

Gandhian Satyagraha as an Act

Janez Krek

Department of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Abstract

Satyagraha is Gandhi's neologism made up of words *satya*, truth, and *agraha*, firmness, devotion, perseverance. *Satyagraha* literally means "insistence on truth" or "confidence in truth". This Truth establishes a political demand that must be enacted with nonviolence. If Gandhian nonviolence as a concept (*ahimsa*) were to be understood as a universal principle which renounces all forms of violence, it would be placed on the level of ideas that have nothing to do with Gandhi. Gandhian nonviolence is not "passive resistance," it is not a passivity that stems from the *inability* to use violence. Nor is it some kind of irrational belief in universal renunciation of violence. Not even a loving concern or cheerful affection for all living things.

The first step to Gandhian notion of nonviolence is his insight that in human beings and societies, the threat or actual use of "brute force" or physical annihilation are ultimately aimed at establishing a power which is no longer a physical force, but rather something that persists: the power of subjective *belief* in power. The power in the Symbolic, which precedes brute force, the power in which physical annihilation also culminates, at least for the survivors, is based in language *as discourse*, which is *a social bond* (Lacan). The power of Gandhian nonviolence ultimately stems from the established social bonds and also aims at a change in the Symbolic. This power is not based on the naively humanistic belief, that the opponent can be convinced of the Truth with arguments alone. As Gandhi writes before the beginning of one of the *satyagrahas*: "It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces." In order for *a discursive subject* to come into power, it requires the risk of taking action, an act whose axis is "measuring forces". It requires a passage to the act (Dolar) – the subject becomes a pure object, but within the Symbolic, not in the form of psychotic foreclosure (*Verwerfung*) – and therefore requires *satyagraha*: a "nonviolent" social or political struggle, a conflict with which Gandhi and his collaborators introduced a hitherto unknown concept of mass civil resistance to India in several campaigns between 1917–1922 and later. In *satyagraha*, nonviolence becomes the subject: *the empty space* of the subject is repeatedly occupied by the very same gesture of separation from violence. It is as if an individual has repeatedly decided that nonviolence was a means of asserting the Truth, that is, of a particular political goal s/he is pursuing – Gandhi's reason has evidently always been the striking social injustice.

The decision for nonviolence is therefore primarily an act: it is a form of action in which the subject makes itself an object of the non-dialectically set content of Truth, without the support of violence. The power of the subject of *ahimsa*, who follows his/her truth in the process of *satyagraha*, is in the "traces" of social injustices, in the reasons for action, and thus in the Symbolic; however, these can only be judged by an opponent who is in the place of the Other. *Nonviolence as a subject in satyagraha* excludes *subjective* violence, but not only does it not exclude, it is even based on *objective* violence of discourse (ideology) and *social* violence produced by the "smooth functioning" of social mechanisms (Žižek), and places political decision-making in discourse.

Keywords: nonviolence, act, subject, Other, Symbolic

Satyagraha is a neologism coined by Gandhi consisting of the words *satya*, truth, and *agraha*, firmness, devotion, perseverance. *Satyagraha* literally means “insistence on truth” or “confidence in truth”. This Truth establishes a political demand that must be enacted by nonviolence. If Gandhian nonviolence as a concept (*ahimsa*) were to be understood as a universal principle that renounces all forms of violence, it would be placed on the level of ideas that have nothing to do with Gandhi. Gandhian nonviolence is not “passive resistance”, it is not a passivity that stems from the *powerlessness* to employ violence. Nor is it some kind of irrational belief in the universal renunciation of violence. It is not even a loving concern of cheerful affection for all living beings.

The first step towards the Gandhian notion of nonviolence is his insight that in human beings and societies, the threat or actual use of “brute force” or physical annihilation are ultimately aimed at establishing a power that is no longer a physical force, but rather something that persists: the power of subjective *belief* in power. The power in the Symbolic, which *precedes* brute force, the power in which physical annihilation also culminates, at least for the survivors, is based in language *as discourse*, which is a *social bond* (Lacan). The power of Gandhian nonviolence ultimately stems from established social bonds and aims at a change in the Symbolic. Gandhian nonviolence requires a specific passage to the act: the subject becomes an object, but within the Symbolic, not in the form of psychotic foreclosure. It therefore requires *satyagraha*: a “nonviolent” social or political struggle, a conflict with which Gandhi and his collaborators introduced a hitherto unknown concept of mass civil resistance to India in several campaigns in the years 1917–1922 and later. In *satyagraha*, nonviolence becomes the subject: the empty space of the subject is repeatedly occupied by the very same gesture of separation from violence. It is as if the individual has repeatedly decided that nonviolence is a means of asserting the Truth, that is, of the particular political goal that s/he is pursuing. Of course, Gandhi’s reason was always blatant social injustice.

The decision for nonviolence is therefore primarily an act: it is the form of an action in which the subject makes itself the object of the non-dialectically established content of Truth, without the support of violence. The power of the subject of *ahimsa*, who follows his/her truth in the process of *satyagraha*, is in the “traces” of social injustices, in the reasons for action, and thus in the Symbolic; however, these can only be judged by an opponent who is in the place of the Other. *Nonviolence as a subject* in *satyagraha* excludes *subjective violence*, but does not exclude – and is in fact based on – the *objective violence* of discourse (ideology) and the *social violence* that is produced by the “smooth functioning” of social mechanisms (Žižek) and that places political decision-making in discourse.

The reason for the passage to *satyagraha* is the necessity of the act, and various statements by Gandhi and others make it clear that Gandhian nonviolence as discourse proceeds through *actions*. Understanding Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence requires above all an analysis and interpretation of his actions.

Gandhi's belief in discursive power (the "power of language", that is, speech and discourse) is attested to by the view expressed in *Hind Swaraj* that liberation from *subordination* to British colonial rule cannot be achieved by violence, but rather "by nonviolence" – that is, on the discursive level – because it is above all necessary to break the "fetters" of servility. These fetters should not be sought in British violence, but rather in Indians themselves.

In one of his many enigmatically simple metaphors, Gandhi says: "Nonviolence is a sleeping state." The power of Gandhi's "nonviolence" in *satyagraha* derives from the fact that, like it or not, the individual is the subject of "nonviolence", that is, of being chained to the "sleeping state" of a given symbolic framework of reality. Liberation will come through an insight into how the existing framework of reality – colonial subordination – is the result of the "voluntary consent" of Indians themselves. In the context of contemporary reality, we could say: if we want anything other than the inevitable ecological catastrophe to which the existing mechanisms of capital and the production of profit are leading, we must first free ourselves from belief, that is, from the "voluntary consent" of all of us to the inevitability of the dominance of these mechanisms.

The recognition of our own share in non-freedom, the recognition of "non-freedom" as something we produce ourselves, however it is manifested as a hopeless fact over which we have no influence, is a condition of freedom. The chain by which the subject is shackled to non-freedom, as if it were a state, is not violence, but rather the bond of *nonviolence*, that is, an attachment to one's own *symbolic*, discursive framework of "reality". From this perspective, Gandhian nonviolence is not some kind of "unrealistic", blind faith in the renunciation of subjective violence. It is a concept that is aware of the fact that in human civilisation, power is based on the field of discourse and resides in the relationships of power in the Symbolic, which is always already present, and thus is necessarily present prior to action.

Gandhi transformed his theories into actual policy and created his own place in the political space, with which he came to the head of the Indian National Congress. In so doing, he positioned himself on the border between two rival concepts of liberation policy: he connected "moderate" nationalists, a political current that advocated a "constitutional" path to independence, and "extremists", who advocated the violent seizing of power. In adopting this position, the policy of nonviolence was not a "temporary policy" to be replaced by a policy of violence when the time was right, nor was it a compromise achieved by "sacrificing" something from each of the rival policies: it does not preserve the principles of both "nonviolence" and "violence", nor is it a policy of maintaining a balance between the two.

Insofar as a trait of constitutionalism is a belief in nonviolence, and the limit (truth) of constitutionalism is therefore not to take action, Gandhi's criticism of constitutionalism would be that this subject nevertheless has "problems with nonviolence" and that this attachment to nonviolence is itself a step of *withdrawing from an act* "to nonviolence".

Constitutionalism is always without an act, so liberation can never be achieved because there cannot be any progress in dialectical movement. In relation to constitutionalism, the departure from nonviolence – that is, the negation of nonviolence – to the extreme violence of “extremists” is *a step towards an act*. Its limit (truth), however, lies in the fact that this violence is progress that remains within the same symbolic framework (a step towards “English power without the English”), caught in the counterposition of oppositions with those who resist it, and therefore is not an act: for an act that would lead to a movement of progress towards liberation it is necessary to “completely” change perspective and shift the very “framework of reality”. This is precisely the intended discursive effect of the central part of *Hind Swaraj*: the absolute dissociating of that point of the predominant discourse (as social bonds) in which Indians are not chained to power (English rule) “by violence” but “by nonviolence” (in that they themselves, even more directly than the English, believe in the welfare of the civilisation brought by English supremacy: in railways, lawyers, doctors, etc., in the promise of pleasure). It is in this way that they are the “most” unfree. “Learning to govern oneself” follows as a consequence, but there must first be some “step into madness”, an act that is discursive in nature from both sides, as discourse and as action.

Let us get back to the question of the way out of this attachment to nonviolence: the way out cannot be the abandonment of nonviolence, that is, the *negation* of nonviolence (in favour of extreme violence). The problem with the other extreme of violence is not that violence is too radical; on the contrary, the problem is that the break is not radical enough, as it seeks to get rid of the oppressors (to change power), but remains trapped in their symbolic framework, in precisely that which it seeks to erase from its own existence. Thus, the Gandhian discursive policy of nonviolence explicitly passed over to the level of the question of identity, as well. His turning away from both positions (“constitutionalism” and “violent extremism”) was the result of reflection on the fact that the Indians’ own identity was chained to the Other: “immobility”, drowning in the comfort of both of these policies, stems from the realisation that we must first ask how their own position is “mediated’ by the Other”.¹

A step on the way out of this “attachment to nonviolence”, which Gandhi advocates with his concept of freedom and which he pursued with the policy of nonviolence, follows the Hegelian logic of “negation of negation”: it is the *negation* of the extremist’s “*negation* of nonviolence”. It is not a step “to a higher unity” (of “violence and nonviolence”), but rather a step to the extreme of absolute nonviolence; thus, it is the logic of negation that takes a step forward *with the radicalisation* of the starting point, that is, “nonviolence”. The Gandhian “belief in nonviolence” is therefore an extremely sharpened point of form, of the “pure”, the non-dialectical with the particular content of the unconcealed subject.

1 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, 72.

The point of *Hind Swaraj* could also be interpreted as follows: if we want to get rid of the English, we must first “fundamentally transform the content” of our own “position”. The step of radicalisation towards absolute nonviolence produces a point of the subject that is formally completely unconcealed by the Other. This in itself is the abolition of the very belief (“in nonviolence”) as, strictly speaking, each particular point to which the subject is attached, that is, the Other. Both previous positions of the subject (“constitutionalism” and “extremism”) remain trapped in the prevailing discourse, but it is only necessary to realise that “The fall is already its own elimination” (Žižek), the recognition that the sought-after *swaraj* is already at work insofar as we already have the existing – “ancient” – Indian civilisation, that is, in the very reality that we want to liberate.

The discursive act of returning to the “ancient Indian civilisation” would be completely misunderstood if it were placed in the logic of loss of and return to “roots”. According to Gandhi, “ancient Indian civilisation” is not the goal, but rather a *means* of liberation for Indians. Here again, one can draw on the Hegelian logic of “negation of negation”, whose matrix is “simply the process of transition from state A to state B: the first, direct ‘negation’ of A negates position A, while remaining within its symbolic boundaries, so it must be followed by the next negation, which then negates precisely the symbolic space that is common to A and its direct negation.”² The starting point with which *Hind Swaraj* must engage is not “Indian civilisation”, but rather “Western civilisation”, or more precisely, the belief of Indians in “power and Western civilisation” and the realisation that the direct negation of this rule (the prospect of replacing “English rule”) remains within these symbolic boundaries. Gandhi’s concept of “modern civilisation” is a construct that in one fell swoop undermines both “power” and “Western” civilisation as two fundamental symbolic points of reference. “Ancient Indian civilisation” is the means in this same construct. As a “positively existing” symbolic reality, it is merely the first, direct negation towards the negation of negation, the concept of *swaraj* as the displacement of the symbolic space itself. Starting to speak in our own language in formal relations or sitting behind a spinning wheel instead of pursuing English goods, or accepting a family of the untouchables into our life (the latter obviously displacing Ancient Indian traditions), etc., are all the means to this end. In the process of *satyagraha* as *the displacement of the symbolic space itself*, the question is how to persuade an opponent who is in the place of the Other (as an interpreter, a judge). Gandhi was not subject to the naive European sixteenth-century humanistic belief that the adversary could be persuaded of his own Truth by arguments alone.

As Gandhi writes before the beginning of one of the *satyagrahas*: “It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces.” In order for a discursive subject to be able to establish itself in power, there needs

2 *Ibid.*

to be the risk of an act, an act whose axis is “the measuring of forces”. Therefore, there is no *satyagraha* without the manifestations that Gandhi knew how to evoke in an ever new way: the *miner’s march* in the South African *satyagraha*, the nationwide *hartal* (a mass strike that killed off all economic life as a sign of non-cooperation with the British government), and the *march to the sea* in the Salt Satyagraha.

The act is preceded by the power of the Symbolic. This field is therefore the primary field of freedom, in which the turn to freedom must be performed and located. Of course, all of these manifestations were only possible as a result of pre-existing injustices and social inequalities; on the other hand, they are above all a message addressed to the Other.

With regard to the Gandhian policy of *satyagraha*, Herbert Marcuse remarks that such a policy of nonviolence is ultimately perverted and functions as *violence*: “There [in India], passive resistance arose to such a large extent that the economic life of the country disintegrated, or was on the verge of disintegrating. [...] Such widespread passive resistance is no longer passive – it ceases to be nonviolence.”³ The conclusion that passive resistance “ceases to be nonviolence” can be understood as a criticism of the Gandhian policy of nonviolence, claiming that it ceases to be nonviolence despite Gandhi’s claim to the contrary. The problem with this implication is that Gandhian nonviolence is not passivity as a result, as a consequence, of a *powerlessness* to use violence. *Satyagraha*, a different concept of passivity, arose through a theoretical gesture, through the insight that the passivity of powerlessness is *not yet passive* because it cannot establish itself in the place of radical powerlessness. The Gandhian concept of nonviolence in *satyagraha* is therefore quite the opposite: *it arises from the radicalisation of passivity*, from passivity driven to an absolute, to absolute powerlessness, to the point of *desubjectification*, in which powerlessness *directly* turns into power. The *willingness* to “lose oneself” as an *object* is already power “in itself”.

The power of nonviolence *in an act* is based on the insight (which can be explained by Hegel’s theory of action) that an act is by definition a step, a passage in which the subject “makes him/herself a thing”.⁴ The action is defined by desubjectification, the subject passes into the act by losing him/herself as a subject (*cf. Ibid.*). In the Ahmedabad Satyagraha, for example, when Gandhi required that the workers vow to adhere to the established demands, he undoubtedly pursues the goal that *satyagraha* must be an act, from which, among other things, the *vow* emerges as a form of desubjectification. The act of the subject of nonviolence is thus the form of an act in which the subject becomes a “pure” object, without violence as a support; the support of the subject of *ahimsa*, who follows his/her own truth, is merely the “traces” that the reasons for the act leave in the Other.

3 Marcuse, “Represivna toleranca” (“Repressive Tolerance”), 108.

4 Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II (Self-Consciousness: Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit II)*, 122.

An act whose foundation is a particular truth for which we strive establishes the adversary in a *subject who is in the place of the Other*, that is, the one who interprets the act. What is left for him/her is either *recognition as a formal act* (he can only accept the “truth” of the subject of *ahimsa*) or some violent response. *Satyagrahi*, which as a subject demands the Truth, is left with its “truth” to be accepted and acknowledged, or (ultimately) is left with death.

Even from Gandhi’s own description of the first conflict with the authorities according to the principles of *satyagraha* (the “South African *satyagraha*”), in which he insisted on this principle against the policy of the South African government for about eight years (from 1906 to 1914) until his demands for non-discrimination were met, it can be shown that *for Gandhi*, the political struggle for the equal civil rights of immigrants from India was always conditioned by the framework of certain rules, within which he had – taken subjectively, that is, from his perspective – the initiative. The frameworks of *satyagraha* establish a *way* of making demands, exclusively “nonviolent” means of coercion, the necessity of *influencing* the public, the *introduction of sacrifice* (the necessity of a specific readiness for sacrifice and suffering) associated with the logic of “nonviolence”, and for Gandhi the specific “art” of creating dialectics of movement of the “truth”. Gandhian *satyagraha* is a “science” and, in a certain way, only a technique: it requires careful preparation, its subject always acts as if s/he had (or *could have*) taken into account certain “structural” elements (including the investment or integration of his/her own life into this structure) and their interdependence. The power of Gandhian *satyagraha* is “Gandhi” as a rational being and Gandhi with his reliance on “ethics”, that is, on the universality of the subject. Part of this power is a “Hegelian” ability to realise arbitrary circumstances as inevitable.

Perhaps the most salient moment of this structure can be approached with the renowned logic of the life-and-death struggle and the master-servant relationship, which Hegel defines in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the “independence and dependence of self-consciousness: lordship and bondage”.⁵ This is also the moment that is most clearly connected with the notion of freedom as the goal of *satyagraha*. In the description of the moment in the Ahmedabad Satyagraha when Gandhi opted for “fasting to death”, we can see that the response of the strikers was instantaneous, the decision provoked stormy reactions. For the workers, the decision came as a surprise, as if it were arbitrary. In Gandhi’s own interpretations of the decision, especially from a somewhat later time, he concludes that “on given occasions in the future I must not hesitate to repeat the humble conduct I have allowed myself to describe in this letter” (Gandhi). There can be no doubt that Gandhi himself viewed this decision within the framework of the logic of the “ethical” in his own sense, and hence this decision

5 Hegel, *Fenomenologija duha (Phenomenology of Spirit)*, 103–109.

(regardless of his own doubts, of the defilement of the decision, etc.) emerged as a *necessity*. When the point is reached in Gandhian *satyagraha* that all arguments are exhausted, it is no longer possible to withdraw before the fact (and for employers in the position of master this was obviously the key point) that what is at stake in truth “is not reality” (not the unreality of the demanded amount of correction to wages), but the independence or non-independence, the “truth”, of the *subject*. Then Gandhi, by deciding to “fast until death”, introduces the moment of the subject who *is* the subject, because in order to demonstrate certainty in him/herself (truth) he/she *must* either choose death *or* renounce truth (him/herself). In *satyagraha*, progress is the result of actions or decisions in these actions. These decisions show that Gandhi does not understand *form* (“ethics”) teleologically: without these decisions there is no progress, but each decision is a risk. Progress is the “only possible” movement, not because the truth always miraculously comes to light on its own, but because of the truth of an *impossible choice*. In this regard, impossible choices are described by Hegel when he explains the antagonism of the “struggle for life and death”, stating:

And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life. Rather it is thereby guaranteed that there is nothing present but what might be taken as a vanishing moment – that self-consciousness is merely pure self-existence, being-for-self. The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.⁶

In this respect, the necessity of moments of progress of movement as the only possible movement is not based on the content of demands, nor on the context (of the Other); the key to this necessity is the Gandhian notion of ethics as the form of the subject. The structure of subjectivity is “always already” present and “always” acts “as a whole”. At this point, “necessity” and “coincidence” can be linked to the split between the two “images of consciousness”, between the master and the servant, in which the struggle for life and death is resolved. Their split is irreducible: it makes the master willing to stake his life, and *for him* this position is a necessity; and it makes the servant choose life, at the cost of renouncing independence.

The moment of the “struggle for life and death” introduces a specific act, the willingness to sacrifice one’s own life, a genuinely Hegelian act in the sense that the act displaces the very symbolic framework of reality: here the displacement lies in the fact that it is the result of a particular relationship, that is, the symbolically established bond

6 Hegel, *Fenomenologija duha (Phenomenology of Spirit)*, 105.

between the “master and the servant”, which occurs in the *passage* of the act itself. Gandhi the moralist (insofar as his position was always also that of teaching and moralising) built the power of nonviolence as an act in *satyagraha* on the *formality of the structure* of human subjectivity, and on placing himself, so to speak, in the role of heterogeneous object *a*, insofar as this heterogeneous object is “the place where the *contingency of material history* can sneak up on the purity of form”⁷: the contingency of actions that make “material history” and whose common thread is that they shift the very symbolic framework of reality.

The Act in the South African *Satyagraha*

In 1913, after seven years, *satyagraha* reached its lowest point in South Africa in terms of the established political aims. After their initial enthusiasm in 1906, the Indian community had become divided by the government’s intransigence. Gandhi had retained only a handful of his most devoted supporters: as he himself writes, “a maximum of 65 or 66 and a minimum of 16”⁸, of which 16 were mostly his relatives and friends living in the settlement (“commune”) of Phoenix.⁹ Gandhi’s insistence on principled demands was opposed by the principle of pleasure.

Then the Supreme Court passed a decision making all marriages that were not entered into according to Christian religious customs illegal (invalid). For most Indians, who had married according to the customs of the Hindu, Muslim or Zoroastrian religions, this decision was a severe blow, with the implication of nullifying their symbolic relationships (“married women [...] were no longer considered wives and were degraded to the level of concubines, while their heirs were deprived of the right to inherit their parents’ property”¹⁰). This gave the resistance a new impetus.

Illiterate and uneducated miners embarked upon a politically motivated strike, the aim of which – the elimination of discrimination – had no direct bearing on the improvement of their material situation. However, despite the numbers and the emotional charge that prompted the workers to strike, this force was on the verge of crumbling to dust. Gandhi, who had initiated it all, set out for Newcastle, one of the major urban centres in South Africa’s northern coal mining district as soon as he learned of the strike. He found that the strikers were in no position to withstand a long strike, even feeding them had become a major problem. As he writes, it was essential to find

7 Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II (Self-Consciousness: Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit II)*, 47.

8 Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 274.

9 *Ibid.*, 278.

10 *Ibid.*

a way out of the situation, otherwise it would be better for the workers to “surrender” on their own and go back to work as soon as possible, rather than doing so after a period of “torturous waiting”.¹¹

At this point, we come to a typically Gandhian turn: “However, defeatist advice was not my way. I therefore suggested that the only possible solution for the workers was to leave the houses of their masters and set out on an actual journey as travellers.”¹² And further: “I suggested to the miners that they should approach the strike as if it would last for all time, and that they should leave the premises provided by their masters.”¹³ What Gandhi “suggested” to the miners is fundamentally a *shift in the symbolic*, a shift of their “entire perspective”, a shift of their entire “symbolic reality”, so to speak. This shift, which can be understood as a moment of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, is the result of an endless judgement: the “strike” is “forever”, it is nothing other than a final expression of powerlessness, “a thought that abolishes itself”, thus ensuring a step of *progress* – “the only possible movement” – in *satyagraha*.

The difficulty of a shift of perspective in the symbolic is, of course, not only symbolic, it is that for the subject in this symbolic, there is nonetheless a “fragment of the real” that is his/her support. The difficulty of the shift is conditioned precisely by the abandonment of this “fragment of the real”: in this case, by the sacrifice of work and property, of all of the possessions (except for the most essential clothes, personal belongings and blankets that the miners could take along) that the miners had to sell or abandon; in short, by renouncing “all material things”, by breaking their captivity in the existence of the existing. If the workers assume that “the strike is for all time”, they have *already* lost everything, and this severs the bond between the subject and his/her phantasmatic relationship to reality in one fell swoop. Gandhian nonviolence is not passive resistance, because it is active. Not, however, through activity such as the organisation of a march, but by the radicalisation of passivity into absolute passivity, into renunciation and sacrifice, by which, as Hegel says, the subject must demonstrate “that nothing is present in him that would not be a vanishing moment for him” in order to become a subject.

At the point of powerlessness, the power of the subject of Gandhian nonviolence lies in not withdrawing, but instead taking a risk with radical renunciation in sacrificing that “fragment of the real” whose sacrifice destroys the symbolic framework of the existing, and this act is an act of “liberation” that transforms powerlessness into power. The act of the *actual* renunciation of bonds, which are the *symbolic* reality of the subject and by which s/he is chained to slavery “in reality”, is a fundamental act for the Gandhian logic of nonviolence in *satyagraha*.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, 288.

The massive use of *hartal* (the temporary cessation of economic or other life, covering practically the entire society) is the least demanding “sacrifice”, the purpose of which is to break the bonds of the “existing”. In the range of possible actions, the *tour de force* of Gandhian nonviolence is action with the insight that the key object in the structure of the discursive subject is life. Thus, the acceptance of risking one’s own life – when life becomes the object of actions – also has the status of an intervention in discourse.

From the South African *satyagraha*, Gandhi was later able to create the “myth of *satyagraha*”, because the ensuing march, combined with other concomitant pressures, escalated the described break in power into coercion, pushing the government to the point of fulfilling the principled political aim of the *satyagraha* that had been established years earlier.

Gandhi’s decision to *end* the strike, to *abandon* the relationship *to the object*, and to march in the South African *satyagraha* highlights the fact that the power of the Gandhian policy of nonviolence is not simply based on trust in the Other. It could be said that it is based on the Hegelian insight that the subject – the relationship to objectivity – is not bound only to the Other, but ultimately to the relationship to the object. In other words:

It is not just that the relationship to objectivity always depends on an intersubjective framework, but, conversely, that this framework itself ultimately depends on that object moment, without which it would collapse. The processing of external and internal nature gives rise to a surplus, which is what holds subjects together at all. The relationship between subjects and the relationship to the Other translates into the relationship to the object.¹⁴

It is on this surplus – which is nothing, it *is* only the emptiness of the Real, the *interregnum* of the relationship to the object – that the “rational logic” of the Gandhian policy of nonviolence is based. It is in this *interregnum* that power becomes a *new* relationship to objectivity.

Bibliography

- Dolar, M. *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II (Self-Consciousness: Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit II)*. Ljubljana: Analecta, 1992.
- Gandhi, M. K. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Transl. Valji Govinji Desai. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1928.
- Gandhi, M. K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Transl. Mahadev Desai. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, [1927¹], 1987.
- Gandhi, M. K. *Selected Political Writings*. Ed. Dennis Dalton. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996.

14 Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II (Self-Consciousness: Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit II)*, 37.

Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Fenomenologija duha (Phenomenology of Spirit)*. Transl. Božidar Debenjak. Ljubljana: Analecta, 1998.

Marcuse, H. "Represivna toleranca" ("Repressive Tolerance"). In: *Časopis za kritiko znanosti (Journal for the Critique of Science)*, XXII (164–165) (1994), 97–118.

Žižek, S. *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 2000.

Janez Krek, PhD

Janez Krek, PhD, is Professor at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana. His fields of expertise cover philosophy of education and education policy studies (citizenship education, education reforms and organisation, quality assessment and assurance in education). He was Dean of the Faculty of Education for eight years (from 2008 to 2016) and before that Head of the Department for Fundamental Educational Studies for four years (from 2004 to 2008) at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. He edited a book *Gandhi and Satyagraha*, published in 2000 in the scientific journal *Problemi* by the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, Ljubljana.