AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PETER SINGER)

SUMMARY
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Violence is the use of physical force to injure any being—human or non-human or property. Violence may cause physical pain to those who experience it directly, as well as emotional distress to those who either experience or witness it. Individuals, families, schools, workplaces, communities, society and the environment all are harmed by violence. Actually, violence thrives in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. We often talk about how a ‘culture of violence’ can take root. This is indeed true—as a South African who has lived through apartheid and is living through its aftermath. It is also true that patterns of violence are more pervasive and widespread in societies where the authorities endorse, the use of violence through their own actions. In many societies, violence is so dominant that it thwarts hopes of economic and social development. No community is untouched by violence. In the present thesis, we tried to take all the aspects of violence by explaining its types i.e. Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Emotional Violence, Psychological Violence, Spiritual Violence, Cultural Violence, Verbal Abuse, Financial Abuse and Neglect, with this we have also taken violence against animals, against embryo and fetus and against environment into consideration. With the explanation of these types, we also gave the causes of violence stating that there are two basic conditions that produce violent tendencies in human beings. One condition is that
The person has been hurt. The second basic condition is less well understood. The person has not been allowed to release the emotions resulting from the hurts. Added to these two basic conditions is the fact that violence is tolerated and glorified in the most industrialized countries, and is culturally linked to appropriate male behaviour. However, violence cannot be attributed to a single factor.

No doubt, there are some preventable measures of violence that can be helpful for stopping violence among children, adolescents, and adults and these are; Forming an attachment, Developing a conscience, Developing empathy, Getting attention, Building Self-esteem, Avoiding harsh punishment and learning calming techniques etc. The solution to the problem of violence is never to turn our backs, but to keep our hearts and minds open to how we can individually affect change. And that change starts with how we raise our children from the day they are born. However from all discussion we can say that, Violence is among the most serious health threats in the nation today, jeopardizing the health and safety of the public. The health consequences for those who are victimized or exposed to violence are severe and can include serious physical injuries, post traumatic stress syndrome, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other longer-term health problems. In addition, the social impacts of violence-diminished academic achievement and worker productivity, the deterioration of families and communities are substantial and costly.

Further we take the issues related to ‘Equality’ in chapter 2 ‘Notion of Equality’. The terms “equality,” “equal,” and
“equally” signify a qualitative relationship. ‘Equality’ (or ‘equal’) signifies correspondence between groups of different objects, persons, processes or circumstances that have the same qualities in at least one respect, but not all respects, i.e., regarding one specific feature, with differences in other features. ‘Equality’ needs to thus be distinguished from ‘identity’ — this concept signifying that one and the same object corresponds to itself in all its features: an object that can be referred to through various individual terms, proper names, or descriptions. For this reason, it helps to think of the idea of equality or for that matter inequality, understood as an issue of social justice, not as a single principle, but as a complex group of principles forming the basic core of today’s egalitarianism. We explained it with reference to Peter Singer’s views regarding Equality. Singer is of the view that in present century, like many other changes in attitudes of people of the whole world, there has been change in attitude regarding equality of human beings. Today, in principle all humans are equal. Singer argues that though, in principle we can say all are equal but when we try to apply this principle on particular cases, the consensus starts to weaken. Another issue that Singer raises is that, if we favor members of disadvantaged minorities even then it is kind of discrimination. Whether for or against the worst members of society. These arguments lead us to enquire into ethical foundations of the principles of equality. Singer questions – How all human beings are equal or in what sense all humans are equal. People differ in physical, mental, emotional basis. The plain fact is that humans differ, and the differences apply to so many characteristics that the search for
the factual basis on which to erect the principle of equality seems hopeless. The other objection which is more serious according to Peter Singer is that – it is not true that all humans are moral persons, even in the most minimal sense. Peter Singer says, the possession of ‘moral personality’ doesn’t provide a satisfactory basis for the principle that all humans are equal. Peter Singer is of the view that we should use the basic principle of equality: the principle of equal consideration of interests. The essence of this principle of equal consideration of interest is that we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions. No special status is given to anybody. All persons affected must be given equal weight. Singer emphasized that equality means to give equal considerations to all those affected without giving priority to any one person or a group of persons. There is no discrimination on the basis of race or nationality or color etc. Along with above views of Peter Singer then we tried to explain why killing is wrong? According to him, the killing of a species cannot depend on the membership of a species we belong to nor is the pain of killing different for the rest living beings as compares to human being. Every living being feels alike when it is killed, else it would be the same position as of racist who gives preference to its race only. As Singer has refuted the claim that there is a special value in the life of a member of our species.

Another important issue discussed is ‘Violence Against Animals’, in chapter-3. Peter Singer is one of the most important advocate of Animal liberation. Peter Singer’s some personal experiences led him to ponder on animal equality. He is of the
view that the basic principle of equality should be extended to all
animals and not restricted to humans only. Though he is a
utilitarian philosopher but his views are more radical in the sense
that he wants equal treatment for all animals as well and wants to
maximize happiness of all animals. Jeremy Bentham had said,
“The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But,
can they suffer? Influenced by these lines of Jeremy Bentham,
Peter Singer wrote an article on “Animal Liberation”. People
started becoming aware of animal suffering. The significance of
the new animal liberation movement is its challenge to this
assumption. Animal liberationists have dared to question the
right of our species to assume that human interests must
always prevail. They have sought – absurd as it must sound
at first - to extend such notions as equality and rights to
non human animals. Peter Singer begin with the more familiar
claim that all human beings are equal. When we say that
all human beings, whatever their race, creed or sex may be,
are equal, what is it that we are asserting? Those who wish
to defend a hierarchical, inegalitarian society have often
pointed out that by whatever test we choose, it simply is
not true that all humans are equal. Like it or not, we must
face the fact that humans come in different shapes and
sizes; they come with differing moral capacities, differing
intellectual abilities, differing amounts of benevolent feeling
and sensitivity to the needs of others, differing abilities to
communicate effectively, and different capacities to
experience pleasure and pain. In short, if the demand for
equality were based on the actual equality of all human
beings, we would have to stop demanding equality. It would be an unjustifiable demand. But if the case for animal equality is sound, what follows from it? It does not follow, of course, that animals ought to have all of the rights that we think humans ought to have - including, for instance, the right to vote. Peter singer observes that though comparison of sufferings of different species is difficult to make, and that for this reason when the interests of animals and human beings clash the principle of equality gives no guidance. He further says, even if we were to prevent the infliction of suffering on animals only when it is quite certain that the interests of human beings will not be affected, we would be forced to make radical changes in our treatment of animals that would involve our diet, the farming methods we use, experimental procedures in many fields of science, our approach to wildlife and to hunting, trapping and the wearing of furs, and areas of entertainment like circuses, rodeos, and zoos. Singer says that the aims of the movement can be summed up in one sentence: to end the present speciesist bias against taking seriously the interests of nonhuman animals.

In chapter-4, the problem discussed is ‘Violence against Embryo & Fetus’. Mostly violence against embryo and fetus is done when a women goes for abortion. The definition of an abortion is the premature exit of the products of conception (the fetus, fetal membranes, and placenta) from the uterus. It is the loss of a pregnancy and does not refer to why that pregnancy was lost. There are three main views: first, the extreme conservative
view (held by the Catholic Church); second, the extreme liberal view (held by Singer); and third, moderate view which lie between both extremes. But according to Peter Singer, the strength of the conservative position lies in the difficulty liberals have in pointing to a morally significant line of demarcation between an embryo and a newborn baby. Peter Singer argued that the life of a fetus is of no greater value than the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, etc., and that since no fetus is a person no fetus has the claim to life as a person. But opponents of abortion argued that because the fetus is a ‘person’, abortion violates its constitutional rights. They argued that because the right to life is more important of fundamental than the right of privacy, the government should protect the fetus’ right to life rather than its mother’s right of privacy. They maintained that because (human) life begins at conception, the state has compelling interest in protecting that life from and after conception. In this context Peter Singer takes into account only the actual characteristics of the fetus, and not its potential characteristics. Singer says, if we consider the actual characteristics of a fetus, there is no difference in animal fetus and human fetus. But the difference comes when we take into consideration the potentiality of the fetus. We have also discussed various examples in which abortion is not taken as wrong step. Peter Singer argues the chief problem with this as an argument against abortion – apart from the difficulty of establishing that rational and self conscious beings are of intrinsic value – is that it does not stand up as a reason for
objecting to all abortions, or even to abortions carried out merely because the pregnancy is inconveniently timed. The claim that rational and self-conscious beings are intrinsically valuable is not a reason for objecting to all abortions because not all abortions deprive the world of a rational and self-conscious being. But Singer is not willing to grant embryo either the status of a human being or a potential human being. By analyzing all the factors, arguments, objections and discussion, the researcher could say that both embryo and fetus are potential human being which possesses life and terminating pregnancy does amount to killing in some form of life. Every new life begins at conception. This is an irrefutable fact of biology. There are degrees of consciousness and life in every living being and it is true for animals and true for humans when considered alongside the law of biogenesis -- that every species reproduces after its own kind— we can draw only one conclusion in regard to abortion. No matter what the circumstances of conception, no matter how far along in the pregnancy, abortion always ends the life of at least a potential human being. Every honest abortion advocate concedes this simple fact.

Violence is done not only to human beings, animals, embryo & fetus but also with environment that we have discussed in Chapter-5 ‘Violence Against Environment’. We try to discuss all the issues and factors which make human beings to live in an environment without being concerned with the harm that is done to the environment in fulfilling our daily needs. The environment is our life support system. It includes everything that we rely on during our life time such as air, water, metals, soil, rocks and
other living organisms. It is important to remember that the state
our environment is influenced by our behaviour and that we have
the opportunity to either nurture or mistreat it. Thus, we can say
that the environment is a complex and is made up of different
factors, any substance or external force which influences the life.
Environment is the investigation of total relations of the animals,
plants, human life and nature. All the components of
environment interact with each other and this interaction which
is called Ecology. Ecology can be described as the study of the
interactions and interdependence of plants, animals and their
environment. Thus there is close relationship between
environment and ecology because changes in one environmental
factor concurrently affect the dynamic state of entire ecosystem
causing its violence. Environmental violence is a complex
phenomenon, and it is very important to understand because it
produces and reinforces certain harms. Its ethical relevance is
undeniable, given its relationship to morally reprehensible and
legally prosecutable actions. So environment protection is one of
the major issues that attract the attention of everyone in the
contemporary world. The very reason that attracts the attention of
the world towards environment is the awareness of the world
towards environment related issues as damages in the
environment results damages on the livelihood, health and well
being of human beings. Global warming, depletion of ozone
layer, Trans boundary movement of hazardous waste/chemicals,
and desertification are some of misuse, mismanagement, or
improper utilization of natural resources or the environment at
large. We have discussed our responsibility towards natural
world. Instead environmental ethics focuses on the moral foundation of environmental responsibility and how far this responsibility extends.

The overwhelming impact of such degradation of environment had led some people to reject the progress in science and technology and go back to simpler age. But this is a short-term solution. The best use of science and technology within the frame work of evolving environmental ethics is a long term solution. So Peter Singer says that the preservation of our environment is a value of the greatest possible importance even within a human centred moral frame work. But when we take a long term view even within a human-centred ethic the preservation of wilderness becomes very important. So, in order to cope with the environmental crises there is a need to develop environment ethic. Such an ethics would regard every action that is harmful to the environmental as ethically dubious and those that are unnecessarily harmful as plainly wrong. An environmental ethic would find virtue in saving and recycling resources, and vice in extravagance and unnecessary consumption. An environmental ethic rejects the ideals of a materialistic society in which success is gauged by the numbers of consumer goods one can accumulate. Instead it judges success in terms of the development of one’s abilities and the achievement of real fulfilment and satisfaction.

After discussing all issues, problems and kinds of violence, we can say that violence is not only killing/harming of one human being by another, which is most obvious form of violence but it is more subtle than this. To do any kind of negative action,
thought and speech is violence according to Indian philosophy. In this sense, violence starts with thinking in a negative and selfish way regarding any living or non-living being, because action and speech is the result of thinking. In this regard, it can be said that our mind is the main source of violence. Many great philosophers have emphasized on changing our thinking pattern to change ourselves and this in turn can change the whole world.

Violence is the result of selfish desires to preserve one self. Everybody is in search of security. This sense of gaining security has moved man to search means of security. Thus we can say that human mind which is the source of all these selfish and never ending desires is the root cause of violence. So in order to overcome violence we have to make a drastic change in our mind – in our thinking pattern. Our mind is always engaged in trying to fulfil one desire after another, and is never ending process. To be aware of our desires is one way to control our desires. For this we need to be very attentive of our actions – what we have done in the past and what we purpose to do in future must be attentively looked at in present. We must get rid of our conditioning by keen awareness – by observing what is happening, outwardly and inwardly – the conflicts, the wars, the misery, the confusion in oneself and outside oneself.

It is the mind that has created the social problems, and having created the problems, it tries to solve it without fundamentally changing itself. So our problem is the mind, the mind that wants to feel superior and thereby creates social inequality that pursues acquisition in various forms because it feels secure in property, in relationship, or in ideas, which is
knowledge. It is this incessant demand to be secured that creates inequality, which is the problem that can be never solved until we understand the mind that creates the difference. And to achieve equality one must follow the golden rule “Do unto others as you wish to be done by”.

Thus, here concept of love or non-violence becomes central. For many, practicing nonviolence goes deeper than abstaining from violent behaviour or words. It means overriding the impulse to hate and holding love for everyone, even those with whom one strongly disagrees. In this view, violence is learned and it is necessary to unlearn violence by practicing love and compassion at every possible opportunity. For some, the commitment to non-violence entails a belief in restorative or transformed justice, an abolition of the death penalty and other harsh punishments. This may involve the necessity of caring for those who are violent.

Nonviolence, for many involves a respect and reverence for all sentient and perhaps even non-sentient beings. This might include abolitionism against animals as property, the practice of not eating animal products or by products (vegetarianism or veganism), spiritual practices of non-harm to all beings, and caring for the rights of all beings. Mohandas Gandhi, James Bevel, Tom Regan and other nonviolent proponents advocated vegetarianism as part of their nonviolent philosophy. Buddhist extent this respect for life to animals and plants while Jainism extend this respect for life to animals, plants even for microorganisms.
In this way we can see that almost all Indian systems of philosophy advocate non-violence and respect for life in one way or another, but in the western philosophical tradition there have been not many philosophers who propagate philosophy of non-violence. The main proponents of non violence and vegetarianism in the west are Martin Luther King, Tom Regan, Arne Naess, Nelson Mendela, Peter Singer. Peter Singer’s contribution in this regard is seminal. He not only talks of equality among human beings but also among all living creatures. His whole philosophy is an effort towards creating equal and non-violent attitude towards other humans, animals and even plants etc. His approach is practical. He has shown by his different arguments that life in any form must be respected and must be given equal moral treatment in equal situations. Animal and plants also suffer when hurt or inflicted pain. His ideas took the shape of an animal liberation movement for the first time in English speaking world. Now many people are becoming aware of the pain that animal suffer in the name of scientific research. Many laws have been created to lessen the pain of animals. His ideas have also contributed towards creating awareness regarding environmental protection. Thus there is an urgent need to incorporate his ideas in our daily life to make this world happier and peaceful.