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## **Metaphysics of *Satyagraha* Fraternizing the Philosophy of Divine Violence – A Žižek - Gandhi Dialogue**

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*Satyagraha* is not mere passive resistance. It meant intense activity – political activity by large masses of people – Gandhi, 1958, 523

The present excursus is in response to Johann Albrecht Meylahn`s essay, *Divine Violence as Auto-deconstruction: The Christ-event as an Act of Transversing the Neo-Liberal Fantasy*, published in this journal, (Volume Seven, Number Two, 2013). Meylahn`s enunciation of divine violence and his subsequent incorporation of Lacanian concept metaphors such as the ethical Act and the Derridean idea of *differance* to arrive at a better exposition of Žižek`s theorisation

of divine violence deserves full throated appreciation but I would argue that Meylahn`s exposition, while brilliantly draws a parallel between Žižek`s hypothesis of divine violence with Derrida`s radicalization of auto-deconstruction or the notion of the *a venir*, situates the entire discussion centering around the idea of divine violence as advocated by both Walter Benjamin and Slavoj Žižek largely in the Euro-centric domain and fails to engage with alternative views in this field. The present rejoinder attempts to provincialise this important debate on the nature and culture of revolutionary violence and I propose to do that by aligning Žižek`s idea of divine violence with Gandhian philosophy of passive resistance or *satyagraha*.

In what follows, I would first conscript what Maylahn had to say about Žižek`s take on revolutionary violence and its comparison with Lacanean hypothesis of Ethical Act and Derridean idea of *differance* and subsequently I would demonstrate how Žižek comes closer to Gandhi in his theorisation of non-violent violence or divine violence. This alignment of Žižek and Gandhi, I would contend, has manifold repercussions, namely a Gandhian reading of Žižek`s seminal political ideas can offer fresh possibilities of a postcolonial study of Žižek and it can also unfold new coordinates of radical or experimental politics both in the first world as well as in the Third world context.

Meylahn`s essay begins with three different categorizations of violence as unpacked by Walter Benjamin (1996) in his essay, *Critique of Violence*, namely, state-founding (law-founding) mythic violence, state-maintaining (law-maintaining) violence and lastly divine (law/state destroying) violence. In most of the cases it is found that revolutionary violence or divine violence although devoted to end the other two forms of violence, ultimately degenerates in to the same category of mythic violence. In other words, post revolution, revolutionary violence becomes mythic violence. Meylahn contends that the only way to move beyond this double bind of revolutionary violence degenerating into mythic or state-maintaining violence is according to Žižek, divine violence. Meylahn can also see in this concept of divine violence, the Lacanian notion of ethical Act ‘which is an Act where the subject chooses him/herself as s/he becomes a subject and is no longer just the object of the big Other`s desire’. Žižek argues to act in freedom and the suspension of the law and Benjamin`s divine violence, Žižek believes and Meylahn quotes, is the “direct subjectivization of (or, rather, the direct subjective reaction to) this objective violence” (Žižek 2008:481).

On the face of it, it appears that here is an open inducement of violence and one may even think as many critics have alleged that Žižek is pro-violence and he is openly justifying

revolutionary terror. But to say that would be to miss the philosophic nuances and auto-deconstructive interpretive horizons of Žižek's idea of divine violence. This argument can be solidified further by placing Žižek's concern for resistance/unplugging and Gandhi's experimentation with *satyagraha* or passive resistance against the mighty power of the British empire. Gandhi has been reduced to a cult figure of peace, and few remembers that he was primarily a practitioner of a unique system of political resistance, employing passive resistance or non-violent violence as an weapon of political fight and he succeeded in dislodging the British empire through this unique weapon. A close study of Gandhi's political philosophy and practice of *satyagraha* would show how we can drag both Gandhi and Žižek in the same theoretic commune. The subsequent section would focus on Gandhi's political ethos of *satyagraha*.

### ***Satyagraha*: Tolerance as an Ideological Category: Brute Force versus Soul Force**

Gandhi's seminal work, *Hind Swaraj* contains his fundamental philosophical standpoints of anti-colonial struggle and non-violent passive resistance. What Gandhi did in the Indian context is considered by all accounts as radical and revolutionary in its political ramifications. In the aftermath of his assassination, Gandhi has been turned into a myth and that mythologised and deified image of Gandhi as the messiah of peace has prevented the emergence of Gandhi the revolutionary and Gandhi the political thinker. In the Western eye (perhaps Žižek is no exception), Gandhi is more a curious cult figure than a radical emancipatory leader and Hollywood films such as *Nine Hours to Rama* has done more harm than good for the projection of Gandhi's revolutionary ideals and methods. A critical demythologization of the Gandhian discourse would make us realize that Gandhi's political concerns have many points of identifications with Žižek's committed outrage against capitalism and his aspiration for an egalitarian future. Gandhi's passionate effort to dislodge the values of industrialization or capitalist ideology and his anti-imperial agenda to liberate and empower the *daridranarayan* or the poorest of the poor in India have large areas of convergence with Žižek's anti-globalist *jihad*. Žižek's hostility to tolerance under the capitalist system is understandable but the Gandhian notion of tolerance is philosophically complex and revolutionary in content. Gandhi problematised the oppositions between violence and non-violence or brute force and soul force in his book *Hind Swaraj*,

The force of love is the same as the force of the soul or truth... the universe would disappear without the existence of that force... those that wield the sword shall perish by the sword. The fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love... Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force... by using violence ... I am using what may be termed body force. If I do not obey the law, and accept penalty for its breach, I use soul force. It involves sacrifice of self. Everybody admits that sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to sacrifice of others... passive resistance, that is soul force is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How then can it be considered only a weapon of the weak? Extremists are considered to be advocates of brute force... when they succeed in driving out the British, and they themselves become governors, they will want you and me to obey their laws... real home rule [*swara*] is possible only where passive resistance is the guiding force of the people. Any other rule is foreign rule. (2010, 72, 78)

Gandhi's passive resistance or theory of tolerance, therefore, was a different and revolutionary concept and he conceived of it to fashion a new political methodology which is ethico-political and emancipatory. Gandhi made his objectives clear when he said, "I am not ashamed to repeat before you that all these novel political methods are intended ... to revolutionize the political outlook ... to spiritualize our politics". (2002, P.955) When applied to political ideology, Gandhi's concept of *ahimsa* implied "intense political activity" by large masses of people. But as noted earlier it was not so much about resistance as about the modalities of resistance, about organizational principles, rules of conduct, strategies and tactics. *Ahimsa* was "the rule for concretising the truth of *Satyagraha*. *Ahimsa* indeed was the concept – both ethical and epistemological because it was defined within a moral and epistemic practice that was wholly experimental – which supplied Gandhism with a theory of politics, enabling it to become the ideology of a national political movement. It was the organizing principle for a science of politics – a science wholly different from all current conceptions of politics which had only succeeded in producing 'the science of violence', but a science nevertheless – the 'science of non-violence', the 'science of love'. It was the moral framework for solving every practical problem of the organized political movement.

The political employment of *ahimsa* was never imposed upon the followers of Gandhi as a creed. It was possible for it to be regarded as a valid political theory even without its religious or spiritual core. This in fact was the only way it could become a general guide for solving the practical problems of an organized political movement. For Gandhi,

*Ahimsa* with me is a creed, the breath of life. But it is never a creed that I placed before India or, for that matter, before anyone except in casual or informal talks. I placed it before the Congress as a political weapon, to be employed for the solution of practical problems. (1991, 220)

And thus “we come to an explicit recognition within the overall unity of the Gandhian ideology as it took shape in the course of the evolution of national movement of India, of a disjuncture between morality and politics, between private conscience and public responsibility, indeed between Noble Folly and *realpolitik*.” (2006, 102) It was a disjuncture which the experimental conception of *ahimsa* was meant to bridge and in pursuance of that Gandhi believed that “there are only two methods; one is that of fraud and force; the other is that of non-violence and truth.”(2006, 103) It did not matter for Gandhi even if the goal was beyond reach. The first responsibility of the political leader according to Gandhi was to strictly adhere to the principles of morality and what he wanted,

to impress on everyone is that I do not want India to reach her goal through questionable means. Whether that is possible or not is another question. It is sufficient for my present purpose if the person who thinks out the plan and leads the people is absolutely above board and has non-violence and truth in him.(1991, 41)

The science of non-violence was the form in which Gandhism addressed itself to the problematic of nationalism. That was the science which was to provide answers to the problems of national politics, of concretising the nation as an active historical subject rejecting the domination of a foreign power, of devising its political organization and the strategic and tactical principles of its struggle. In its specific historical effectivity, Gandhism provided for the first time in Indian politics an ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation. In order to do this it quite consciously sought to bridge even the most sanctified cultural barriers that divided the people in an immensely complex agrarian society.

Thus it was not simply a matter of bringing the peasantry into the national movement, but of consciously seeking the ideological means for bringing it in as a whole. Then what model of politics emerges from the Gandhian view? Gandhi takes pains to clarify that the commonsensical definition of politics understood solely as the quest for power, pursued through the structure of the state and through legislative and electoral processes was to be avoided. In contrast to many modern or western views, politics for Gandhi is not to be seen as an autonomous sphere of life guided by its own set of assumptions and principles. Rather Gandhi

wants to broaden the political realm to include most aspects of daily action that relate to the improvement of the society at large. Gandhi repeatedly makes the distinction between what he calls “power politics” and “real politics” which for him must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress. For Gandhi, politics was a spiritual quest and his emancipatory mechanisms cannot be divorced from ethico-spiritual categories. Žižek’s simultaneous divergence from and convergence with Gandhian ways of non-violent militancy or non action can be addressed in a more comprehensive way by examining his idea of divine violence as enunciated by Meylahn. In the subsequent section I would contend that both Žižek and Gandhi share the same matrix of thought in their theorization of divine violence and *satyagraha* or passive resistance.

### **Žižek’s *Gelassenheit* and Gandhi’s *Satyagraha***

A closer study of Meylahn’s essay would unveil areas of identifications between Žižek and Gandhi vis-à-vis the question of the political act. Meylahn rightly says, that ‘just wars and revolutions have often been fought in the name of the correct interpretation/actualization of justice, but such wars or revolutions only perpetuate the violence, but never get any closer to justice’. Meylahn reads Divine violence as something that ‘would not be on the “side” of a better interpretation or actualization of justice, but would be on the “side” of the immanent difference (excess) within justice itself. It would be on the “side” of the auto-deconstruction of justice itself.’ Here Melahn rightly brings in Derrida and it is this idea of auto-deconstruction of justice or the political act that fraternize Žižek to Gandhi because ‘if one identifies divine violence with auto-deconstruction then one enters the idea of *Gelassenheit*, nonviolence, or passivity’. Žižek argues, Meylahn reminds us, that “Divine violence is the very form in which nonviolence appears” (Žižek 2008:485). How to understand this *Gelassenheit*? Meylahn rightly says, ‘it is the nonactive violence, as it is not violence in the name of something, but the violence (excess) immanent in the very concept of, for example, justice. It is the non-active violence of deconstruction’.

The only way to truly unplug or the only way to move beyond transforming the divine violence into a new state-founding violence, is via an active-passive or non-violent violence of divine violence. What this means is, not active (violent) in the name of some higher good or goal, but neither passive as in non-activity, but *Gelassenheit*. This is a *Gelassenheit* of the auto-deconstruction of *différance*. Meylahn refers in this context to the hatred that Christ demanded from his disciples which is “not a kind of pseudo-dialectical opposite of love, but a direct

expression of what St. Paul, with an unsurpassable power in 1 Corinthians 13, deployed as *agape*, the key intermediary term between faith and hope: it is love itself that enjoins us to “unplug” ourselves from the organic community into which we were born...” (Žižek 2008:487).

This also echoes Lacan’s argument that the only truly ethical Act is love. “The domain of pure violence, the domain outside law or legal power, the domain of that violence which is neither law-founding nor law-sustaining, *is the domain of love*” (Žižek 2008:488). This notion of *agape* as the ethical act connects it with Gandhi’s idea of *Satyagraha* or love or truth oriented action of resistance in non-violent ways. Evidently therefore, there are curious similarities between Žižek’s espousal of the power of non-action as the best form of violence and Gandhi’s doctrine of passive resistance or *satyagraha* or Agamben’s theory of inoperativity (2010, 55). Žižek has exposed the real nature of global capitalism today and its bloody underbelly through his brilliant discussion of different categories of violence in his books like *Violence* (2008) and *In Defence of Lost Causes* (2008). His analysis and his exposition of the politics of overrating subjective violence to hide the Real violence of capitalist exploitation, and his outrage at our collective Thermidorianism and our democratic tolerance and complacent acceptance of capitalism as the ultimate teleological end and his valiant attempt to keep alive the emancipatory dream deserve our full throated appreciations but in fashioning the modalities of such emancipation, we need to fraternize Žižek with Gandhi to arrive at a better way of resistance.

### **Conclusion: SOS Violence, Systemic Violence & Non-violent Violence**

In the light of the above discussion an in-fusional approach of combining Žižek and Gandhi would yield larger political and theoretic dividends. In the introduction to his book, *Violence*, Žižek focuses on the fascinating lure of the directly visible subjective violence, a form of violence which is performed by a clearly identifiable agent. In today’s context, such forms of subjective violence are always highlighted as the only form of violence but Žižek would rightly remind us that the eruption or genesis of subjective or visible violence has to be ascribed to the larger presence of systemic violence which is invisible. It is the systemic violence of capitalism which generates a sense of illusory peace and normalcy by alluring us to conform to its exploitative structures as normative. Such an illusion induces us only to focus on media images of visible violence keeping us unconscious of the real source of violence which lies dormant as the dark matter of physics. Žižek would appeal to us to step back and have a real understanding

of violence, “And this is what we should do today when we find ourselves bombarded with mediatic images of violence. We need to learn, learn, and learn what causes this violence.”(2008, 8) We definitely need to learn, learn and learn the real root of violence and according to Žižek,

Opposing all forms of violence, from direct, physical violence (mass murder, terror) to ideological violence (racism, incitement, sexual discrimination), seems to be the main preoccupation of the tolerant liberal attitude that predominates today. An SOS call sustains such talk, drowning out all other approaches ... is there not something suspicious, indeed symptomatic, about this focus on subjective violence – that violence which is enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds? Doesn't it desperately try to distract our attention from the true locus of the trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence and thus actively participating in it? (2008, 10)

Now this true locus of the trouble is and should definitely be the main concern for us but instead of that as Žižek rightly says, because of the enticing and solipsistic speculative dance of capital our attentions are distracted from the in-built systemic discriminatory brutalities and we emphasize all the time the humanitarian SOS for the closure of all forms of subjective violence. The need of the hour is to address the complex interaction of different modes of violence: subjective and systemic and thereby resist the fascination for subjective violence, a violence enacted by social agents, fanatical crowds, evil individuals, etc rendering it the more visible of the two. For Žižek,

it is the self-propelling metaphysical dance of capital that runs the show that provides the key to real life developments and catastrophes. Therein lies the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism ... this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their evil intentions, but is purely objective, systemic, anonymous (2008, 13)

It is because of its anonymous and systemic nature that no one owns responsibility of the millions of deaths caused by this capitalist system. The hegemony of the capital and its perpetuation of the systemic violence, Žižek feels, have been possible further because of the political bankruptcy of the liberal Left or the postmodern Left. The anti-globalisation slogan, “another world is possible” launched in Porto Alegre could not be carried forward because of the blinkered vision of the neo-Left who has conceded the invincibility of Capital and its systemic discrimination. Alain Badiou the radical French philosopher to whom Žižek dedicated his book *Violence* has characterized this post-political globalised space as the atonal world which lacks



the intervention of a Master-Signifier to impose meaningful order onto the confused multiplicity of reality. So keeping in mind the structural disparities of global capitalism and its inherent violence, what should be our counter-mechanisms? Should we go for full-fledged political violence as a means? The subsequent section would critically engage with Žižek's explanation of violence as a valid form of dissent to express our anti-capitalist anger.

It appears that in contrast to the Gandhian commitment to non-violence, the Žižekian path is an overt advocacy of brute force as a political weapon. The Žižekian ideologue would strive for the rage capital to inspire revolutionary terror and Žižek alludes to Walter Benjamin's Critique of Violence in the penultimate chapter of his book, *Violence* and his validation of the Benjaminian notion of divine violence needs a thorough investigation to arrive at any conclusive evaluation of his theory of violence. Benjamin tried to define divine violence by contrasting it with mythic violence,

Just as in all spheres God opposes myth, mythic violence is confronted by the divine. And the latter constitutes its antithesis in all respects. If mythic violence is law-making, divine violence is law destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood. It is this domain of pure divine violence which is the domain of sovereignty. (2008, 197)

Žižek capitalizes on Benjamin's assertion that "revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man, is possible." (2008, 199) Mythic violence is a means to establish the rule of Law (the legal social order), while divine violence serves no means, not even that of punishing the culprits and thus re-establishing the equilibrium of justice. It is just the sign of the injustice of the world, of the world being ethically "out of joint." In Badiou's terms, "mythic violence belongs to the order of Being, while divine violence belongs to the order of Event" (2008, 200) and there are no "objective" criteria enabling us to identify an act of violence as divine; the same act that, to an external observer, is merely an outburst of violence can be divine for those engaged in it - there is no big Other guaranteeing its divine nature; the risk of reading and assuming it as divine is fully the subject's own.

Divine violence is precisely not a direct intervention of an omnipotent God to punish humankind for its excesses, the ultimate distinction between divine violence and the impotent/violent *passages a l'acte* of us, humans, is that, far from expressing divine omnipotence, divine violence is a sign of God's (the big Other's) own impotence. This materialist turn is fine but then, Žižek's earlier valorization of Paulian *agape* is to be kept in mind to interpret his idea of divine violence that clearly aligns with Gandhi's idea of *satyagraha* or

non-violent violence. Unlike Žižek, Gandhi would not segregate the means of revolution from its targeted ends, on the contrary, for Gandhi, the means decides the end and the distinction of the end. Gandhi and Žižek share identical outrage against the systemic form of violence, both of them ask for rallying against it for systemic change but while Žižek has only theorized, Gandhi had transcended theory to implement different political experimentations in practice and he succeeded in ousting the imperial powers by his experimental ways of non-violent resistance. In the current global conjuncture, with Arab Spring and Occupy movements providing enough cause for jubilation, a Žižekian analysis coupled with a Gandhian methodology of resistance would succeed in greater global mobilization of resisting forces. Systemic violence is the biggest violence, but resisting revolutionary violence would ultimately perpetuate mythic violence, so perhaps a Žižek Gandhi combined approach is the best way out.

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