Structural Violence and Human Predicaments: A Brief Introduction
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The world is engulfed with violence and is in perpetual violence and threats of violence. Scholars and thinkers from different fields have spilled considerable ink over the topic of violence. We have seen violence of different types occurring in and around us. Violence exists and will be aspects of reality. However, when we use the term violence, we often narrow it down the term or rather merely associate it with physical violence or direct violence is not a comprehensive concept of what violence is all about because violence is more than just physical or direct. There are definitions given by different thinkers from different areas of expertise. Merriam Webster defines violence as the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy[1]. According to the World Health Organization, violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.[2]

The definitions as given, however, do not comprehensively address various dimensions of violence. Johan Galtung, a prominent founder of peace thinking has taken to a higher level of understanding violence by recognizing different faces of violence that can exist in many subtle and notoriously evil ways, such as cultural and structural violence. But before going into details it is worthwhile to discuss the meaning of violence. Johan Galtung defines violence as the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible. Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.[3] Thus, violence is the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and

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[1] "Violence", *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Retrieved 2019-01-31.
[2] Krug et al., (2002) "World report on violence and health", Archived 2015-08-22, *World Health Organization*
[3] Johan Galtung (1969) "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.6, No.3, pp.168

what is. It increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance.

In order to comprehend violence it is important to understand the opposite of it, that is, peace and what is peace all about. Peace is conceived as a situation where there is absence of violence. There are different conceptions of peace. Peace can be seen as a synonym for stability or equilibrium. It also refers to internal states of a human being, a person who is at peace with himself and peace as absence of organised collective violence between human groups; nations, classes, racial and ethnic groups and moreover, peace can be seen as a synonym for all other good things in the world community. In the 1964 founding edition of the Journal of Peace Research, Johan Galtung came up with two types of peace, namely, negative and positive peace. Negative peace is conceived as the absence of violence, absence of war and positive peace as the integration of human society. In relation to this Johan Galtung introduced typologies of violence, namely, direct, structural and cultural violence and made a clear distinction of the three. As for him, negative peace is the absence of organized direct violence whereas positive peace is the absence of structural and cultural violence and prevalence of justice, harmony and equality.

The question remains: what is direct or physical violence? It is an overt form of violence caused by an individual or group of people directly upon those with whom they are in conflict or at war. It is the used of physical force like torture, rape, killing etc. The 11/9/2011 US terrorists attack, the terrorists attack at the Taj Hotel, Mumbai on 26th of November 2008 are some of the obvious and vivid examples of direct violence. Johan Galtung states that direct violence though avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or life makes it impossible or difficult for people to meet their needs or achieve their full potential. It is the presence of violence that hinders human relation in the world community. Violence pervasively penetrates and permeates every sphere of our human society.

Johan Galtung categorized violence into various dimensions such as physical and psychological violence, positive and negative violence, whether or not there is an object that is hurt, whether or not there is a subject (person) who acts, whether the violence intended or unintended and manifest or latent violence. Violence is

permeated in the social structures of society and works to exploit, marginalize, fragmentize, etc. the structurally oppressed. Violence can also be in the form of culture by which it means any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both.[4] The massacre or holocaust about 6 million Jews by Hitler, Apartheid where the blacks are segregated and discriminated as inferior beings, are some of the examples of culture violence. According to Johan Galtung, cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right- or at least not wrong. He offers a useful scheme to help differentiate among the three terms in his analytic: Direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a 'permanence'. Johan Galtung notes, though, that generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified. The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all. One way that cultural violence works, Galtung contends, is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent. Obviously this is more easily done with some forms of violence than others.

Johan Galtung in his article "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" says the notion of violence as "when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations"[5]. Gilligan, in his book *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, defines structural violence as "the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society, as contrasted with the relatively lower death rates experienced by those who are above them". Gilligan describes "excess deaths" as "non-natural" and ascribes them to the stress, shame, discrimination, and denigration that results from lower status.[6] For Johan Galtung, structural violence is a systematic ways in which

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[4] Johan Galtung (Aug. 1990) "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.27, No.3, p.291
[5] Johan Galtung (1969) 'Violence, Peace, Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research,* p. 168
[6] James Gilligan (1996) *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (second ed.). New York: First Vintage Books, ISBN 0-679-77912-4.

social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage a group of individuals or communities. It is subtle, often invisible and often has no one specific person who can be held responsible. Structural violence is injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for many, stunting everyone's ability to develop their full humanity. Daniel Christie, Michael Wessells say structural violence as ubiquitous and manifest in the enormous gap between people who have influence and material resources and those who are relatively powerless[7]. According to Kathleen Structural violence is differentiated from personal violence and refers to preventable harm or damage to persons where there is no actor committing the violence or where it is not practical to search for the actor(s); such violence emerges from the unequal distribution of power and resources or, in other words, is said to be built into the structure(s)[8]. Farmer defines structural violence as a way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way…the arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people…neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault: rather, historically given (and often economical driven) processes and forces to conspire to constrain individual agency[9]. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denied them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress. Structural violence is a sinful social structure characterized by poverty. Wealth and power distribution is uneven and thus making huge distance between the have and have not. And in the situation like this the human predicament is getting bad to worse. According to his violence triangle, cultural and structural violence cause direct violence and direct violence re-enforces structural and cultural violence.

Now it is pertinent to ask the question as to how does structural violence lead to human predicament and how can the predicament be addressed. Structural violence is a violence which is invisible in most cases. It is rightly called indirect violence or

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[7] Daniel Christie, Michael Wessells (2008) in "Social Psychology of Violence" in *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*

[8] Kathleen M. Weigert (2008), "Structural Violence" in *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*

[9] Fernando De Maio,(2015) "Paul Farmer: Structural Violence and the Embodiment of Inequality", From the *Selected Works of Fernando De Maio*, DePaul University

sometimes institutionalized violence where the violence caused or meted out to persons are preventable even though there is no actor committing the violence or where it is not practical to search for the actors. And such violence could only emerge from the inequitable distribution of resources internally and globally and systematic oppression which is said to be built into the structures. The unequal distribution of power and resources inflicts much suffering on marginalized sectors and this leads to their predicaments. It is not an exaggeration to say that structural violence is ubiquitous and manifest in the enormous gap between people who have influence and material resources and those who are relatively powerless. While physical and structural violence against women, children, and minorities has existed for centuries and such is a global fact of everyday life. The pressing questions are can we stop violence and thus reduce human predicaments? How do we elevate the status of humans by combating both violence and predicaments? According to James Warnock, morality has a content is to help human predicament by expanding our sympathies, which has a tendency to get worse. The tendency to get worse is mainly because of the limitations of resources, such as intelligence, knowledge, rationality and sympathy and because of which the social condition tend to fall apart, producing state of nature in which chaos reigns; as classically outlined by Thomas Hobbes. He argues that the fundamental moral concern is with what he sums up as the 'amelioration of the human predicament', a predicament which is made even more pressing by the natural limitations of our human sympathies. As it is stated the object of morality is to countervail the natural limitations by working not only against systematic constraint on human potential but also positively for the human flourishing by targeting the symptom rather than the disease. And this ccountervailing the human predicament is for all rational agents as James Warnock rightly opines that moral reasons apply to all rational agents, though, moral reasons are always outweighed by other reason.

A question may be raised that why are we evaluating violence of different types? What is the object of evaluation for? James Warnock[10] posed a question asking as to what is moral evaluation for. For him the general object of moral evaluation

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[10] James Warnock (1971) *The Object of Morality*, Methuen,. ISBN 0-416-13780-6.

must be to contribute in some respects, by way of the actions of rational beings to the amelioration of the human predicaments, that is, of the conditions in which these rational beings, humans, actually find themselves. James Warnock does think that morality has a content, which, he claims, is to help human predicament by expanding our sympathies, which has a tendency to get worse. The tendency to get worse is mainly because of the limitations of resources, such as intelligence, knowledge, rationality and sympathy and because of which the social condition tend to fall apart, producing state of nature in which chaos reigns; as classically outlined by Thomas Hobbes. And thus he considers that it is the role of ethics to offer an anti-entropic response, to offer order and structure within society which people may flourish as human being. He argues that the fundamental moral concern is with what he sums up as the 'amelioration of the human predicament', a predicament which is made even more pressing by the natural limitations of our human sympathies. As for James Warnock the object of morality is to countervail these natural limitations. Countervailing the human predicament is for all rational agents because he maintains that moral reasons apply to all rational agents though a rational agent can rationally hold that moral reasons are always outweighed by other reason.

Here some important questions arise as to what is it in the human predicament that calls for amelioration? What might reasonably be suggested as the specific contribution of morality to such amelioration? According to James Warnock, human beings in general are not just naturally disposed always to do what would be best that they should do, even if they see, or are perfectly in a position to do. We are naturally somewhat prone to be moved by momentary goals rather than long-run considerations. We tend to ignore what one should do to others when we are perfectly in a position to do, even worse, we not only remain indifferent to others whose lives are getting worse but become active malevolence towards others. Our sympathy is so limited that we cannot go beyond near and dear ones. Desperate poverty abounds everywhere in our country in the midst of rich multitudes. There is inequality of distribution of wealth and justice. Structural violence is violence that not hurt or kill through fists or guns or weapons of mass destruction, but through social structures that produce poverty, starving children, death and enormous suffering. Hence, if a person died from tuberculosis in the eight century it would not be hard to conceive of

this as calamity since there had been no remedy to fight against the disease but on the contrary if a person dies from it today, in spite of all the medical resources, then violence is present because potential to cure is higher than the actual and thus avoidable. As James Galtung rightly defines violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual and that which impedes the decrease of this distance.

James Warnock in his book, *The Object of Morality*[11] emphasizes on how moral reasons which are found present in all rational agents is always outweighed by other reasons. A moral reason according to James Warnock is a consideration about some person, or some persons' character, or some specimen of actual or possible conduct, which tends to establish in the subject concerned conformity or conflict with a moral principle. He offers four salient virtues of fundamental moral standards or principles: non-maleficence (no harm), beneficence (a promotion of human well-being so that all are encouraged to fulfill their potential, impartiality (thus avoiding preferential treatment) and truthfulness, which although not absolute can be beneficial toward human relations. Johan Galtung too rightly enumerated values such as presence of cooperation, freedom from fear, freedom from want economic growth and development, absence of exploitation, equality, justice, freedom of action, pluralism and dynamism which I consider worth adopting.

In order to take forward the indispensable presence of positive peace to the world community, persistent and consistent approach needs to be innovatively implemented to combat violence. However, what would possibly be a pragmatic and consistent approach to it is a matter of debates. It is not an exaggeration to make an attempt to bring in the need of ethical approach as one indispensable approach because the essence of morality is about virtues which help uplift the momentum of moral status to the practitioners. Violence that debars people from meeting their basic needs and requirements needs to be addressed by inculcating the virtues that would be beneficial for the entire moral community. I am not hesitant to use the world as "Moral Community" because every individual irrespective of differences in terms of

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[11] Theodore Benditt, Warnock's Reasons, *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.51, No.3; December 1973

religion, caste, tribe, gender, nationality belongs to a community of rational being. Moral reason applies to all rational agents even though moral reasons are often outweighed by other reasons and hence bringing out the so-called moral reason possibly might ameliorate human predicaments.

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