



Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance (Cultural Critique Books)

Ajay Skaria

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Unconditional Equality examines Mahatma Gandhi's critique of liberal ideas of freedom and equality and his own practice of a freedom and equality organized around religion. It reconceives satyagraha (passive resistance) as a politics that strives for the absolute equality of all beings. Liberal traditions usually affirm an abstract equality centered on some form of autonomy, the Kantian term for the everyday sovereignty that rational beings exercise by granting themselves universal law. But for Gandhi, such equality is an "equality of sword"—profoundly violent not only because it excludes those presumed to lack reason (such as animals or the colonized) but also because those included lose the power to love (which requires the surrender of autonomy or, more broadly, sovereignty).

Gandhi professes instead a politics organized around dharma, or religion. For him, there can be "no politics without religion." This religion involves self-surrender, a freely offered surrender of autonomy and everyday sovereignty. For Gandhi, the "religion that stays in all religions" is satyagraha—the *agraha* (insistence) on or of *satya* (being or truth).

Ajay Skaria argues that, conceptually, satyagraha insists on equality without exception of all humans, animals, and things. This cannot be understood in terms of sovereignty: it must be an equality of the minor.

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