

Space, Place and Peace:
Engaging with Mahatma
Gandhi in the Discursive
Alternative

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Abstract: With the ever-increasing challenges to the very existence of human societies, there has been a dire need to have an alternate discourse about the way human societies are 'progressing' and would progress in future with reference to nature, resources, communities, developmental dynamics and so on. The same reiterates and invites innovative reconstructs in the realms of social relations, administrative setups and political structures that have otherwise become defunct to address the recent issues. The existing construct has been developed over the centuries under the specific influences of world political and economic order and the then geographies of power engulfing most of the societies to rework their lives through the specificities of capitalism as a dominant discourse. The 'competitive' spirit instilled therein forced the societies (irrespective of their geography) to linger in and around 'war' zones almost every day.

There have been several alternate discourses introduced so far, to mention a few: 'welfare state', 'democracy', 'human face of globalisation' (another world is possible) and the most recent popular on 'sustainability'. However, all these approaches have yielded limited benefits and were subsumed apparently in the 'logic' of market economy. If at all, there has to be a concrete alternative to resolve the current issues, there is a need to combine the understanding of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and of course, Karl Marx.

Harmony, peace, social equality and economic equality should be at the centre of the alternative discourse. There has hardly been any discourse that centres 'peace' as one of its core values. The article is an attempt to explore the possibility of 'peace' centric geopolitical and developmental discourse and investigate the relevance of Gandhian perspective on development and peace.

I. Introduction: Referencing the Context

The contemporary time(s) are marked with increasing complexities in socio-cultural and politico-economic structures. There has been aggravation of several issues threatening the very existence of human societies. The developmental discourses that have been introduced so far work on the principles of *capitalism*. Here when I say *capitalism*, I mean to refer to the 'invisible hand' present in all the political regimes. At least, the contemporary time(s) do not exhibit any substantial difference in attending the current socio-cultural and politico-economic problems. Why I choose to talk simultaneously about 'development' and 'geopolitics' is because the contemporary discourses on development and geopolitics are intrinsically connected with each other and revolve around the workings of capital. So it is the developmental geopolitics that needs to be scrutinized in the light of the current situation of economic crisis and associated consequences. There had been critical discourses in analysing the 'development geopolitics' in the late 1950s and that remained prominent till almost the last decade of 20th century. Raul Prebisch in late 1950s; Andre Gunder Frank (1971); Paul Baran (1957); Paul Sweezy (1966) all contributed to the concept of 'underdevelopment' and theories of dependency while exploring the link between political agendas and developmental discourses. The classical and neoclassical economic theories on development remained mainstream, leading to marginalisation of every other analysis of developmental geopolitics.

The 1980s witnessed a forceful shift in the perspectives on development. Several national governments especially from the Global South were forced to realise that international capital flows were must for economic development. Interestingly, it wasn't the World Bank or International Monetary Fund that was involved in pushing these agendas but it was the United Nations that abruptly hijacked 'development' as their prime objective. The abrupt shift was justified by interlinking 'Peace and Security' - there as the prime objective with achievement of better levels of economic and social development. Following the same, MDGs - Millennium Development Goals were designed, keeping socio-economic development at its core. Ironically, a supranational body that was meant for maintaining peace and security, got converted into a puppet regime and started serving the interest of international capital. The resolution passed in 1997 by the UN reiterated the need to take measures that have larger implications on economic development through the international capital as a primary driver (United Nations, The Draft on Resolution, 1997). In the year 2015, the UN declared that the goal of poverty eradication has been met by most of the countries as it claims that more than 1 billion people have been lifted from extreme poverty worldwide (UN, accessed in 2020). Following the same, in the next step, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced where there is no mention of poverty eradication and associated key issues. At this backdrop, now the UN is pushing the agendas of sustainable development, thus, falsifying the very objectives of economic and social development. It could be interesting to note such a shift in the policy of the UN is responsible for intensifying the contradictions in the national policies on development and environment as they are set in the times of neoliberal governance regime and shaped under finance capitalism.

With the economic aftershocks of neoliberal reforms and intensification of global economic integration, anti-globalisation trends are already creating space for themselves in developed economies, for example, BREXIT. With extremist regimes in the US, Great Britain, China and other European countries, there have been efforts to reframe the regulations on visas and citizenship status. All kinds of restrictions on trade and commerce interactions are in the pipeline. The importance of 'local' is gaining much more attention than ever. The recent COVID 19 pandemic, the world could observe a complete set back to the economy. There has been the 're-realisation of Geography and self-reliance'. To revive this economic situation,

we need resources – all kinds of resources, a strong local network of inter-spatial linkages and political vision.

What especially, does India have in its account currently? The resources are already depleted and we are at the verge of complete exhaustion of some of the very important energy resources. Our environmental protection policies and 'development' policies contradict each other and stand compromised on the quality of the environment. There is a complete stagnancy at the level of the economy with all-time low GDP i.e. -23.9 in quarter 1 (The Economic Times, 2020). An estimated 122 million people lost their jobs in the Coronavirus pandemic (The Hindu, 2020). At social and societal level we continue to experience complete anarchy with the rise of post modern and neoliberal regimes setting in the narrow agendas of identity politics over real concerns of socio-economic and ecological development. Nonetheless, the policies on economic development also emanate from capitalist market ideology and continue to exclude everything else that does not fit into the capitalist logic. [May it be the poorest of the poor or the children, women, farmers, workers and search countless numbers of people who are not consumers, taxpayers.] In COVID 19 pandemic, the situation is far grimmer and has witnessed complete wiping out of the 'progress' so far. Ironically, to deal with this situation, almost all governments are falling back on options of localisation. Recently, there has been a policy envisioned by the Central Government titled as 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' launched on 12th May, 2020 having its five pillars as economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography and demand (Ministry of Finance, 12th July, 2020). It is an effort of self-reliance and localisation as per what has been described by the ministry.

So we are back to square one – 1947 and Gandhi's vision of self-reliant villages. Who becomes most relevant at the outset? It is Gandhian economic principles that would be the most appropriate for making India self-reliant in terms of economy.

II. Development and Geopolitics

What is development is the key question today. Capital centric economic and societal development is equivalent to materialistic growth and product consumption. How much one consumes decides his worth in the market economy. Noam Chomsky (1988) in his book {Manufacturing Consent} suggests that the market has the deepest influence on our everyday life. The circuits of consumption, production and distribution imply more or less the economics of profit maximization than satisfying the basic needs and demands of people specially the masses. It is obvious to see that the economy is subservient to the capitalist interest and occupies peripheral position in serving the interest of masses. Capital continues to be the soul of economic organisation whether it is founded on capitalist, communist or socialist ideologies. None of the political ideologies have ever created an alternative to 'capital'. These three economic and political systems may differ in their approaches vis-a-vis distribution of the profit in the different cross sections of society. But ultimately, reaching the poorest of the poorer has remained equally difficult for all the systems. The geopolitics - a structure that is set to work again in the interest of international capital - basically capitalises on development that has 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 1950) at its core. The global geopolitical structures and international relations have been reconstituted frequently, following the vested interests of the developed economies in resources, territories and people. China as a major power now, too, emerges to be equally expansionist, authoritarian and exploitative. The world system theory proposed by Wallerstein (1974) fits perfectly here. It suggests that the world is a single entity having several hierarchical levels denoting specific power parity and with 'exploitation' as its integral component. All the countries are positioned in core, semi peripheral and peripheral positions depending on their politico-economic status. They may change their positions as per the altering developmental and geopolitical scenario. Both upward and downward mobility is possible. It is interesting to see how in the past three decades, the frequency of altering the political equations between several countries has been accelerating under the regime of international finance capital. The formation of BRICS for example is the best example of such altering geopolitical equations. The recent changes in the geopolitical relations of India with its neighbouring countries and their closeness to China is another example of such temporary geopolitical

structures that are largely guided by vested interests. Though it is claimed that there has been no war since World War Two, the period since then has been witnessing several 'peace efforts' in the form of 'war on terrorism'; 'saving people from the authoritarian regime'; 'peace army' and so on. These 'peace efforts', ironically were in the form of military interventions, stirring political instability against unwanted governments, supporting the anti-government groups and organisations and so on. The dominant nations from every continent have probably applied all these methods to regain regional control and domination. India too, has not shy away from. The killing race for territorial dominations in the name of financial aid and help, economic growth and so on has already killed and uprooted billions of people from their everyday lives. 'No direct war between superpowers' cannot be equated as peace (Gregory, 2010).

In this backdrop, what is the status of India is another key question. India spent almost 71.1 billion dollars in 2019 making it world's third biggest military spender (Shukla, A, 2020). India spends only 3 percent of its budget on education. Is it affordable for a developing country like India to spend so much on defense? In fact, the peacekeeping efforts in an innovatively creative manner would balance out all odds. It would be policies that keep peace as its essential core. Would India emerge as a leader that can create space for peaceful international deliberations? Here again, the conceptualisation of peace by Gandhi becomes most significant as he believed international relations can also be governed by the principles of nonviolence. He further proposes that 'there is no path to peace, peace is the path'. I would extend it by saying 'peace is space',

III. Geography, Gandhi and Space

In critical geographical praxis, 'space' is one of the most widely used constructs to understand the interrelationship between people, nature, resources, economies, cultures and social structures as spaces are the productive reflections of their amalgamations. That further suggests that the spaces are the mirrors of socio-cultural, economic and political amalgamations at a particular time and get represented explicitly in a particular place. The major determinants of any

socio-cultural space thus would be people, communities and structures. What a particular space would contain will be decided by the process of production of space. Lefebvre (1996) explains the production of space as through 'being' and 'becoming'. He also suggests a triad to decode the production of space – perceived, conceived and lived spaces. 'Spatial' approach reinstates 'space as a dynamic element'. Most of the conventional geographers look at 'time' as a decider. The debate goes on around vis-à-vis how to place space and time with each other. For many, 'time' is active, dynamic, decisive – so masculine, whereas spaces are passive, static, dependent – so feminine. The narrative of 'everything changes with the time' dominates the understanding of any 'change', may it be, social change or political change. Interestingly, in the process, one conveniently ignores the conditions of 'spatial fixity' where in the absence of any stimulus, irrespective of 'passing time', the spaces remain unchanged. For example, a remote village continues to have similar living for decades together, in the absence of any stimuli. That indicates that the spaces are not passive and do not wait for 'time' to transform them. These are volatile forces, processes and influential people that shape any space and punctuate imprints of those changes in 'time'. How the space has evolved over the period of time will decide what fundamental ethics have been put to work, produce and 'run' that space. So what does constitute the socio-political space and which political ideologies are shaping the political spatial mending and so on, becomes vital. For instance, the entire history of world politics is dominated by the discourses of expansionism, dominations and controls. In geographical perspective, 'peace' has always been equated with a 'no war' situation, putting peace as a secondary element of political space. The very secondary position of peace in geopolitical studies engulfs the discourse on peace and shifts it to the conflict resolution mode and weakens the independent thinking on centralising peace in the alternate discourse. In fact, peace research as a discipline has been polarised as much as peace as a concept (Swiss peace, 2014).

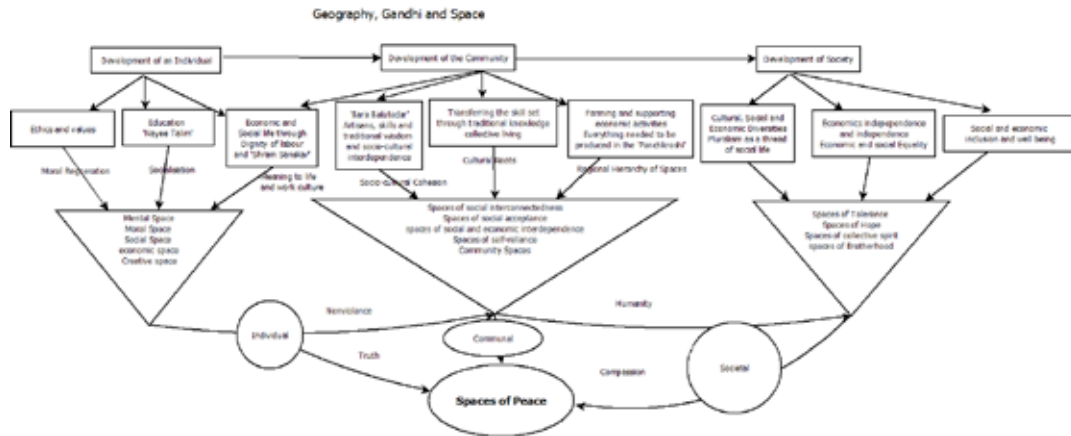


Figure 1: Conceptualising Production of Space through Gandhian Principles

It could be interesting to see how Gandhi dealt with space in his several proposals when it comes to development and geopolitics. The analysis of his models on development as well as international relations suggest that he firmly believed in the continuous production and reproduction of space at various levels of individual and collective life.

It is the coherence and interconnectedness of all principles he proposed in his lifetime that allows us to have Gandhian principles at the core of alternate discourse on development and geopolitics. For example, he has given tremendous emphasis on mental space that includes ethical and moral training not just to an individual but also its application in different situations and varying scales. As suggested by Rathi (accessed in 2020), Gandhi continues to emphasise a creation of mental space that would encourage the moral regeneration of an individual and imbibe non-violent values. The creation of 'ethical moral space' thus not only remains the core of individual moral regeneration but also implied to the larger socio-political spaces at the level of community and society. His emphasis on dignity of labour and '*Shram Sanskaras*' to be imbibed in formal education suggests his keen interest in rebuilding a society that respects all kinds of work and there is no 'caste' identity attached to it. His emphasis on education through '*Shram Sanskar*' and insistence on developing skill sets pertaining to '*Bara Balutedar*' (12 types of artisans interdependent on each other in rural settings) in students got reflected through the experiment of '*Nayi Talim*' in school education. The moral education through '*The Experiments of Truth*' and philosophy of

Nonviolence and 'simple living, higher thinking', were the key elements in reaching the level of self-actualisation and spiritual intimacy. Finally, his directives on the natural environment. Gandhi upheld that the environment is not an inheritance to which one is entitled, but is rather a loan from one's ancestors for the future generations. The same would imbibe the values of social equality in children. There can be simultaneous economic space generated through the internal interdependence of various artisans, farmers and other elements of villages to create a self-sustaining and self-reliant local economic space. He expected the same would promote social and economic interdependence that would keep the village society together and encourage collective life. The creative space would allow people to engage in the development of appropriate technologies and sharpening the traditional skill sets to solve the problems that are locally created. Such social and economic cohesion of different communities will lead to the development of healthy society. The core principles of these societies would be socio-cultural pluralism, respect for diversities, tolerance, acceptance and nonviolence to achieve a creative, truthful and peaceful individual and societal life at the end. His firm belief in 'simple living and high thinking' also guides the society to have reorientation on how to 'consume'.

Reconstruction of 'peace' and 'space' must be simultaneous, in fact, both should be intrinsically linked, as Gandhi suggests. With the advent of globalisation, there is, on a massive scale, an abrupt, hurried and leap frog pattern of social transformation. Probably at every scale there is a rush to grab 'maximum'. We continue to equate joy, happiness and peace with materialistic consumption – more or less which is a passive mode of consumption. There is a complete lack of creativity and originality in what we do as we have been trained to believe that 'consumption is creativity'. Peace needs to be constructed in spaces by integrating and interweaving the mental peace at individual level to socio-economic peace at community level and political peace at societal level – as per one of his sayings, 'there is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed'.

The model of holistic development had been already offered by Mahatma Gandhi. His ardent followers like Vinoba Bhave who successfully moderated Bhoodan Movement, experiments rooted in Gandhian Vision are success stories

like Popatrao Pawar and the experiment of *Hivarebajar*, *Mendha Lekha*, *rights to forests and empowerment of Scheduled tribe*, *Vanrai* by Mohan Dharia, etc. Why Gandhian principles become extremely important here in societal regeneration is because of his emphasis on individual's moral and ethical development.

Interestingly, the principles with which he suggests a reconstruction of society at local levels, the same principles he has suggested to attain World Peace. The geopolitical world structure is so complex that one may be confused by how such simple principles can solve the complex conflicts and war like situations. Rathi (accessed in 2020) suggests that Gandhi envisioned a World Federation or International League founded on the principles of non-violence and international cooperation. He also expected the proposed world federation to maintain a nonviolence policy where the soldiers of this force would bear no arms (Rathi, accessed in 2020).

Secondly, Gandhi believed in the attainment of peace through establishing economic equality as the "master-key" to non-violent world order (Rathi, accessed in 2020). Peace must have its roots in fraternity rather than in fear. He regarded that global peace could not be possible unless the exploitative world economic and social hierarchy is replaced by a new world that is committed to non-violence and exploitation free social order (Rathi, accessed in 2020).

Nazareth (accessed in 2020), in his speech delivered at National Defence College, Delhi (2008) expresses the views of Antony Copley who stated that Gandhian style resistance to apartheid was part of the wider struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism. He also sheds light on the influence of Gandhi on Nehru, who was behind the Non-Aligned Movement. On international relations, when Gandhi was asked about its relation with Great Britain, he had answered that India would be completely cut off from the Empire but not from the British nation. I would prefer an equal relationship with Britain (Fischer, L,1954).

There have been many struggles and freedom movements that got inspiration from Gandhian principles of nonviolence. To name a few, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and many others have engaged themselves in promoting peace as the core of geopolitical relations. Many environmental

movements also have their roots in Gandhian Philosophy. Right from Chipko movement to recent Aarey movement, the young generation too followed satyagraha as its way of exhibiting opposition to the decision of state governments to cut down the trees. Internationally the German Green party has acknowledged Mahatma Gandhi for inspiring them to rethink on life styles and methods of production which rely on an endless supply and a lavish use of raw materials (Nazareth, 2008). Megaron (2011) offers an interesting concept of 'Everyday Peace' which can be connected here, as its basic premise is communal and societal harmony. Gandhian principles have always been relevant in reconstructing the socio-cultural fabric of society in the most pluralistic way they are now.

IV. Places with Spaces of Peace

The experiments of reconstructing spaces of peace through Gandhian philosophy thus emanated from the effort of reconstructing communities... rather reconstructing people into communities. There is a tremendous scope for geographers to emerge with innovative concepts inspired by Gandhian Economics and philosophy in reconstructing 'peaceful spaces'. In fact, internal and external peace are intrinsically linked with each other. Bhutan, a tiny country ranks 15 in Global Peace Index in 2019 whereas India ranks 141 in Global Peace Index with deterioration of 4 points in last 5 years. The choice is ours...

What can really bring us peace – homogeneity or diversity? It is definitely the diversity – environmental, social, cultural and so on. In fact, the whole world economy thrives on diversity. Geographical diversities can be translated into spatial uniqueness. The planning should be such that most of the people get right to not only resources (physical, financial and infrastructural) but also a right to plan their resources and livelihood in a sustainable manner for the long term and larger communal welfare (Phadke, 2019). The larger sustainability can be brought through inclusion, equity and responsibility (Phadke, 2019) and peace rests there ...

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