

TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON PEACE STUDIES IN INDIA: EMERGING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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Abstract

Peace Studies has developed as a discipline with an alternative epistemology and ontology as compared to the disciplines like international relations and security studies. Though its emphasis is on inter-disciplinary as well as participation from the grassroots for the creation of knowledge, yet the discipline needs considerable enrichment with interventions from the global South. This paper discusses some of the problems faced by the discipline in India. Scholars face the tremendous challenge of countering the binaries created between the global North and South in course of the debate on the spurt of intrastate conflicts in the developing world. The research on peace in the global South faces several infrastructural constraints, a factor which has impacted the research environment in the country. In light of these challenges, the paper offers some suggestions on how to improve the research, teaching, and pedagogy of the discipline in India.

Keywords: *Peace Studies, Conflict Resolution, global South, pedagogy, Peace research*

INTRODUCTION

Peace Studies is a relatively young discipline, but the concerns and traditions of peace can be traced back to ancient times. The origins of contemporary peace and conflict research go back to some of the scholarly works published in the interwar years between the two World Wars and beyond that under the shadow of the Second World War (Kriesberg, 2009, p.15). However, the field of Peace and Conflict Resolution (PCR) started assuming its formal shape after the end of this World War, when the world witnessed the era of Cold War, the era that held the world hostage to perpetual tensions and conflicts in an age of nuclear weapons. The main concerns for the emerging discipline were concerns like causes of wars, superpower rivalry, nuclear war and the threat of a Mutually Assured Destruction and disarmament. However, the evolving

discipline of PCR soon parted ways with security studies by bringing the focus on peace rather than the traditional emphasis on national security. PCR had some remarkable contributions to the theories on peace and proved effective in challenging the mainstream understanding in International Relations theory which was arresting the development of alternative perspectives. Most significantly, the field challenged the state-centrism in the discipline of International Relations (the statist narrative, with its conventional focus on stability and security, overlooked root causes of conflicts and emphasized on containing rather than resolving or transforming conflicts. It ignored alternative voices, actors and perspectives and the need for building sustainable peace). While wars were regarded as inevitable in the statist discourse, and statesmen regarded peace as a utopia and at the best an idea to be used as a rhetoric, Peace Studies integrated research on peace into the social sciences, based on observations and falsifiable theories, thereby asserting that peace was not mere wishful thinking but a necessity (Wallenteen, 1988, p.9).

Thus, Peace Studies carved out its separate area from the realm of International Relations and traditional security studies. A rich literature on conflict resolution and conflict transformation as a means of handling conflicts developed and attracted the attention of scholars from across the globe. The profound work by Prof. Johan Galtung (1969), in particular, his analysis of structural violence, had important implications for the developing countries. Further, a substantial amount of literature on the global South started coming with the end of the super-power rivalry, when the Cold War faded away, and the attention of the researchers shifted to the instability and conflicts which seemed to engulf the other half of the world. Violent intrastate conflicts in countries of Africa and Asia made the scholars realize that the expected post-Cold War 'peace dividend' had failed to materialize. There was also a growing realization that the changing nature of conflicts in the post-Cold War era had posed a new challenge to the discipline. This had important implications for the development of peace scholarship and education across the world. This paper examines some such problems and challenges to the development of this field in India.

CHALLENGES FOR PEACE RESEARCH IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Scholars have observed how there has been a clear shift of focus from interstate to intrastate conflicts in the contemporary world (Holsti, 1995). However, what is less often emphasized is the impact this had on the dissemination of this discipline to the global South. As these intrastate conflicts were concentrated in the global South hence the

scholars who had been busy analyzing issues like disarmament and reduction of tensions between power blocs, found themselves studying situations which were entirely different and difficult to explain. From the genocide in Rwanda to the ethnic conflicts in Srilanka and Indonesia, these conflicts baffled the observers with their barbaric fierceness, the eruption of dormant hatreds and the hardening of identities along with the fragmentation and chaos that ensued. As scholars turned their attention to study what scholars like Mary Kaldor (1999) termed “new wars”, there were a number of efforts to understand their causes and also attempts to find the means of their resolution. There were heated debates between scholars who considered grievance as a cause and those who considered greed as a more potent factor in causing these intrastate conflicts. Thus, while Ted Gurr (1985) located the cause in relative deprivation, studies by scholars like Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2001) offered explanations emphasizing resources like raw materials. On the other hand, there were scholars like Thomas Homer-Dixon and his “Toronto group” who brought in new factors like environmental degradation in the countries of the global South in the debate (See Homer-Dixon: 1991, 1999). It is to be noted that though this debate focussed on the global South, the scholarship in the West hardly recognized any theoretical contributions from the scholars from the countries of the South in understanding these wars and conflicts. Many of these Western theories thus proved partial, elitist or ethnocentric views of the developing world. However, it is these debates which warmed up the academic environment in India for the formal establishment of institutes and centers on peace and conflict resolution.

With the rapid changes in the world today, the field requires a lot of enrichment to factor in the recent developments in the world while breaking free of the ethnocentric perspectives in the discipline of International Relations which seem to overshadow many of the alternative ideas. The end of the cold war led to the emergence of a substantial amount of literature in International Relations which posited a binary between the civilized and orderly states of the North in contrast to the barbaric and chaotic states of the South. Robert Kaplan's 1994 article entitled “The Coming Anarchy” in the *Atlantic Monthly* had pictured the global South as a threat to the peace and stability to the entire world, prominently the global North (Kaplan 1994). Kaplan wrote this while totally neglecting the roots of these chaotic societies in the colonial histories which have caused this economic and intellectual impoverishment of the South which led to these conflicts. Furthermore, he fails to note how imperialism in the era of globalization leads to interventions and conflicts. Similarly, Samuel Huntington (1993) wrote about a clash of civilizations, focussing on the differences between the liberal Western and

fundamentalist Islamic civilizations. This kind of a biased picture which finds the barbaric South overshadowing the prosperous and liberal North was critiqued and dismissed, but not without a lesson for the scholars of the South. A need was felt among scholars for theories and responses from the South which countered this false binary and analyzed the problems in the post-cold war world in an unbiased manner.

Thus, Peace Studies in the global South has a massive task before it, the task of training future researchers for reinvigorating contribution from these countries. The discipline has to develop with the changing times and at present, it needs many more theoretical contributions for understanding conflict, war, and peace in the era of globalization. This requires new formulations which challenge the one-way flow of ideas and theories. Peace Studies is highly interdisciplinary, integrally related to concerns of human development, social justice, and human rights, and it is here that there is a gap where many more contributions could be included from the global South. It is to be noted that there is significant movement in this direction. There has been a 'local turn' in Peace Studies, as indicated by recent literature published in this field, "Recently, there has been interest in 'local ownership of peacebuilding' where local actors are 'integrated into the design and decision-making process' of peacebuilding" (Upadhyaya and Kolås, 2018, p.33). Yet much more work on how diverse insights from different locales could enrich the discipline is required.

THE ACADEMIC MILIEU IN INDIA

In the task of setting the agenda for debate in scholarship in the discipline, the scholars in India, like their other counterparts from the countries of the global South face a constant dearth of financial resources, libraries, and platforms for discussing and debating these issues. Dedicated centers of Peace and Conflict Studies are few, and therefore seminars and conferences on these issues are not very frequent. Even journals on Peace Studies from India are only a handful and have very less visibility, so that the ideas get lost, failing to get much audience and failing to spark new debates. Here, one might mention the *Journal of Peace Studies* published by the International Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi, or *Gandhi Marg*, the journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation as noteworthy journals which have attempted to fill the gaps in this field, however much more remains to be accomplished for a thriving research-scape. This, in turn, can then lead to a vibrant educational and academic scenario in the country.

It is important to examine the academic milieu in which peace education in India is being imparted to understand its strengths and weaknesses. One of the pioneers in peace and

conflict research in India was the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research at the Banaras Hindu University. The center has developed into a major center for peace education with the relentless efforts by Prof. Priyankar Upadhyaya (one of the leading peace scholars based in India who holds the UNESCO chair for peace and Intercultural understanding). Prof. Upadhaya has made notable contributions towards the discipline, with his endeavour of enriching the discipline with insights from peace traditions of the country like Jainism, Buddhism and Gandhian thought (see Upadhyaya 2009). The Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia is also one of the prominent academic centres for research and education in this field. The proliferation of courses and concerns on peace and conflict resolution across the globe has also reflected in the research and teaching on this area in the recently established South Asian University. Jawaharlal Nehru University has no specific centre for Peace Studies and has related courses which are offered in the School of International Studies. There is again no center for Peace Studies at the University of Delhi but some courses at the undergraduate and Master's level have been introduced by the Department of Political Science. There are some other universities like the Sikkim University, Panjab University and the University of Mysore, offering similar courses, but the discipline is still to acquire its importance and distinction in the country. Furthermore, there are a number of institutes and centers studying Gandhian contribution to peace, like the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi, but their focus remains more on Gandhian studies than the discipline as a whole. However, a notable effort in the direction of integrating studies on Gandhian philosophy with the recent developments in peace and conflict resolution has been made at the Centre for Gandhian Thought and Peace studies at the Gujrat Central University.

A challenge for the discipline also emanates from security studies. While a google search on peace studies institutions in India yields a result which flags think-tanks like *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies* and *Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*, these think tanks approach conflicts from the point of view of security studies and traditional statist concerns. There are also some research institutes like the Institute for Conflict Management founded by Mr. K.P.S. Gill, however, they remain narrowly focused on the more traditional methods like conflict management as methods of handling conflicts. Thus, when it comes to policy, it is the state-centric approach which drives the debate on wars and conflicts while neglecting the alternative voices. As a result, the concerns of peace get subsumed within this dominant discourse.

TEACHING PEACE IN INDIA

The impact of globalization on the educational scene in universities and colleges in India

has led to some major challenges for the discipline. Globalization brought to India, as to the rest of the world, in the words of Leslie Sklair (2010, p.116) a “culture-ideology of consumerism”, carried to the people through incessant propaganda by the global media. In a matter of two decades, this ideology has spread rapidly to all parts of the country. The icons for young people have shifted from social reformers like Gandhi to icons of success like film stars, sportspersons or multi-millionaires. This drive for wealth and power has led to the emergence of a generation with very little interest in values, ideas or even the problems in this world – issues with which they feel they are remotely connected. In such a scenario, teaching Peace Studies is often a challenge for the educators who are increasingly facing the task of countering the apathy in the students and making them realize how peace is related to their everyday lives. Secondly, and perhaps more strikingly is the tendency of numbness towards violence in young students. This generation, unlike the generation brought up before the advent of globalization, has been used to increased violence in entertainment, the increased doses of crime and violence in cinema, computer and mobile games and through the live coverage of violence in the news media. The collapse of the World Trade Centre in 2001, or smoke billowing out of the Taj Hotel in Mumbai in 2008 after the terror attack is mere spectacles and not immense tragedies for them. It is difficult to convince them of the urgency as well as the possibility of stopping them. Being born and brought up in violent societies, hearing a violent and graphic description of heinous crimes, wars and conflicts are mere spectator sports for this generation. The sanctity of human life and the idea that violence and bloodshed are an aberration is alien to these students who oftentimes seem far less interested in changing the state of affairs. The challenge for peace educators is to counter this tendency of apathy, pessimism and fading sensibilities in the globalizing generation. Peace Studies and education are also about a pedagogy where the young realize that the discipline is not only about unrealizable idealism, but about the ideas which are pragmatic – inevitable and necessary – if one wishes to survive in the contemporary world.

A related concern is related to the syllabus and course structures in various institutions. In order to maintain its distinct ontology and epistemology, it is imperative for Peace Studies to have a distinct pedagogy as well. In light of these concerns, a pedagogic workshop on Peace and Conflict Resolution was organized at Kamala Nehru College in March 2017 for the teachers of the University of Delhi. The deliberations of the workshop were interesting and thought-provoking. Prof. Swaran Singh (Professor at Centre for International Politics, Organization, and Disarmament, Jawaharlal Nehru University) spoke about how the students could be taught with the help of everyday

examples from their lives and what they experienced around them (Singh, 2017, March). Prof. Sanjeev H.M. (Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi) spoke on how the pedagogy in Peace Studies is about an alternative process of learning, “The students come to the class after being socialized in different circumstances and they carry various biases and cultural perceptions. The aim of the course should be to help students come out of the received wisdom and their biases and prejudices. The teaching should be a three-fold process including e-learning, learning, and re-learning. This means that students must first be taught to de-learn their received biases and behavior. Then they could be imparted with the new learning and offered alternative ways to thinking and finally, they should be able to put that learning into practice.” He added how “historical narratives of peace, storytelling and field study” could be the key components of the practical aspect of the discipline (Kumar H.M. 2017, March). Scholars also discussed the usefulness of alternative and critical insights in pedagogy, like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which talks about how education can be a practice of freedom instead of a practice of domination, thus emphasizing the participation of oppressed themselves in the creation of the pedagogy for transformation required for achieving freedom from oppression. In the words of Richard Shaull (2005, p.34), Freire had averred, “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”. Teachers thus have to come up to the task of transforming Peace Studies into this practice of freedom.

Peace Studies curriculums are hence qualitatively different from other theory-based courses, as they are emphatically not only about the theory but also the practice of peace, wherein both constantly develop in a dialectical relationship. Students are encouraged to grasp simple concepts through games and exercises designed for the purpose. A very important component of peace education is to take students out of the formal classrooms into fields, to break the mechanical process of teaching-learning which overshadows attempts to bring in alternative concepts and issues. An example is regular fieldwork undertaken by the students of the Masters' Programme at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia. Another example of such an approach is the field visits undertaken by the students of the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research at Banaras Hindu University. Students go to the *ghats* (bathing places at the

bank of rivers) of Banaras near Ganga river to interact with the people, to study how their lives are intertwined with the river, how religion and life are interwoven on these banks, and understand the elements of inter-community harmony in everyday life, as well as the factors which destroy the fabric at times (for further insights on this read Upadhaya 2011).

Similarly, there is a growing literature on how extra-curricular activities are a part of understanding Peace Studies. In practice, cultural interactions like music, theatre and poetry events are considered a part of the multi-track diplomacy, which often runs parallel to the diplomacy between states. This people to people contact and cultural exchange helps in diffusing tensions between states, making people across the borders understand each other better, thereby developing bonds of friendship and appreciation. For learning this approach, students could be encouraged to organize events featuring songs, music, poetry and book discussions relating to peace and resistance to war. There is a plethora of literature, poetry, and songs which were composed under the shadow of wars like the First World War and the Vietnam war. These can powerfully convey to the audience the tragedy of wars and the beauty and necessity of peace. One such poem by Siegfried Sassoon (cited in Hobsbawm, 1994, p.21) conveys the trauma and terror of the wars very graphically:

Lines of grey muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!

Even screening of films and audio-visual content like short videos, interviews, and documentaries have a powerful potential to educate students in peace. An example of such activities is a moment in Kamala Nehru College, when Palestinian journalist and writer Laila El-Haddad and Palestinian-Egyptian poet Tamim al-Barghouti shared their stories with the students, along with readings of sections of El-Haddad's work entitled *Gaza Mama: Politics and Parenting in Palestine* (2013), wherein she shared her two-year-old son's anguish at the closed border at Gaza. His innocent queries to his mother gently unravel the absurd political realities which have been created in the world of the grown-ups. The students enjoyed the interaction and learned about questioning received wisdom and binaries at the same time.

A close relationship between practice and theory has the potential to further enrich the

discipline. Along with field visits, workshops and exercises which have always been emphasized as an integral part of the discipline, another and extremely vital aspect of putting the theory into practice is by developing a community of scholars, students and peace activists for exchange of ideas and experiences about the realities that exist in different locations and environments. Such vibrant forums seem to be few in India and an attempt to form such communities could lead to a new life in the discipline by integrating lived experiences in peacebuilding into theory building about the issues which are in particular important for India. An examination of the syllabi in many of the Indian institutions calls for a restructuring of the syllabus according to the priorities of the global South. The syllabi have to integrate many of these local experiences at peacebuilding. The course on peace and conflict in India, in particular, has a vast scope for further development. Most syllabi already include a study of the particular problems faced by India like the communal and caste aspects of conflicts, studies on violent secessionist conflicts and the ways of their resolution as well as peace movements in India. But some syllabi, like the syllabus introduced for the undergraduate course on Peace and Conflict Resolution, under the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) scheme, still have to integrate these. While most of the syllabi in major institutions have included sections on Gandhi, more development in this direction with insights from other Indian thinkers like Jawaharlal Nehru and Jyotirao Phule, litterateurs like Tagore and Premchand, and social reformers like Narayan Guru and Vivekanand could further enrich the discipline. Another and equally important step towards restructuring Peace Studies at the global level could reflect in the inclusion of outstanding and useful contributions from the global South in the Peace Curriculums of the global North.

This section, with the help of some examples, underscores how better teaching and research requires continuous enrichment of the syllabus on lines of the current debates in the discipline. This includes steps to constantly upgrade the theoretical insights in the field and integrating new methodologies of research on the subject. Furthermore, this section emphasizes integrating the contributions from India in the discipline of Peace Studies, in India as well as at the global level.

CONCLUSION

Despite the spurt in research on peace and conflict resolution, Peace Studies still remain a relatively young discipline and need to be developed both as regards the theories as well as the methods. The interdisciplinary scope of the discipline makes it all the more important for different scholars from different streams and areas to come together for developing it further. Hard-headed realpolitik is still given more importance in the policy

circles than Peace Studies, and peacebuilding remains a relatively unimportant process for them, to be conducted as a sideshow, or at the best as a supplement to the diplomacy conducted around “high politics”. It remains a challenge before the scholars, peace activists, and epistemic communities to bring the discipline to the fore so that it contributes towards the development of a more just and peaceable world.

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