



Explaining the concept of violence

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Abstract

The concept of Violence is one of the most contested concepts in social sciences. It is used under many perspectives like domestic violence, revolutionary violence, cyber violence, Naxalite violence and so on. Many philosophers have tried to explain this concept. Thinkers from theological as well as secular background have managed to justify or negate the use of violence for some specific purposes. All the major theories and ideologies in social sciences have at one point or another discussed the role of violence in society. Some ideologies consider violence good and necessary to achieve certain goals while some condemn its presence viewing it as a deformity in society.

Keywords: violence, terror, force, marx, non-violence

Introduction

The major problem as well as asset of Social sciences is the presence of diverse opinions of various scholars about a range of phenomena. This has not only created problem of non conformity with the meaning of various socio-political labels but has also provided an opportunity for further inspection for betterment. This trend has remained alive since the times of ancient scholars like Plato and Aristotle to Post Modern scholars.

In these various phenomena one such troublesome concept is that of violence. Different scholars have different notions about violence. They have provided their own justifications on logical, factual and metaphysical ground for defining and confining violence. But still ample of insights can be sought from the concept of violence. In this paper, it would be tried to analyse the views of various scholars who have conversed about violence in positive or negative terms. And doing so, it would be tried to answered that

1. What is the meaning of term violence that can be acceptable?
2. What is the scope of the concept of violence?
3. Can there be any ground on which established theories of violence co-exist?

To start with one can state that the use of violence entails use of ideology as a means of legitimization of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. Ideology provides an evaluative framework to differentiate 'bad' and 'good', thereby creating a social milieu for the use of violence. The modus operandi of violent acts in such a context is far from straight forward. The psychological factors behind the use of violence can be explained in terms of the linkages between covert and overt violence in relation to ideology and politics.

In fact, man inherently is a value seeking and value creating being who is also given to identify crisis situation and is accordingly required to meet the challenges offered by situations both at the social and moral level. When one reflects

upon the nature and concept of violence, one is constrained to take into consideration all those aspects of social reality, which force an individual or a group of individuals to embark the course of violence ^[1]. That is why, there are both pro-violence and anti-violence theories.

The philosophies of all kind, secular as well as that of major religions of the world, have advocated the use of violence, when all other modes to deal with a wrong fail. As per encyclopedia of religion, "violence as a means may serve religious values or, more typically, a blend of religious and economic or religious and political ends.... Violence may be rationalized by the perpetrator's claims to have exhausted the alternative of social negotiation" ^[2]. Thus in all religions, martyrs are highly respected, for it is a sacrifice to maintain the solidarity of a community. In religious terms it is certainty of death that makes man seek immortal fame in word and action ^[3].

The justification of violence is as significant in the Bible, even in the New Testament, as its negation. If Jesus got himself crucified in its superbly non-violent manner, the Popes lauded the "assassins" and the 'crusaders'. Even Primitive Christianity, which dominated ostensibly with the slogans of love and the technique of non-resistance, destroyed pagan temples and slew their priests.

If someone is asked about being violent the answer would always be in the negative. Most of the Hindus are vegetarians in India with passion and often their arguments run on the line of not killing animals for one's own life. But at same time, it is stated in the scriptures that sacrifice of animals on the altar of *yajna* is not a violent act. The concept of *Bali* has sanction of many Hindu testimonials and is performed with spiritual faith.

In such a background, a variety of scholars have diverse notions about violence. Evolutionary thinkers believe that violence is linked to the backwardness of human mind and society ^[4]. Anarchists too do not eulogize violence *per se* but only as a mean to an end, as the last alternative. And As

Bakunin states, "...The passion for destruction is a creative passion too", they justified violence on moral grounds^[5]. To St. Thomas Aquinas, "where there is no violation of morals, there is no violence committed". Moral wrong doer is committing violence but when he receives his just desert, even if this means acute physical suffering, this is not to be constructed as violence^[6]. For Hobbes, "Covenants, without the sword, are but words?"^[7] In his classical writing 'Leviathan', he justifies the violence committed by the supreme ruler for the maintenance of the State.

Marx, in his early writings, argued that togetherness, harmony and love are impossible; all relationships between men are relationships of conflicts... Going further Sartre gives an economic reason (scarcity and need) for this conflict, but the conclusion is the same. Reviewing Marx contrarily, Hannah Arendt says that "Marx was aware of the role of violence in history, but his role was to him secondary; not violence but the contradictions inherent in the old society brought about its end"^[8]. Analyzing Marx, Walzer says that, "Like Bismarck, Marx had a different way of understanding political matters. He regarded war not merely as the continuation but as the necessary and inevitable continuation of politics"^[9]. Going further in this direction, V. I. Lenin also advocated violence, when Lenin justified guerrilla warfare, under the leadership of an organized party^[10]. Lenin says that "mass consciousness is neither attained from the books, nor from the theoretical induction in socialist seminar groups. It will come from the struggle against capital and eventually with its confrontation with the state because the latter is by definition an instrument of violence". Mao believes that war is the continuation of politics. He argued that, "In order to achieve victory, we must as far as possible make the enemy blind and deaf by stealing his eyes and ears and drive his commanders to distraction by creating confusion in their mind"^[11]. Mao also wishes to eradicate war but there is only one way to do that and that is "to oppose war with a war; to oppose counter revolutionary war with war"^[12].

Sorel validates violence in proletariat revolution as 'creative and liberating force against oppressive force of the state'. He views it as 'heroic and service to civilization' by keeping the revolutionary spirit alive^[13]. This can be viewed in his remarks that, "Proletarian violence, carried on as pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of the class war, appears thus as a very fine and very heroic thing; it is at the service of the immemorial interest of the civilization"^[14]. Neo-Marxist scholar Frantz Fanon considers violence, committed by people and organized by leaders, as key to understand social truths. Explaining violence in decolonization process, he opines that it is just a mirror image of violence committed by colonial empires. Max Weber in his classical essay on 'Politics as a Vocation' urges that, "...violence is the very stuff and substance of politics but only in the last resort and the very task of politics is to deal with violence in order to hold it at bay".

Mahatma Gandhi also stated, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." Here on one side he shun violence but on other admits that violence can do good albeit only temporary one.

As being viewed while analyzing the views of various

thinkers, that violence like all other social sciences concept, is a term with great ambiguity. That's why there are many theories dealing with violence directly or indirectly. Some of the major and most promising theories would be described here.

Biological theories and psychoanalytical theories

There has been a topical renewal of attention in man's inborn aggressiveness. Proponents of this approach include Konard Lorenz^[15], Robert Ardrey^[16], Morris^[17] pronounced that the aggression and violence in human beings is the legacy they have received from their predecessors from the animal kingdom. As per some biological theories, the starting place of this aggressiveness is traced to man's inheritance in the animal empire. Like that of his inferior order ancestors, man's aggression is based on instinctual tendencies to survive and to guard himself and his territory. Whenever there is threat to the possessing (life, property or territory) of individual, he tends to be aggressive by instinct.

One of the instincts postulated in Freudian theory was the one labeled 'Thanatos'. According to Freud, "the aim of all life is death". Or an instinctual drive to return to the earth from which man was created^[18]. Although the death instinct is not commonly accepted among modern psychoanalysts, the concept of innate aggression still prevails.

Regarding violence, Feldman explained that psychogenetic schema that begin in grievance (material or ideational) moves to expression and culminates in violence, in the absence of redress. In turn their common approach advances a given diagnostic agenda in the form of aberrant cause, pathological symptom (violence), potential cure (elimination of cause)^[19].

The frustration-anger-aggression theory

This theory maintains that the primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism. The anger induced by frustration is a motivating force that marshals men to aggression. The famous frustrations aggression hypothesis put forward by John Dollard and his associates. According to them, frustration is an interference, with the occurrence of an instigated goal response, at its proper time in the behaviour sequence and aggression is any sequence of behaviour, the goal response to which is the injury of the person toward whom it is directed^[20]. One feature of aggression and violence is that it may be displaced. It may be worked off on a substitute. The frustrated person may, who is afraid of attacking the actual instigator, will aggress against someone, who is least likely to harm him by retaliatory aggression^[21]. Its prime tenet is that goal directed behavior which is frustrated will lead to aggression in order to vent the inhibited energy. It is particularly popular as an explanation of how constraining social conditions breed frustration among social groups and lead to violence in an attempt to remove those conditions. Frustration does not necessarily lead to aggression in all instances. It may lead to regression, fantasy or reaction formation. Benkowitz (1962) proposes that frustration leads to anger, which may lead to aggression, contingent upon situation stimuli that authorizes the expression of a violent response. All aggression does not necessarily arise from frustration. Patterns of frustration leading to aggression are strongly modifiable by socialization

and learning. Coser (1967) while analyzing the ghetto riots, explains that violence serves mechanism for the reduction of conflict between groups in their social structure, particularly when one group is not being heard in its appeals for social change. To initiate and sustain violence requires a tremendous mobilization of hate, frustration, disappointment and despair with current social and political structures. Coser predicts that it would occur only when conditions are at the 'last resort' stage. Before this those in power will recognize the intensity of feelings that leads to violence and will turn their attention to the violent groups' needs. Thus violence has a social function of alerting society to the fact that a serious malaise exist, and that it needs attention and treatment. (Hornstein, Bunker, Burke, Gindes, Lewicki, 1971)

Feirabends-nesvald theory of social change and systematic frustration

Feirabends and Nesvald define systematic frustration with reference to three criteria, one as frustration interfering with the attainment and maintenance of social goals, aspirations and values. Two as frustration simultaneously experienced by members of social aggregates and hence also complex social systems and three as frustration or strain that is produced within the structures and processes of social system. Systematic frustration is experienced simultaneously and collectively within societies [22].

Guided by this definition they adopt two basic propositions from frustration aggression hypothesis and restate them with social system:-

1. Violent behaviour is instigated by systematic frustration
2. Systematic frustration may stem among other circumstances of the social system, from specific character of social change.

The structural-functional theory

Views society as an organism, with many structures and sub-structures, which play multiple functions. If these sub-structures i.e. groups, communities, institutions etc., are in compatibility, society will remain in a state of harmony. But society never remains in such a perfect harmony. One or other kinds of strains, are always present, to press upon the system. These strains may be in the form of change, against change or product of any occasional incident. Society responds to these strains, either with the help of existing institutions or builds some new institutions, to deal with them. But some times, these strains are so overwhelming to reckon the society that society seeks mechanisms, outside the framework of society, to respond to them. Violence is one of these mechanisms. In structural-functional theory, violence is the indicator of unsteadiness of society and is resolved when society once again returns to equilibrium [23]. So far as the structural functional approach is concerned the basic flaw is that it assumes that the social system is stable and that the outburst or violence is attributed to the partial breakdown in the system. This analysis may provide the description of the strains in the system e.g. Unemployment, price-rise etc., but fails to account for the motivation leading to violent action.

The theory of modernization causing violence in transitional societies

There are many scholars who blame modernity and its

elements for violence. Among them is Robin off Colling word, who states that present complexities of modern life have raised the possibilities of violence. In the name of national interest, obeying order and other type of unreasoned rationality has provided for violence in society [24].

Accepting three tier paradigm of society as developed by structural functionalist that is traditional, transitional and modern, Huntington argues that the first and last one are less prone to violence and instability than middle one [25]. Revolutionary upheavals, military coups, insurrections, guerrilla warfare and assassinations are common features of transitional societies. He asserts that social mobilization is much more destabilizing than economic development. Urbanization, literacy, education and the mass media expose the traditional men to new possibilities of satisfaction. However, the abilities of a transitional society, to satisfy those new aspirations, increase much more slowly. Consequently a gap or lag develops between aspirations, expectations and abilities. This gap generates social frustration and dissatisfaction which leads to demands on government and expansions of political mobilization and participation to enforce those demands. The lack of adequate political institutions makes it difficult, if not possible, for the demands to be expressed through legislative channels and to be moderated and aggregated within the political system. Hence the sharp increase in political participation leads to political instability and violence.

According to Campbell and Dhillion, "Modern political thought conceives of human as a rational political subject, a calculating satisfier of want and pursuer of manifold interests". This very quality brings him in conflict with other human beings. "In such a way, reason too falls under the plural sign of the political subject of violence" [26]. Going more philosophically, Caygill said, "Both modern reason and civil society were made possible by displacing violence to the boundary or limit. In modernity unrestrained violence at and beyond the border was contrasted with rational management of violence institutions" [27].

Marxian Theory

The whole Marxian theory revolves around the concept of contradictions, within the society itself. Contradiction and alienation are the pillars of Marxian thought. As per Marx it is contradiction that brings conflict in opposites and ultimately generates alienation.

Marx divides people into two main categories- propertied, those who have access to means of production, and non-propertied, those who have only their labour to sell. Their relations are governed by the mode of production. Non-propertied classes add value to goods with their labour. Marx argues that propertied classes exploit non-propertied classes by not giving them their due reward of labour, and thus retaining the surplus value, alienate labour class from its own labour. This alienation ultimately results in the confrontation between exploiters and exploited. This confrontation is some times bargained through organized labour class but most of times, it results in sporadic violent clashes between these two classes [28]. Marx was aware of the role of violence in history, but this role was to him secondary; not violence but the contradictions inherent in the old society brought about its

end. The emergence of a new society was preceded, but not caused, by violent outbreaks. State is used as instrument of violence by ruling class but the power is in role of ruling class in process production. In a way Marxian theory gives primacy to the economic factors that are sub structure for all other superstructures. Keeping in line Engles has also stated that, “wherever the power structure of a country contradicts its economic development”, it is political power with its means of violence that will suffer defeat ^[29]. It means in escalating violence the prime movers are contradictions generated by economic situations.

Relative deprivation theory

Relative deprivation is defined by Robert Ted Gurr as a perceived discrepancy between men’s value capabilities and their value expectations. Value expectations are goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining and maintaining, given the social means available to them. Deprivation induced discontent in a general spur to action. The primary casual sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent; second the politicization of that discontent and finally its expression in violent action against political object and actors. Relative Deprivation theory makes a psychological explanation of violence. It is true that some sort of inequality or disequilibrium has remained the cause for eruption of many incidents of violence. Aristotle has also expressed that “cause of sedition is always to be found in equality and inequality” ^[30].

Marxian theory also provides that inequality in material sphere caused violence through alienation. Structural-functional approach also in some way admits that instability in any form, whether in material or idea is root cause of violence. But neither alienation nor instability alone can cause violence in society. To answer this, Marxists argue that mobilization of masses will organize them, to resist against deprivation that result from alienation. But theory of relative deprivation states that relative deprivation, that is gap between value expectations and value achievements, leads to violence. Ted Robert Gurr has given most appropriate explanation of this. This can be correlated with the Frustration-Aggression theory of John Dollard. In his theory, John Dollard says that each individual has some goals to achieve. If this behaviour of goal attainment is prevented in some way, affected one is likely to get frustrated. This frustration is likely to lead to aggression. The theory of Relative Deprivation is its social form ^[31]. Explaining it, Ted Robert Gurr argues that relative deprivation is the necessary precondition for violent civil conflict. Relative Deprivation distinguishes between value expectations of actors and value capabilities of their environment. Defining value expectations, he includes goods, services and conditions of life, which people believe they legitimately deserve. These can be correlated to goals to be achieved. Value capabilities include factors that determine people’s chances of getting or keeping the goods, services or conditions. These capabilities facilitate or hinder the process of this goal attainment. The social and physical environment, surrounding people determines these value capabilities. Ted Robert Gurr argues that whenever the value expectations are not fulfilled, due to

inadequate value capabilities, violence erupted in the society ^[32].

J curve principle of Davies

As per Davies, revolution is more likely to take place when a prolonged period of rising expectation and rising gratification is followed by a short period of sharp reversal, during which the gap between expectations and gratification quickly widen and become intolerable. He holds that contrary to Marxian expectation or even the assumption of Alexis de Tocqueville and other, revolutions do not occur during periods of prolonged abject or worsening situations of social deprivation. On the contrary, revolutions occur during period of relative prosperity and improvement. Thus Davies postulates J curve where the discrepancy between achievement and expectations become intolerable ^[33]. J curve principle of Davies is valid in certain specific socio-political situations but it seems wanting in universal application. Davies himself opines J-curve is necessary though not sufficient part of the explanation of at least several revolutions and some contained revolutions.

Harry Eckstein classified the whole theory of political violence into two broad categories. They are

1. Contingency theory- collective political violence or such violence in its more extreme form should occur, when as the result of some temporal patterns, the specified contingency such as relative deprivation is or may be accepted to be particularly great.
2. Inherency theory- collective political violence for its most extreme form should occur when, as a result of temporal pattern- a) the costs of violent collective actions are expected to be especially low or, b) non violent actions in pursuit of highly valued goals have been shown to be unproductive ^[34].

Rasheeduddin Khan who focus on developing societies opines that it is not development itself but the disequilibrium in development or what may be described as ‘mal-development’ that results in tension, conflict and violence. In an unequal society, which is fragmented by tribal, caste, class and other cleavages, the ‘mal-development’ means unequal opportunities in the competition for jobs, services, education and social facilities and so on, also aggravate groups and class conflict and accentuates individual frustration ^[35].

Rajni Kothari views in the same manner when he says that violence induced by development, which has by virtue of its monopolistic and exploitative nature pitched one section of society against another in almost every region particularly in poorer and so called backward states (and backward regions within the states). That is why development is necessarily becoming an arena of war between classes, castes and communities ^[36].

After analyzing above mentioned theories, one can view that, these above theories are valid to some extent, but they all their limitations. No theory can single-handedly explain the concept of violence or its causes. In fact the concept of violence is multidimensional both from the side of causes and consequences. In any society, emergence of violence is the result of combination of various factors, which are by themselves result of various socio-economic and politico-cultural situations. For example many view aggression and

violence as biological to human beings. But for some, collective aggression or violence is more a phenomenon of symbolic world than biological or psychological [37]. In the same way, systematic frustration is difficult to measure. Huntington's hypothesis over emphasizes violence in what he calls transitional societies and overlooked the type of violence both direct and structural that one is endemic in tribal and feudal societies on one hand and in developed industrial societies on the other hand. The theory of frustration-anger-aggression does not clearly show that why frustration not always leads to aggression and violence but some time to regression or fantasy. In the theories there is no recognition of the basic global process the process of decolonization, which permeates the life, society, economy and politics of the bulk of the colonial states and territories.

In a way these theories have collectively contributed to our understanding of the concept of violence. If one wishes to relate any of these theories to Indian situations, it would not be of much fruitfulness. In Indian milieu, there are many diverse phenomena that have contributed to conflict and violence. Indian society has faced the yoke of colonialism for long, which justifies the application of Sorel's, Sartre's and Fanon's explanations of violence. In post-independence period, the process of development and progress has remained regionally imbalanced. It is proven fact that the gap between rich and poor has widened as well as the regional disparity has also gone off the record. In such situations theory of relative deprivation as well as the theory of modernization are applicable to Indian setting. It has diversities of caste, class, religion, race, language etc. On the other hand, Marxian concept of contradictions and its violent effects has also a say in Indian situation of discrepancy.

In nutshell, it is imperative to combine various theories to understand the concept of violence. No single theory can wholly justify the explanation to violence, its causes, processes or consequences.

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