

PRODIGAL FREEDOM AND ASYMMETRIC VIOLENCE: A DEVELOPMENT AUDIT

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1. Introduction

We live in an oddly equivocal time, alternatively blasé in its developmental activities and aggressive forms of individualism. The assault on the vulnerable and fragile sections of society is at once so complete, so cruel and so clever – all encompassing and yet specifically targeted, blatantly brutal and yet unbelievably insidious – that its sheer audacity has eroded our very definition of justice. It has forced us to lower our insights, and curtail our expectations. Development has not been doing anything with oppressive idea at the beginning; it was bound to become one after being thoughtfully adopted by a series of despotic regimes as the final justification of authoritarian politics. As a product of this political process, the culture of development kills off alternative visions of desirable societies and all ‘equivocities’¹ against univocal identity, and thereby what occurs is the burial of “dialectic process of development.”² Consequently, the post-development era has come to represent something more than resistance to a hidden structure of dominance. It now means

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¹For this usage, I am indebted to my Leuven Professor William Desmond, who elaborated its meaning in his celebrated work, *Ethics and the Between*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001. To a good number of people, equivocity means less an orientation to the ethical as a problem to be treated. The equivocal is not a problem; nevertheless, proper attunement to it is inevitable. Desmond argues that equivocity can coax us into deeper rapport with what is at play in the ethos. Ethical involvement does not mean a definitive dissolving of the equivocal, but a way of dwelling in it, a dwelling that has its own equivocity. Tragically, the modern globalized version of developmental paradigm calls for univocity, where all differences and particularities are abolished in order to build certain systems, a kind of Oriental patriarchal despotism.

²Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, x.

giving back the savage the right to envision its own future. In the same way, omnipresence of violence is once again hammering our hopes and trouncing our dreams. When we analyse the root causes of terrible violence, there are different approaches available in the contemporary global milieu. Each theory has scientifically defended and systematically explained, and even thought of self-sufficient, but nevertheless keeps large space without explaining the enigmatic representations of such a phenomenon. Can we defend the Kantian view that conflicts and revolutions or wars are inevitable in human progress as “splendid misery is bound up with development of the natural predisposition in the human race”?³ I do not look into the ontological stimulus of violence; however, I look for empirical reasons – economic, cultural and political, in particular – although those reasons may ontologically exist in the human beings. For example, Levinas argues that ‘temptation to murder’ – to reduce the other into my subject without recognizing the dignity of the ‘otherness’ of the other – is inherent in every human individual. No one is invulnerable; anyone can be a potential racist, where extreme form of denial of the other is seen, or at least sometimes an implicit racist.⁴ Every kind of reduction whether it be ontological or existential, epistemological or metaphysical, political or social, in one way or the other, is a form of racism, where the particularities are violently, univocally, and shrewdly demolished. Differences we perceive are not norms to judge or subjugate the other. “It is not difference which makes alterity; alterity makes difference.”⁵

³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, §83, 320/433. The Kantian revolution in philosophy not only represents an epistemological subjectivism, but also the legitimisation of a Eurocentric praxis.

⁴Emmanuel Levinas, “*Derriere la couleur, un visage*” (Interview with Catherine David), in *Le Nouvel Observateur* no. 1429 (1992), 14-15. He says: “Racism remains a permanent temptation, for it is the most easy inclination of the human” (15). It is nothing ‘exceptional’ or ‘abnormal,’ but a logical sequence of our vehement and imposing attempt at being. One wants to accept the ‘others’, including ‘strangers’ or ‘foreigners’, only to the extent that they belong to one’s own ‘genre’ or ‘kind’, which is to say to one’s own blood and soil, to the same family, tribe, sex, nation, and so on. For more on this, see Roger Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas*, Dharma Endowment Lectures no. 10 (specifically, chapter 2), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2009.

⁵Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Levinas*, ed. Jill Robins, Stanford: Stanford University, Press, 2001, 106.

Among multiple theories, I pay attention to two lines of theories: one concentrates on the culture of societies together with the politics of disgust and the other on the political economy of poverty and inequality. Each approach has some plausibility, at least in some forms, and yet both are, I would argue, ultimately inadequate and in need of supplementation.

2. Cultural Violence: A Bad Samaritanism

The prospects of peace in the contemporary world may well lie in the recognition of plurality in our affiliations and in the use of reasoning as common inhabitants of a wide world, rather than making us into inmates rigidly incarcerated in little containers. Human being, the only natural being as part of its constitution, has the “supersensible faculty”⁶ freedom – although such freedom sometimes is used in a prodigal way – to reason out his or her own identity and determine one’s own priorities in order to attain higher goals. In culture, man is carving out a circle or a sphere for himself from the world around him. A border is being instituted between the inside and the outside, between interiority and exteriority. Inside this difference, it is possible for a human being to live and feel a comfortable zone, although that does not compel one to keep away the other in the heteronomous relations. The dynamics of globalization caused the cultural order to coincide with the global order, materially and world-wide, because of its drive for colonisation and the opening up of continents. By Euro-centrism, which almost functions as a transcendental but purely material economic constituent, the world is grasped and understood up to the moment when the circle is broadened into totality. Western prodigal freedom⁷ has expanded into the entirety of the world. It is possible to call this a spatiotemporal compression. In this ‘compression’ all ‘difference’ is vanished.⁸ The neglect of the plurality of our affiliations and of the need for choice and reasoning obscure the world in which we live.

Consequently, it is perhaps remarkable that the particular cultural theory that has become the most popular and crudest in approaching global violence is what is called ‘clash of civilizations.’ The approach defines some postulated entities that are called ‘civilizations,’ primarily in

⁶Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §84, 323/436.

⁷When I use the term ‘western’, it is no more exclusive in territorial terms, but much in the dispositional extra-territorial terms.

⁸Z. Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 6-26.

religious terms, and it goes on to contrast what are respectively called ‘the Islamic world’, ‘the Judeo-Christian’, or ‘the Western world’, ‘the Buddhist world’, ‘the Hindu world’ and so on.⁹ Underlying the approach of civilizational clash – clash between ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’ civilizations, in particular – is an oddly artificial view of history, according to which these distinct civilizations have grown separately, like trees on different plots of land, with very little overlap and interaction. Today, as these disparate civilizations, with their divergent histories, face one another in the global world, they are firmly inclined, we are told, to clash with each other – a tale, indeed a gripping tale, of what can be called ‘hate at first sight.’ Here, one can see the other individual in the society primarily as belonging to one civilization or another, and it makes him or her to take the sword against the other. The relations between different persons in the world can be seen, in this reductionist approach, as relations between the respective civilizations to which they allegedly belong. Culture and religious affiliations can only be one of the many dimensions of an individual in a liberal society. I find that this make-believe account has little use for the actual history of extensive interactions through history, and constructive movements of ideas and influences across the borders of countries, in so many different fields – literature, arts, music, mathematics, science, engineering, trade, commerce and other human engagements. As Amartya Sen said, “ignoring the immense richness of the multiple identities that human beings have, given their diversity of affiliations, attachments and affinities, the civilizational approach attempts to put each of us into a little box of a single sense of belonging, to wit, our alleged perception of oneness with our respective civilization.”¹⁰ In most of the riots, the poor labourers and their families are the victims irrespective of their religious identity or caste position. Nevertheless, their class identity at the economic realm remaining the same, nothing other than religious identity was allowed to count in the murderous world of nasty singular classification. We must see that there is no identity without difference; no sameness without otherness.

⁹The comprehensive exposition of this theory can be found in Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

¹⁰Amartya Sen, “Violence, Identity and Poverty,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 45, 1 (2008), 5-15.

It is a sad fact that the illusion of singularity and homogenous formulations tend to make clash in the civil society of both the past and the present. The ‘solitarist’ or univocal way of dividing the society, many a time engineered by the so-called religious leaders – a more conspicuous example may be the Gujarat riot that continues to work against the Muslims organised by sectarian Hindutva leaders in India, in spite of the fact that these barbarities received the massive condemnation from the Indian population at large – creates the illusion that one’s destiny is determined on the basis of asserting the singular identity, whether it be religious or caste, national or regional that they imposed on them (I further discuss this example in the next section of this essay). It functions on certain Machiavellian logic, which is “a fragmentary logic.”¹¹ One’s equivocal identities are formulated in a sovereign univocal manner; without knowing that the stricken Samaritan is endowed with plural identities, including the same ground on both of them can be shared, this bad Samaritan starts to inflict pain on him as an outsider. Bad Samaritan cannot surpass the traditionally imposed univocal fixation of neighbourhood and, on the other hand, he sees an alleged opponent to be eradicated on the other side. As Sen says,

The conceptual weakness of the attempt to achieve a singular understanding of people of the world through civilizational partitioning not only works against our shared humanity, but also undermines the diverse identities – plural positioning – we all have which do not place us against each other along one unique rigid line of segregation. Misdescription and misconception can make the world more fragile than it need be. In addition to the unsustainable reliance on the presumption of a singular categorization, the civilizational approach has tended to suffer also from ignoring the diversities within each identified civilization and also from overlooking the extensive interrelations between distinct

¹¹Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, London: Norton & Company, 2006, 176. What is done here is that making up of an illusory self-understanding that too ignores the relevance of all other affiliations and associations, and to redefine the demands of the ‘sole’ identity in a particularly belligerent form, where the individual in a particular society becomes a nasty murderous instrument.

civilizations. The descriptive poverty of the approach goes beyond its flawed reliance on singularity.¹²

However, the phenomenon of continuous resistance to ‘Westernisation’ is to be reflected in a different way – partly the memory of the history of colonisation. Here, the west does not mean any territorial or spatial understanding alone, but includes the technological revolutions, democratic political liberal society, secularisation and so on; although it is irrational and non-factual to subscribe that they are exclusively western in character. Western culture is sometimes seen, rather arbitrarily, as a central, inexorable, and entirely independent determinant of societal predicaments in the social history of the world, which has been made dominant through trade and exchange in the colonial period. This cultural homogenization sweeps away all the particularities, diversities and univocities of each society and that sometimes, through military powers or religious organs, which made an irrevocable imbalance and discrepancy in the humanity. The ‘social memory’ of the colonial subjects, although the persecuted subjects are no more living on the earth, is in a way obsessed with developing hostility towards the perpetrators.¹³ This hostility makes revenge against many global ideas and even to take the form of international terrorism, nevertheless the past cannot be undone. Against “Arendtian forgiveness,” where “forgiving serves to undo the deeds of the past,”¹⁴ the neo-colonials continue to form the past imperial arrangements

¹²Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 46. Such logic has successfully worked in India in the demolition of Babri-Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. It is no more an accidental issue, as the recent Justice M. S. Liberhan Commission rightly mentioned, it was an orchestrated event. When political leaders manipulated the cultural and religious ethos of the vulnerable masses, it takes Frankenstein’s monster to brutally assassinate the alleged enemy, the other and, thus, to destroy the face of a land that is known for tolerance for centuries.

¹³The atrocities committed by colonial masters, for example, the notorious Amritsar massacre in India on April 13, 1919, when 379 unarmed people were gunned down at a peace-meeting, their generated psychological attitude toward the subject people often generated a strong sense of humiliation and an imposition of perceived inferiority. The role of colonial humiliation in the dialectics of dominated people deserves at least as much attention as the influence of economic and political asymmetry imposed by the imperial authorities.

¹⁴Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 237. For a brief but clear discussion, see Glen Pettigrove, “Hannah Arendt and Collective Forgiveness,” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 37, 4 (2006), 483-

through market systems, although the lavish employment of the language of forgiveness is seen in the political arena. The dialectics of the colonized mind can impose a heavy penalty on the lives and freedoms of people who are reactively obsessed with the West. It can wreak havoc on lives in other countries as well, when the reaction takes the violent form of seeking confrontation, including what is seen as retribution.¹⁵ I do not, in any way, mean that historical woundedness of colonialism or the present mode of ‘neo-liberal monism’ permits us to take collective battle in the form of terrorist violence; however, when such violence bursts out and its root causes are enigmatically unknown, it is both retrospective and prospective signs that conventional wisdom of employing military to bring peace systematically fails. We need to look for certain alternative wisdom for peace and harmony in an asymmetrically conflicting world of today.

Identity is not pegged down to an immovable foundation of self-presence. Our plurality of affiliations in a political society is to be affirmed instead of making certain identities as dominant and exclusive ones as to fight for such univocal identity. Huntington’s core claim is that “in the post-Cold War world the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural.”¹⁶ This is a bold

500. You may lavishly do and undo on your personal computer, but never get an occasion to undo anything on your historical computer. Alas! Historians can ‘change’ the history, which even God cannot! We need a new anthropology, a new historiography, not written by the victors mediating on the victories, but the victims, the vanquished and the persecuted.

¹⁵As Sen says, among the adversities Africa faces today in trying to move away from its colonial history and the Cold War suppression of democracy is the continuation of the successor phenomenon in the form of militarism and continued welfare, in which the West has a facilitating role. In the same way, every identity may rationally get equal value in a group of people in the society, but it does not mean that there is no difference between when a Black-American and a White-American, or a Dalit Indian and a higher caste Indian speaks on their identity in a political society, as one’s identity is a wounded one crying for justice, and other’s is a powerful sovereign identity. Dethronement is the heart of the ‘defeated’ identities.

¹⁶Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, 21. Before the mid-twentieth century, many interstate conflicts occurred within a multi-polar western world, most dramatically in the case of the two World Wars. Conflict among the western states declined when so much of the world was caught in the bipolar tensions of the Cold War; and the once popular classification of states into first, second, and third worlds indicates that hostilities after World War II involved diverse groups, North versus South as well as East versus West. But these

claim and, if true, would mark a significant change in the world politics. This ‘solitarist’ approach always obliges one to perceive the other only in respect of differences, not on the ground that they can share the same platform. Here, people look for the points that divide, not those that bind. It is a fact that such an imposed misunderstanding can tell its story of success statistically, even if it is for a short run and rudely manipulated ones. There is no reason to argue that whatever civilizational identity a person has – religious, communal, regional, national, or global – must invariably dominate over every other relation or affiliation he or she may have. Trying to understand global violence through the lens of clashing civilizations does not bear much scrutiny, because the reasoning on which it is based is so extraordinarily crude. Yet, it must also be recognized that reductionist cultivation of singular identities has indeed been responsible for a good deal of what can be called ‘engineered bloodshed’ across the world. One person can have different identities. I can be a person of Indian origin, a Belgian citizen, a US resident, a man, a Christian, an economist, a writer, a heterosexual, a dalit, an activist, a proponent of egalitarianism, and many other. They cannot be mutually exclusive and, thus, it should not lead to clashes. One’s identity is neither something over which one has exclusive control, nor something of which one has exhaustive knowledge. So, an attitude of enigmatic appreciation on saturated experiences towards other identities is inevitable to develop solidarity among the members of human family.¹⁷ Of course, a clear distinction may be needed when the identity assertion between that of the marginalized and the dominant is compared.¹⁸ When political or economic policies are formulated and executed – it may be ethical – without discussing various heterogeneous

characterizations were based primarily on ideology and perceived differences in economic development. Huntington proposes to replace them with a paradigm stressing the importance of civilizational differences. His central theme is that “culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilizational identities, are shaping patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world” (20).

¹⁷One’s identity takes shape in a community and, often, “the ‘who,’ which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself.” Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179.

¹⁸For such discussion see, Roy Varghese Palatty, *Cathedrals of Development: A Critique on the Developmental Model of Amartya Sen*, Bangalore, Centre for Publications, Christ University, 2009, 119-123.

identities and historical repercussions, they may cause bursting out asymmetric violence as it is unjust.

3. The Politics of Disgust and Violence

Disgust is yet another powerful and an exhaustive tool that is used in the political society to inflict violence on others. All human beings experience disgust, and use disgust to construct boundaries between themselves and their own animality. Yet, in some societies and some groups within the societies, they learn to make disgust more central to their lives than the other groups do. Nussbaum, when she writes on the role of emotions in laws, speaks on how the magical ideas of contamination are systematically used to shame others.¹⁹ It is used for the social subordination of people who belong to religious and ethnic minorities or those who lack the privileges that the ones who control the society's wealth and power have. She describes how Jews were depicted in medieval representations so as to evoke disgust and how similar but more extreme depictions by notorious nineteenth and twentieth century German anti-Semites were used to promote an ideal of Aryan masculinity from which the German people were supposed to draw inspiration and strength. Thus, she writes: "the stock image of the Jew, in anti-Semitic propaganda from the Middle Ages on, was that of a being disgustingly soft and porous, receptive of fluid and sticky, womanlike in its oozy sliminess. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such images were widespread and further elaborated, as the Jew came to be seen as a foul parasite inside the clean body of the German male self."²⁰ She goes on to describe how Jews were caricatured as having

¹⁹Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust Shame and the Law*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. She develops her theory in order to find the psychological foundations of liberalism. Anti-Semitism and misogyny are her chief examples used in the work to show how emotions in general and shame and disgust, in particular, are used to subordinate the other. Devlin, being a member in the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution appointed by the British government, on the contrary, argues that every society has the right to translate disgust into law. It is, thus, based on certain conservative social norms – "invisible bonds." So, eliciting disgust on homosexuals is a sound ground to establish laws against them. It is the same case with pornography or prostitution. I do not intend to elaborate this in the present essay. See Patrick Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965. Remember *dalits* or 'untouchables' were objects of disgust in the ancient India in order to maintain the caste system. Projecting disgust onto another group subordinates the group.

²⁰Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 108.

grotesque physical features, which were identified as distinctively Jewish – Jewish noses, Jewish feet, Jewish skin – and which were then used to represent Jews as more animal than human. Misogyny too, has been expressed in different cultures and, at different times, depictions of women meant to evoke disgust. These depictions, Nussbaum argues, typically manifest a reaction formation to female sexuality and to the threat to male domination that female sexuality represents.

As I mentioned earlier, one recent example of the political role of disgust is exemplified in the violence fabricated by the Hindus in the name of purity and nationality against the Muslims in Gujarat, India, in March 2002. Hindu nationalist rhetoric typically uses the idea of purity and contamination, with Muslims often portrayed as outsiders who sully the body of the nation. This general ideal of purity insistently takes a bodily form, as Muslim men and women are portrayed as hypersexual animal beings, whose bodily fertility threatens the control of the pure Hindu male. Pamphlets circulated during the rioting obsessively developed this sexual imagery, and invited retaliation against the bodies of Muslim men and women in terms of violation of their sexual parts by fire and metal objects. These tortures were enacted on the bodies of women, who were gang-raped, tortured with large metal objects inserted into their vaginas, and then burned alive. The Hindu male does not dirty himself with the ‘contaminating’ fluids of the Muslim woman.²¹ The instrumental rationality of univocal language is explicitly and in a most nasty way revisited in that genocide. As Ricoeur says, “violence in discourse consists in the claim that a single one of its modalities exhausts the realm of speech,”²² where all equivocalities or diversities are annihilated. This example, as Nussbaum, shows that there is a positive correlation between the agenda of making something disgusting and the type of aggression

²¹Tanika Sarkar, “Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 July 2002, 2872-76. As Sarkar says, there is something dark and unusual about Gujarat tortures, something suggesting obsession with women’s body and especially her genital organs. The instrumental rationality of language is revisited in the cruelest manner.

²²Paul Ricoeur, *Political and Social Essays*, collected and edited by David Stewart and Joseph Bien, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974, 101. In the fourth chapter of this work, “Violence and Language,” Ricoeur tries to develop how violence functions in the discourses. To be non-violent in a discourse is to respect the plurality and diversity of languages. It is important not only in hermeneutical approach, but in the very practical sense, when someone lives in equivocalities.

whose animating factory is that of ridding the nation of containment.²³ Nevertheless, the anti-Muslim environment cannot purely explain in terms of pamphlets that promoted disgust or sexual imagery, which may have orchestrated to aggravate the cruelty more sinister. Even if the disgust element for subordination is taken out of these and many other examples, we are left with an ample supply of other reasons for justifying their subordination, the primary one being the ostensible lack of reasoning capability. It was not an emotional justification, but a justification based in and through liberal ideals and assumptions about the human subject.²⁴ In every colonial attempt, power is used in a most astute way to catch the victim. The vulnerability of the other makes an ‘invitation to murder’ for them and they never succeed to overcome such objectifications of the human subjects. Sin leaves a scar always in history as it takes another revolutionary history to remove it. Continual correction to eradicate ethical asymmetry is of great importance on the question of a justice-oriented society.

4. The Bottom Billion and the Bad Neighbourhood

It is not difficult to see that injustice and inequality generate intolerance and that continued poverty can provoke anger and fury. Why does the USA have exceptionally high rates of violent crime, particularly youth homicide, compared to other industrialized nations? Conservative

²³Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 114-115. In this communal carnage alone around two thousand people were killed. Asghar Ali Engineer, “Communal Riots 2002,” <http://www.sacw.net/2002/EngineerJan03.html> [20 November, 2009].

²⁴The idea of liberalism is a neat and tidy project that has the potential to become all-inclusive, though it has already been challenged by a host of scholars. Rather, it is a system that has not been inclusive, based on a Eurocentric vision of the world and enlightenment ideals that has come under serious challenge by the world’s ‘others,’ whose positions have been articulated by feminists, critical race theorists, and postcolonial and subaltern scholars. They view modernity’s thesis of ‘history as progressive’ as a fiction and exclusive and law as the mechanism for sustaining unequal structures of power, whether in the form of slavery or Empire, and a subordinating or civilizing tool of the ‘superior’ power. Indeed, as Kanpur writes, “when Europe was in the midst of a struggle for liberty, equality, and freedom, Europe’s ‘others’ remained subjugated under the weight of colonialism and slavery. Even within Europe, gender apartheid established a hierarchy of what and who constituted the liberal subject: the white propertied male.” Ratna Kapur, *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Post-colonialism*, New Delhi: Centre for Feminist Legal Research, 2001, 24.

commentators argue that it is the lenient criminal justice and juvenile justice system that causes high crime rates or that crime and violence are the result of cultural decline and something called moral poverty. But the American justice system is one of the harshest in the world – including shame punishment – and, although the cultural and moral condition of American families and communities is important to take into account in understanding crime, these conditions are strongly affected by larger social and economic forces. These larger social structural conditions are the factors that sociological criminologists point to the root of violence. As Elliott Currie observes, “For there is now overwhelming evidence that inequality, extreme poverty, and social exclusion matter profoundly in shaping a society’s experience of violent crime. And they matter, in good part, precisely because of their impact on the close-in institutions of family and community.”²⁵ A conservative moral and political philosophy holds sway, arguing that social inequality is necessary to encourage individual initiative and economic efficiency. This leads to a noninterventionist laissez-faire approach to a government that relies heavily on the discipline of largely unregulated market forces backed up by reliance on severe criminal sanctions. Indeed, there is considerable plausibility in seeing a connection between poverty and violence. Many countries have experienced and still continue to experience the simultaneous presence of economic destitution and political strife.²⁶ In a feudal system, slaves were ill-treated, but they knew that they were wanted; in the traditional caste system, the outcasts were discriminated, but they knew that they were wanted and without their toil the society could not function. But now, when the violent technology conquered the field and the market, the poor are brutally forgotten and, consequently, the destitute take violence and rebellious reactions as their last resort. Given the co-existence of poverty and violence, it is not at all unnatural to ask whether poverty kills twice: first, through economic privation and, second, through political carnage. The enlightened attitude to war and peace must go beyond the immediate

²⁵Elliott Currie, *Crime and Punishment in America*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998, 114.

²⁶Some examples are the people in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Haiti, where they are faced with dual adversities of deprivation and violence. For a detailed empirical investigation on the correlation of poverty and violence, see Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done about It*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

and seek instead deeper causes. In looking for such underlying causes, the economics of deprivation and inequity has a very plausible claim to attention. The belief that the roots of discontent and disorder have to be sought in economic destitution that has been widely favoured by social analysts who try to look beyond the apparent and the obvious. The UN Development Report notes:

The interaction between poverty and violent conflict in many developing countries is destroying lives on an enormous scale... The human development costs of violent conflict are not sufficiently appreciated... Conflict undermines nutrition and public health, destroys education systems, devastates livelihoods and retards prospect for economic growth... The immensity of these costs makes its own case for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction as three fundamental requirements for building human security and accelerating progress...²⁷

Economic destitution may not lead to any immediate violence, all the time, but it would be wrong to presume that there is no connection between the two. Just as virtue or karma is its own reward, poverty is at least its own punishment. Since generic physical violence seems to be more widely loathed and feared, especially by well-placed people, than social inequity and deprivation – even extreme deprivation – of others, it is indeed tempting to be able to tell all, including the rich and those well-placed in the society, that terrible poverty will generate violence, threatening the lives of all. However, it is not essential that destitution alone should lead to violence, and such a stand would not allow one to look for certain ulterior reasons and may be satisfied as if everything out of economic reasons, a kind of economic reductionism.

Let me give certain examples along this line: Crime rate in cities was generally higher than the corresponding crime rate in the domain state. Take the case of Bengaluru (Bangalore) – as the name of that city is now spelled in English in order to sound closer to its Kannada original – where crime rate is shown as 475.6 whereas in the domain of State it is 211.7. The cities Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru have accounted for 15.1%, 9.0% and 8.0%, respectively, of the total crimes reported in the 35 mega cities (means, population above one million) in India. At the same time, in Kolkata (Calcutta), although it is not only one of the poorest cities in India,

²⁷United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2005*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 14.

and indeed in the world, but it also has exceptionally the low rate of violent crime – absolutely, the lowest violent crime rate of all Indian cities. The average incidence of murder in Indian cities (including all the 35 cities that are counted in that category) is 2.7 per 100, 000 people – 2.9 for Delhi. The rate is 0.3 in Kolkata.²⁸ Of course, the low crime rate does not make those nasty problems go away. Yet, there is something to understand in the fact that poverty does not inescapably produce violence, independently of political movements as well as social and cultural interactions. Social scientists should have the humility to accept and look for certain mysterious elements beyond poverty-violence relationship which otherwise may lead to easy empirical generalizations. Here, in the case of Kolkata it is to be seen that the radical politics of the left-wing politics (West Bengal has the longest history in the world of elected communist governments, based on free multiparty elections – for 28 years now, although in the last election its strong ground was very strongly shaken) and extreme impoverishment made people too debilitated even to protest and rebel. As Sen rightly said, “destitution can be accompanied not only by economic debility, but also by political impotence.”²⁹ Looking at the wilderness and wasteland, you can very well write a good poem on peace on earth, yet such a peace terribly destroys the significance of permanent revolution.

Indeed, many famines have occurred without there being much political rebellion or civil strife or intergroup warfare. For example, the famine years in the 1840s in Ireland were among the most peaceful, and there was little attempt by the hungry masses to intervene even as ship after ship sailed down the river Shannon laden with food, carrying it away from starving Ireland to well-fed England, which had greater amount of purchasing power. As it happens, the Irish do not have a great reputation for excessive docility, and yet the famine years were, by and large, years of law and order and peace.³⁰ There were no forms of violence and discontentment seen immediately after Irish famine. However, the memory

²⁸National Crime Record Bureau (2007), <http://ncrb.nic.in/cii2007/cii-2007/CHAP2.pdf> [30 November 2009].

²⁹Sen, “Violence, Identity and Poverty,” 11.

³⁰For an excellent exposition of this issue and particularly on the Bengal famine of 1943 see, Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 142-148; *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005, 34-44.

of destitution and devastation tends to linger, and can be invoked and utilized to generate rebellion and violence in the future. I think that the prodigals of freedom have to pay the cost, may not be immediately, but, undoubtedly, in the long-run. Indeed, the memory of injustice and neglect had the effect of severely alienating the Irish from the British, and contributed greatly to the violence that characterized Anglo-Irish relations over more than one and a half centuries. In the same way, the ill-treatment of the Middle East by western powers for many decades – perhaps even a hundred years – which still hangs around in various forms in the West Asia, can be cultivated and magnified by the commanders of confrontation to enhance the ability of terrorists to recruit volunteers for violence. Reinstated justice brings healing, not only the healing of the present, but of the wounded history too.³¹ Neglect can be reason enough for resentment, but a sense of encroachment, degradation, and humiliation can even be easier to mobilize people for rebellion and revolt, which may at times be asymmetric in its outcome. Gandhi, who was a steady crusader against the disorganized socio-economic inequalities and injustices, notes:

Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth, on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other... A non-violent system of government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists... A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.³²

The ever-widening gap between rich nations of the North and the poor of the South has to be abolished for establishing peace. The 'poor' South fails in the competitive markets and free-trade games, which ultimately, although not always, take them to retaliatory violence and resentment. Every revolutionary violence, even if done in the name of bringing peace in the society, hides its own angel of death in its passion, the terror of the ethical good. We are provided with huge number of examples that the traditional military solutions are no more plausible to bring peace, both at

³¹Palatty, *Cathedrals of Development*, 178.

³²M. K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1981, 20-21.

the national and international levels. Without looking for certain innovative ideas and strategies like dialogue with the parties concerned, distributive justice-oriented approach against conventional social contract basis, and the like are very much needed in the present scenario of terrorism and asymmetric violence.³³ Enlightened approaches should replace weak and chaotic strategic planning based on old military doctrines. Eventually, we will have to negotiate our way out with just and political solutions.

5. Conclusion

Cultural, religious, and social factors, together with political economy are quite important in understanding violence in the world of today. As I have argued, they do not work in isolation from each other, and we have to resist the tempting shortcuts that claim to deliver insight through their single-minded univocal concentrations on one or another factor, ignoring other central features of an integrated picture. Religious identities with their enigmatic equivocalities, for example, are used to inflict violence on others, like cultural identities. In the same way, extreme privatization of religion also indirectly promotes violence. We relegate religion to our private sphere, where everyone has prodigal freedom to enjoy his or her religious faith, although it has nothing to do with public discourses. Their tolerance sometimes turns out to be intolerant in many ways. A domesticated god and privatized religious practices are hallmarks of present capitalist way of liberal believers, where they make dualistic

³³The present Naxalite violence in certain regions of Indian states has certain underpinning with the questions of justice and how the governments deal with the issue. Jacob argues that, the grinding poverty, the rising inequalities and the failure of successive governments to improve the lives of ordinary people have led to disenchantment with the democratic process. The lack of basic needs of water, sanitation, nutrition, housing, health, education, employment guarantees, and the social exclusion of the majority of the people, are major concerns. Corruption at different levels of government, the insensitivity of the political class, common instances of high-handedness and harassment that many poor people face at the hands of the police and religious and caste bigotry set the stage. The situation is loaded with asymmetries, forms of structural violence that have become normal across the region. The disillusioned decide to move out of the establishment framework and take up arms as the only means to break down the insensitive system, which has not delivered an egalitarian society. See K. S. Jacob, “Coping with Asymmetric Violence,” *The Hindu*, 31 July, 2009, 8.

visions of life – private in opposition to public – and thus, look for self-mediation without social intermediation. Does not Nietzsche’s remark about the anarchy of the instincts have some clues to decode the intricate dynamics of our social life? As Desmond says, “we are lacking a sense of otherness that would make us cast our glance beyond. Our consuming society offers us the social cultivation of our narcissistic impulses.”³⁴ It is true that diagnosing the sickness is needed, but that is not enough; we certainly need treatment. Such treatment begins with every individual standing for possible justice, “moral politician” (against “political moralist”) readying for altruistic service, and the universal community cultivating certain *sensus communis* for enlarged mentality,³⁵ where all plurivocities are recognized, accepted, and treated with equal dignity, on the one hand, and justice-oriented policy formulations and the consequent implementations at the national and international levels are ensured, on the other.

³⁴Desmond, *Ethics and the Between*, 422.

³⁵Immanuel Kant, “Appendix” *Political Writings*, Hans Reiss (ed.), H. B. Nisbet (transl.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 118. Political moralists fashion morality to suit his own advantage as a statesman. See also, Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner, ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 75.