The Paradox of Gandhian Secularism: The metaphysical implication behind Gandhi’s ‘individualization of religion’*

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Abstract

This article will examine the relationship between Gandhi’s two major intellectual developments in his last years: his insistence on political secularism (‘individualization of religion’) and his controversial religious experiments with brahmacarya (sleeping naked with his 17-year-old grandniece, Manubahen). Contrary to the prevalent interpretations, I will argue that Gandhi’s political principle of secularism during the last years of his life entailed implicitly his radical religious belief, which he thought worth risking his life to present before the public. There was an intimate relationship between the concepts of brahmacarya, individuality (vyaktitva), and religion (dharm) that constituted his principle of secularism—these concepts were integrated by Gandhi in his distinct Hindu metaphysics of ātmā. Although Gandhi’s ideas on ātmā were initially influenced by Śrīmad Rājācandra’s Jainism, he later repudiated the latter’s views and revised them by incorporating some ideas from Western Orientalists, including Sir John Woodroffe’s tantric thought. Gandhi’s concept of ātmā was considered to inhere

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with the cosmological spiritual power of sakti, ultimately identified with God (Īśvar, Brahm): this concept of ātmā was one of the fundamental components of Gandhi’s eventual ideas of individuality and religion. Gandhi attempted to realize his ‘unique individuality’ (anokhum vaktitva’) in his last religious experiments with brahmacarya, which were conducted contemporaneously to his increasing political valorization of secularism. Gandhi’s secularism was virtually a political platform to universalize religion, paradoxical in that he meant to go beyond the impregnable hedge of privatization by making religion deeply individualized—that is to say, ātmā-centred.

Introduction

Gandhi is known for his idea of ‘religious politics’.1 In the preface of Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā (1925–29; hereafter, Autobiography), he illustrated this explicitly:

What I want to do, what I have been eagerly doing for the last 30 years, is self-realization (ātmadarśan), to see God face to face (Īśvarno sākyātkār), [and] the liberation of the self (moks). My every activity is practiced just from this perspective. My every writing is undertaken just from this perspective, and my jumping into the political sphere (rājyaprakāraṇī kṣetra) is also subject to this thing [perspective].2

Later, in the concluding chapter, ‘Pūrṇāhuti’,3 Gandhi remarked: ‘One who says religion (dharm) is not related to politics (rājyaprakāraṇ)


2 AK, pp. 6–7. All translations are mine, except for some quotes from Desai’s translation of AK (in my ‘Some unexplored aspects in the definition of religion in the Gujarati Autobiography’ section of this article). I translated Gujarati and Hindi texts as literally as possible in order to convey certain subtle nuances from the original texts. I avoided English paraphrasing when the same Gujarati and Hindi words were repeated. However, when I thought the translation would be unintelligible and adding some extra words or changing words was unavoidable, I wrote suggestions in square brackets. For kindly proof-reading my Gujarati and Hindi translations, I owe special thanks to Professor Emeritus Toshio Tanaka of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and Assistant Professor Ishan Bhavsar of the Institute of Technology, Nirma University.

3 Pūrṇāhuti is the concluding rite of burning oblation in yajña.
does not know religion." Anthony Parel pertinently argues in this
connection that Gandhi’s *Autobiography* represents ‘the dynamic
nature of the relationship of politics to *moksha*’. This dynamism in
Gandhi's philosophy is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of his
religio-political conception of *satyagraha* (literally meaning ‘holding
onto/insisting on the truth’).

In contrast to this established view, however, some recent works
highlight that, towards the end of his life, Gandhi began to put
forward his ideas on ‘secularism’, in which he reiterated that, while
religion was bound to be ‘individual’ or ‘personal’, the state should
be wholly ‘ secular’. Although Gandhi at no time in his life espoused
the top-down religious compulsion of theocracy, it was not until the 1940s
that he desperately called for the individualization of religion along
with the creation of the secular state. He became particularly vocal in
support of the dissemination of this principle during the period after
the partition.

There are two major interpretations of this secularism of Gandhi’s
last years. The first is the argument proposed by Bipan Chandra
and K. Sangari. According to these works, Gandhi came to realize
that a religion could no longer ‘be a binding force in a multireligious
society’, since the unrelenting communal violence during the 1940s
had ‘destroyed or transformed the “inside” of all religions’. This
em-

bryonic recognition ultimately led Gandhi to advocate the principle of
secularism, pushing ‘against’ his own earlier insistence on the fusion of

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4 *AK*, p. 529.
5 A. Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press,
6 See my footnotes 7 and 16. Gandhi himself did not use the word ‘secularism’, yet,
during the 1940s, the word ‘secular’ often appears in contexts where he insists on
the separation between the state and religion. Additionally, the word even appears in
Devanāgārī in Gandhi’s Hindi text (*SGV*, vol. 90, p. 121). Given these cases, I agree
that Gandhi’s idea can be legitimately called ‘secularism’, but I also emphasize that
it should be regarded as his own distinct variant.
7 B. Chandra, ‘Gandhiji, secularism and communalism’, *Social Scientist*, vol. 32, no.
1/2, 2004, pp. 3–29; K. Sangari, ‘A narrative of restoration: Gandhi’s last years and
Nehruvian secularism’, *Social Scientist*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, 2002, pp. 3–33, later reprinted
in *Towards a Secular and Modern India: Gandhi Reconsidered*, I. Habib, B. Chandra, K.
Sangari, and S. Muralidharan (eds), Sahmat, New Delhi, 2004. In this article, I use
the original articles rather than excerpts from the edited volume, since the originals
are more frequently cited by other scholars. I am grateful to Professor Akeel Bilgrami
of Columbia University for recommending that I read Chandra’s article.
8 Sangari, ‘Narrative of restoration’, p. 3; B. Chandra, *History of Modern India*, Orient
(the spirit of) religion and politics'.

To put it more concretely, during this period, Gandhi urgently developed a new linguistic formulation to refer to the principle of secularism, moving away from reference to a ‘fundamental religion’ underlying all religions and toward a ‘fundamental ethics’ common to all religions. This new linguistic formulation was able to emerge because Gandhi’s conception of religion was basically constructed upon an ‘ethics/morality’ that would eventually prioritize ‘reason’ as ‘the final arbiter’ with respect to both secular and religious matters. Chandra argues that Gandhi’s secularism in his last years represented a similar effort at secularization to that which occurred in nineteenth-century Europe. Gandhi’s idea of secularism is also interpreted by Sangari as ‘Nehruvian’, in the sense that it was derived ‘partly from Protestantism and a bourgeois notion of individual freedom’, where it guaranteed ‘the right of individuals to freely profess and practice any values subject to public order and morality’.

Another interpretation is propounded by Ajay Skaria. In contrast to Chandra and Sangari’s arguments, Skaria argues that Gandhi’s

9 Sangari, ‘Narrative of restoration’, p. 17, emphasis added, material in parentheses in the original.

10 Chandra, ‘Gandhiji’, pp. 10–12, emphases added. These works point out that Gandhi’s concept of religion generally has two separable meanings: the first is ‘denominational’, ‘sectarian religion’ (ibid., p. 9), or ‘religious groupings’ (Sangari, ‘Narrative of restoration’, p. 4), while the second is religion as ‘the moral code which guides a person’s life and the social order’ (Chandra, ‘Gandhiji’, p. 9) or ‘the universal ethical core’ (Sangari, ‘Narrative of restoration’, p. 4). The second meaning of the concept was encapsulated by Gandhi in oft-used terms such as ‘religion inside all religions’ and ‘fundamental religion’. Chandra and Sangari’s arguments are critical insofar as, in Gandhi’s final years, he articulated his views on secularization in terms of not only the first meaning, but also the second meaning of religion, in contrast with his earlier stance on religious politics.


12 Ibid.

13 What it is generally called ‘Nehruvianism’ should, however, be carefully distinguished from the ideas of Nehru himself. Like Gandhi, Nehru changed his ideas on the concepts of modernization and religion across different stages of his life, and his ideas are much more complicated than is usually regarded. It is inadequate to see Nehru and Gandhi as simple binary opposites—the ‘modern Nehru’ and the ‘traditional Gandhi’. See R. Guha, ‘Mahatma Gandhi and the environmental movement in India’, Capitalism Nature Socialism, vol. 6, no. 3, 1995, pp. 47–61; B. Parekh, ‘Nehru’s conception of politics’, Indian Journal of Social Science, vol. 2, no. 4, 1980, pp. 453–69.

14 Sangari, ‘Narrative of restoration’, p. 5.

15 Ibid., p. 26, emphasis added.

secularism in his last years was substantially ‘consistent’ with his previous ideas on religious politics.\textsuperscript{17} Skaria, primarily examining Gandhi’s \textit{Hind Svarāj} (1909), asserts that the latter’s concept of religion was not premised upon any otherworldly, transcendent God or on any Enlightenment reason,\textsuperscript{18} but instead that it was originally inspired by Jain ascetic Śrīmad Rājendra’s (also known as Rāycandbhāī Rājībhāī Mahetā, 1867–1901) ideas on \textit{dayādharma} (religion of compassion), which were intimately concerned with secular ‘everyday transactions’.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, the word \textit{duniyā} used in \textit{Hind Svarāj} was not equivalent to the ‘secular’ of classical Western secularism, in particular in that it was by no means separable from religious matters.\textsuperscript{20} Skaria concludes that Gandhi’s political commitment to secularism during the last years of his life should be understood in terms of his ‘distinctive secularism that was internal to the concept of religion’.\textsuperscript{21}

In this article, I will propose a different interpretation from either of the above. In order to do so, I will stress the necessity of attention to the following two points. First, looking carefully into Gandhi’s deliberative expressions of secularism in his last years, we find that what he reiterated to be secular was unexceptionally the ‘state/politics’ (‘\textit{rājkāran}, \textit{rājyaprakāran}’); never did he propound, despite the assertion by Chandra, the \textit{secularization} of religion. Instead, Gandhi repeatedly advocated, with his all strength, for a distinct means (\textit{sādhan}) of \textit{individualization/personalization} of religion (the words ‘individual(ity)’ and ‘personal(ity)’ were used interchangeably by Gandhi as the equivalents to the Gujarati word \textit{vyakti(tva)}). In this article, I will explore the meaning of Gandhi’s secularism by highlighting this idea of religious individualization. Second, when we give full regard to this, Gandhi’s secularism does not need to be construed as either constituting a ‘change’ from or merely ‘consistency’ with his prior ideas on religious politics, but rather as \textit{the most radical deepening}—in Gandhi’s term, ‘broadening’ (‘\textit{vadhvum}’)—of them. This wholly broadened conception of religious politics at the last phase of Gandhi’s life entails some of the crucial insights that may affect our fundamental understanding of his intellectual evolution.

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\textsuperscript{17} Skaria, ‘No politics without religion’, pp. 175, 203.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 189–92.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 177–80.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 191–2.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 177, 187, 202, 205–6.
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In order to illuminate this position, it is essential also to examine Gandhi’s controversial experiments undertaken with his 17- to 18-year-old grandniece, Manubahen Gandhi\(^{22}\) (hereafter Manu), namely the experiments with brahmacarya or the yajña (the ritual act of self-sacrifice), where Gandhi and Manu slept naked in one bed. In the initial phase of the experiments, which were carried out during his stay with Manu in Noakhali from December 1946 to March 1947, he conducted certain psycho-spiritual experiments with his sexual desire (\(\text{vikār}\)). Gandhi firmly believed that, in order to bring about a true reconciliation of the communal conflict, both Gandhi and Manu had to attain a perfect purity in their ātmā. As has been often pointed out, in Gandhi’s religious politics, private concerns were inseparable from public concerns.\(^{23}\) Indeed, Gandhi officially reported on these personal religious experiments with brahmacarya in a series of five articles in his weekly publication Harijanbandu, just before the partition.\(^{24}\) Therefore, Gandhi advocated his private religious views on sexuality ‘in the midst of intensely political articles’\(^{25}\) as he repeatedly began to assert the urgent need for political secularism. The obscured logic of Gandhi’s ‘science of mind’ (‘\(\text{mannum} \text{ vijñān}\)’), the integration of his internal and external concerns, cannot be made intelligible through the interpretations provided by previous works.\(^{26}\)

\(^{22}\) Neither her birth nor death dates are known, but she was 17–18 years old during the experiments.


\(^{24}\) The articles are the following: ‘\(\text{Mem kem šaru karyum}\)’ (‘How did I start?’) in the Harijanbandhu of 8 June 1947; ‘Brahmacarya vāḍ’ (‘The fence of brahmacarya’) in the Harijanbandhu of 15 June 1947; ‘Iśvar kyān ne kon?’ (‘Where and who is God?’) in the Harijanbandhu of 22 June 1947; ‘Nāmsādhanānām cihn’ (‘The sign of name exercise’) in the Harijanbandhu of 29 June 1947; and ‘Ek mūñjhvan’ (‘A confusion’) in the Harijanbandhu of 6 July 1947.

\(^{25}\) N. K. Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1974, p. 163. ‘The readers’ of the articles, as Bose notes, ‘did not know why such a series suddenly appeared’ during the most urgent and intense period in the political history of colonial India (ibid.).

\(^{26}\) On 16 March 1947, N. K. Bose wrote in a letter to Kishorilal Mashruwala that Gandhi’s experiments with brahmacarya in his last days entailed a ‘new way of thinking’. *N. K. Bose Papers*, Group 14, Correspondence, National Archives of India, New Delhi, No. 68.
A number of works on Gandhi’s last experiments with brahmacarya have already been published; there is, however, not yet any work exploring these experiments in relation to his public political statements on secularism. In this article, in order to elucidate the conceptual relationship between brahmacarya and Gandhi’s secularism, I will use not only writings by Gandhi himself in three languages—Gujarati, English, and Hindi—but also diaries written by Manu in Gujarati during the period from 1946 to 1948; these have scarcely been investigated in previous scholarship.

This article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will explore the central metaphysical framework of Gandhi’s concept of religion. This process is indispensable as a preliminary to our hermeneutic examination of Gandhi’s ideas on secularism (‘individualization of religion’). Specifically, I will cast a light on some unexplored aspects pertaining to Gandhi’s definition of religion as expressed in the Gujarati Autobiography. There is one crucial line,


28 GNDD (the diary between 4 November 1946 and 4 March 1947); Bihārī Komī Āgamāṃ, Navijāvan, Amdavād, 1956 (the diary between 7 March and 24 May 1947); Bihārī pachī Dilhī, Navijāvan, Amdavād, 1961 (the diary between 25 May and 30 July 1947); Kalkattāno Camatkār, Navijāvan, Amdavād, 1956 (the diary between 1 August and 8 September, 1947); Dilhimāṇ Gāndhimāji, vol. I, Navijāvan, Amdavād, 1964 (the diary between 9 September and 30 November 1947); Dilhimāṇ Gāndhimāji, vol. II, Navijāvan, Amdavād, 1966 (the diary between 1 December 1947 and 30 January 1948).

29 I use the word ‘metaphysics’ or ‘metaphysical’ not as a ‘supernatural’ concept that has no relation with physical matters; rather, I want to emphasize the etymological meaning of ‘after physics’ (the Greek prefix ‘meta’ primarily means ‘after’ both in a temporal and a spatial sense). J. N. Mohanty argues pertinently that Aristotle’s original connotation of the term should be construed as ‘the science of beings qua beings’ (J. N. Mohanty, ‘The concept of metaphysics’, in Essays on Indian Philosophy: Traditional and Modern, P. Bilimoria, (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p. 18). Metaphysics in this sense, I suppose, will fit the analysis on Gandhi’s religio-secular thought, implying a reality in demand of some sort of ‘belief’ in satya, regardless whether āstik or nāstik, after a plenitudinous process of reasoning.
only found in the Gujarati original text, elaborating on his distinct Hindu metaphysics of ātmā, which enables the interconnection of all philosophical terms related to his concept of religion. In the second section, while highlighting this distinct metaphysics of ātmā, I will first investigate to what extent Gandhi’s religious thought was initially influenced by Rājācandra’s Jain philosophy, and then show the decisive differences between the two, which would become apparent in Gandhi’s ‘unorthodox’ religious views on brahmacarya developed in his later years. Gandhi kept redefining the meaning of brahmacarya from the mid-1920s onwards, since the concept was constructed upon his metaphysics of ātmā whose essence was its ineffability. In the third section, I will take a look at Gandhi’s (proto-)Sāṅkhya interpretation of the concept of ‘individuality/manifestation’ (‘vyakti’) in relation to his ideas on ātmā and brahmacarya. Then, I will conduct an intensive reading of the diary written by Manu on the Noākhālī yajña, and unravel Gandhi’s fundamental purpose in the experiments—that is to say, the realization of a ‘unique individuality/personality’ (‘anokhum³⁰ vyaktitva’). In the final section of the article, I will elaborate on how this concept of individuality was implicitly articulated in Gandhi’s public political statements on secularism. Gandhi’s persistence on the issue of the individualization of religion was not the kind of limited secular humanist thought merely intended to guarantee negative liberty of individual religion—far from it: it entailed a much more positive connotation that Gandhi believed worth risking his life to present before the public. Gandhi’s secularism was virtually a political platform to universalize religion, paradoxical in that he meant to go beyond its impregnable hedge of privatization by making religion deeply individualized—that is to say, ātmā-centred.

Some unexplored aspects in the definition of religion in the Gujarati Autobiography

Before examining Gandhi’s idea of secularism (‘individualization of religion’), it is essential to bring out the core meaning of his concept of ‘religion’ (‘dharm’) that underlies it. Gandhi most famously defines

his concept of religion in the preface and the ‘Pūrṇāhuti’ section of the Autobiography. As mentioned in the introduction to the present article, previous works by Bipan Chandra and K. Sangari have furnished interpretations of Gandhi’s concept of religion along with his principle of secularism in terms of Western Enlightenment and bourgeois individual ethics. I will argue that these interpretations fail to grasp a crucial aspect of Gandhi’s religious metaphysics.

Although both Gujarati and English writings by Gandhi have their own hermeneutic relevance, when we particularly need to delve deep into the intimate religious metaphysics of his professed ‘Sanātana Hindū’ thought, more often than not, the English translation barely conveys the full intended meanings of the Gujarati original texts.31 In this respect, Bhikhu Parekh perceptively compares the original Gujarati text of the Autobiography with its English translation, and concludes that

a close reading of Gandhi’s Gujarati works suggests that although their more satisfactory translations will not radically change our view of him, they will discredit interpretations based on inaccurately translated isolated sentences, enable us to appreciate the subtlety and nuances of his thought, and lead to a better understanding of his intellectual evolution.32

Whether we should view Mahadev Desai’s translation as being ‘inaccurately translated’ or not is, as Gopalkrishna Gandhi contends, highly disputable.33 However, we cannot deny, at any rate, the

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31 C. N. Patel, for instance, points out that ‘[h]is English writings and speeches often reflect the stresses of the political conflict with the British Government, but in his Gujarati writings Gandhiji as it were speaks to the reader with a relaxed intimacy reflecting the inner serenity which was the essence of his karmayoga. No account of Gandhiji, therefore, can be whole and complete without a careful study of his Gujarati writings’ (C. N. Patel, Mahatma Gandhi in His Gujarati Writings, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1981, p. 1). Also see S. Khilnani, ‘Gandhi and Nehru: the use of English’, in An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English, A. K. Mehrotra (ed.), Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2003, p. 136. For Gandhi’s special concern for Gujarati language and literature in his regional-national reform programme, see R. Isaka, ‘M. K. Gandhi to Gujārātō no Gengo, Bungaku’, Asian and African Studies, vol. 8, no. 2, 2009, pp. 177–94.

32 B. Parekh, ‘Gandhi and his translators’, Gandhi Marg, vol. 87, no. 8/3, 1986, p. 172. Furthermore, Parekh excoriates the current available translations and concludes that ‘Gandhi’s works need to be translated anew’ (ibid.).

33 Contrary to Parekh’s argument, Gopalkrishna Gandhi writes that ‘[t]he text in Gujarati, and Desai’s English translation of it should be seen as twins’ and supports the relevance of Desai’s translation (T. Suhrud, An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth: A Table of Concordance, Routledge, New Delhi, 2010, p. ix). In Gopalkrishna Gandhi’s view, ‘[v]ariations in a translation are not “defects” and when, as in this particular work [the Autobiography], the stamp of the author’s approval is
possibility that the difference between the original and the translation will to some degree affect our basic interpretation of Gandhi’s religious thought.

Responding to Parekh’s argument, in this section, I will use Gandhi’s Gujarati Autobiography, namely Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā (literally meaning Experiments of Truth or a Story of Ātmā; hereafter, AK), comparing it with the English translation by Mahadev Desai, entitled An Autobiography: My Experiments with Truth (hereafter, AB).

To begin, I will look into the relationship between Gandhi’s concept of religion and buddhi; Desai translated the latter as ‘reason’ in AB. In the preface and the ‘Pūrṇāhuti’ section of AK, Gandhi illustrates the ultimate purpose (purusārthā) of his life; he outlines what religious efforts are required to achieve ‘seeing/sight/vision/worship/realization’ (‘darśan’), the ‘glimpse’ (‘jhāṅkhī’) of what he calls variously ‘independent/autonomous, eternal Truth’ (‘svatantr, cīrsthāyī satya’), ‘supreme God’ (‘parmeśvar’), ‘pure Truth’ (‘viṣuddh satya’), ‘supreme God as Truth’ (‘satyarūpī parmeśvar’), and ‘God of Truth’ (‘satyanārāyaṇ’). In other words, Gandhi elaborates on how the pursuit (sodh) of his Truth/God can be aided by ‘gross truth’ (‘sthūl satya’), ‘vocal truth’ (‘vācāvum satya’), and ‘imagined truth’ (‘kalpelum satya, kalpanik satya’); these are ‘voice(vācā)-like’ and ‘thought(vicār)-like’ truths. The one manifestation of these latter types of truth is buddhi:

But, step by step, I separate things that I see into two parts, what should be renounced (tyāgya) and what should be received (grāhya), and I make my conducts according to what I understand as grāhya. And, as far as the conducts made accordingly give satisfaction to me, so to say, my buddhi and ātmā, I must keep an immovable faith (acalit viśvās) in its good results.

We can clearly see here that Gandhi’s concept of buddhi is not an anti-religious or anti-metaphysical concept analogous to that of Enlightenment reason; rather, it is a capacity or quality with a particular religious role: to aid the search for Truth/God. Additionally, implicit, the variations have to be taken as “revisions” that re-phrase the original for one or more reason, being as much by the author as by the translator (ibid., p. x).
along with buddhi, Gandhi here refers to ātmā\textsuperscript{38} and, elsewhere, he often remarked that, where buddhi could not reach, the ‘faith’ (śraddhā) in ātmā would be imperative.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the first step to ensure the authenticity of religious truths was to consult with one’s buddhi; but, after this preliminary requisite, in order to reach the deeper perception of religious understanding, reliance on ātmā would be indispensable.

The word ātmā appears 11 times in total in the preface and the ‘Pūrṇāḥuti’ section.\textsuperscript{40} No other religious concept is used more frequently to refer to the pursuit of Truth/God. This shows Gandhi’s significant concern with the concept. However, the word ātmā, representing one of the core concepts in Hindu philosophy, cannot easily be translated into any single English word. The word is often paraphrased in Desai’s translation, or translated into different words in different contexts, such as ‘self’, ‘soul’, and ‘heart’. Working with translated texts thus excessively complicates for scholars the task of examining the conceptual relationships between the uses of ātmā in the original texts and the effect of their nuances of meaning on the overall framework.

According to Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi himself unequivocally recognized a huge philosophical difference between the Western self and ātmā. Whereas ‘the self had nothing but history encompassing several life-spans and largely beyond recall’, Gandhi’s ātmā had ‘no history’ and was ‘a unique “psychological and spiritual constitution” consisting of distinctive dispositions, propensities, tendencies and temperament inherited at birth’.\textsuperscript{41} More importantly, while the former was theologically based upon the ‘ontological dualism’ between

\textsuperscript{38} In \textit{AB}, the related part was translated into the words ‘my reason and my heart’ (\textit{AB}, p. 6).

\textsuperscript{39} For example, in 1932, Gandhi stated: ‘Our own ātma or ātmā is far beyond buddhi. . . Buddhi is at one time helpful for obtaining knowledge (jñān), but the man who stops there will not be able to enjoy the prime benefit of the knowledge of ātmā (ātmajñān).’ N. D. Parikh, (ed.), \textit{Mahādēvbhāīnī Dāyērī}, vol. I, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1948, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{40} In counting these words, I included compounds such as mahāātmā, ātmadarśan, ātmānirikṣayā, antarātmā, ātmāsauddhi, and āsuddhātmā.

\textsuperscript{41} B. Parekh, \textit{Gandhi’s Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination}, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1989, p. 92, emphasis added. Gandhi was highly critical of the Western conception of ‘history’, as potentially unable to record onto-experiential aspects of human events. \textit{Satyāgraha} or the force of ātma (ātmabal) cannot be regarded as a historical object, but can only be observed from the perspective of \\textit{iithihās} (literally meaning ‘it so happened’ according to Gandhi’s explanation). See M. K. Gandhi, \textit{Hind Svarāj}, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1979, pp. 183–5.
an individual and transcendent ‘God’, the latter concept should be understood as the ‘whole of Brahman “flowing through” every living being; it was not separate or distinct from but one with the Brahman; and it was identical in all men’.43

I would also like to argue that this monist framework of Gandhi’s concept of ātmā was, notwithstanding its position distinguished from absolute theological dualism, thoroughly open to various bhakta expressions, such as Īśvar and Rām, in his prayer (prārthnā). The ātmā as Brahm or Truth/God was for Gandhi nothing other than ‘Being’ (‘Sat’). Gandhi often asserted that ātmā was fundamentally inarticulable, since it is not the ‘object of knowledge’ (jānvāṇī vastu’).44 Thus, Gandhi suggested, one could not attest that either kind of religious expression was superior or inferior to the other, since either ‘is decent from each perspective’.45 The ātmā (paramātmā) as Truth/God was something or someone whose ‘glimpse’ (jḥāṅkhṛ) was only capable of being perceived during the intermittent practice of darśan or realization, which was, as Dipesh Chakrabarty also suggests, ‘a moment that bypasses—and not just dissolves—the subject-object distinction’.46

Gandhi viewed his ātmā as the central concept in his Hindu religious metaphysics; in AK, Gandhi indeed explicitly defines the meaning of religion in relation to this concept. The translated text of the following original lines in AK is probably one of the best-known lines in Gandhi’s Autobiography:

In my experiments, spiritual (adhyātmik) means ethical/moral (naitik); religion (dharm) means ethics (nīti); ethics observed from the perspective of ātmā, it is religion (ātmāni drṣṭe pāḍelī nīṭi te dharm).48

Here, we should note that, although Gandhi defines religion as ‘ethics’ in the clause after the first semicolon, he specifies this more precisely

42 Parekh, ‘Gandhi and his translators’, p. 165.
43 Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy, p. 92.
44 In 1932, Gandhi stated that ‘ātmā or God (Īśvar) is not the object of knowledge (jānvāṇī vastu). He himself is the knower (jānāt)’ (Parīkh, Mahādevbhāvbini Đāyri, p. 137). Also see Harijanbandhu, 18 August 1946.
45 Ibid.
47 Gandhi used both ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ as English equivalents to the Gujarati word nīṭi. There seems to be no particular rule for differentiating the use of these two English words by Gandhi. To avoid a confusion, hereafter, I will consistently translate nīṭi as ‘ethics’.
48 AK, p. 7, underlining added.
in the third, underlined part, where he explains that religion is not unconditionally equivalent to ethics, but is identical only when ‘observed from the perspective of ātmā’. In these crucial lines, Gandhi succinctly defines the meaning of religion in terms of ātmā.

The corresponding part in AB has nonetheless been translated quite differently:

The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual, or rather moral; for the essence of religion is morality.\footnote{AB, p. 5, underlined segment in the original omitted here.}

As we can see in this translated part, the third segment in the original, where Gandhi rearticulates the meaning of religion in terms of ātmā, has entirely disappeared.\footnote{This point has not been discussed by either Bhikhu Parekh or Tridip Suhrud.} It is thus almost impossible, from reading AB alone, to anticipate Gandhi’s distinct Hindu metaphysics of ātmā, and the way it frames his core idea of religion—that the ‘spiritual’ is moral and that ‘the essence of religion’ is morality. Etymologically, the word adhyātma (spirituality) combines the prefix adhi- ‘concerning [something]’ and ātmā; thus, the etymological meaning of adhyātma is ‘concerning ātmā’. In Gandhi’s experiments with Truth/God, an ethical pursuit was adhyātmik because his ethics was justified only when ‘observed from the perspective of ātmā’. Gandhi firmly believed that this spiritualized concept of ethics alone deserved to be reckoned as ‘true religion’ (‘sāco dharm’). Thus, his ideas of religion, ethics, and spirituality were each inseparable from their intimate relationship with ātmā—intrinsically an ineffable concept beyond our intellect, as outlined above.

In previous works by Bipan Chandra and K. Sangari, Gandhi’s concept of religion has been construed in terms of Western Enlightenment and bourgeois individual ethics. These interpretations were presumably originated from their analysis, which relied solely on English materials.\footnote{Indeed, Gandhi often elaborated on the meaning of religion in relation to ‘reason’ and ‘morality’ in English texts. For instance: ‘I should clear the ground by stating that I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality’ (CWMG, vol. 18, p. 73); ‘There is no such thing as religion overriding morality’ (CWMG, vol. 21, p. 485). Chandra uses the former quotation to construct his argument (Chandra, ‘Gandhiji’, p. 13). However, as I have clarified in this section, both ideas of reason (buddhi) and ethics/morality (nīti) in Gandhi are essentially connected with his distinct metaphysics of ātmā.} However, as I have argued in this section, Gandhi’s concept of buddhi, translated as ‘reason’ by Desai, was basically a religious concept, a capacity required by the search for
Truth/God. Moreover, Gandhi’s concept of religion can be said to have been equivalent to ‘ethics’ only if the ethics is ‘observed from the perspective of ātmā’. In Gandhi’s view, there is nothing else but the concept of ātmā that ultimately leads one to the unification with Truth/God or Being.

**Jainism to Tantrism?**

*Śrīmad Rājendra’s Jainism*

We have seen in the previous section that religion was defined by Gandhi in *AK* as ‘ethics observed from the perspective of ātmā’. Given this, we may wonder how the idea of defining religion in terms of ātmā initially occurred to him. Although Gandhi was first asked to write *AK* before the period of his incarceration in Yarvadā Jail (1922–24), he could not launch this project until November 1925. During his years in jail, Gandhi wrote some chapters on Śrīmad Rājendra that were later published as the preface to the book entitled *Śrīmad Rājendra* (1926). In these chapters, Gandhi summarizes the life and philosophy of Rājendra, and explains the former’s concept of religion as follows:

[Rājendra defines it such that] Religion (dharma) is a quality of ātmā (ātmāno guṇa) and is present in visible (dṛṣṭa) or invisible (advṛṣṭa) form in [all] humankind. Through religion, we can know the duty of human life (manusya-jīvānāṃ kartraṇa). Through religion, we can know our true relation with others. It is apparent that all these things will continue until we know/identify ourselves (potaṇe ... olakhīe). Thus, religion is the means (sādhan) by which we know/identify ourselves. 52

As can be seen here, in the first sentence and the last two sentences in particular, Gandhi defines Rājendra’s concept of religion in a manner that is similar to the way in which he defines his own idea of religion in *AK*. Moreover, Rājendra’s view outlined in the second sentence shows that his religious thought also encourages the construction of ethical relationships with others.

Indeed, Gandhi first gained his confidence in the universal significance of ‘Hinduism’ as the search for ātmā by reading Rājendra’s writings during the years of his South African sojourn. In this period, Rājendra sent Gandhi a number of letters and

52 *GA*, vol. 32, p. 8.
various books on Indian philosophies, including Rājścandra’s own book, Mokṣamālā (1884).\(^{53}\) In these letters, Rājścandra emphasized the essential role of ātmā in his own Jain metaphysics. Gandhi’s first letter to Rājścandra enclosed 27 questions about the essence of religion; his first question was ‘What is ātmā?’ (‘Ātmā śum che?’). Rājścandra’s answer to this question was the longest of all his answers in the first letter, and Rājścandra’s view of the essence of ātmā or jīv was repeatedly articulated throughout his first letter as well as his subsequent letters.\(^{54}\) In later days, Gandhi explained several times that his interaction with Rājścandra, who devoted his life to the attainment of ātmadarśan, had been one of the largest religious influences on his life.\(^{55}\) Gandhi further enriched his understanding of ātmā by combining it with the concept of ‘soul’ or ‘conscience’, as elaborated on in the works by Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Edward Maitland in particular.

As I have mentioned in the introduction to this article, Ajay Skaria also points out that Gandhi’s religio-secular concept was likely to have been inspired by Rājścandra’s thought (dayādharm or vyavahār dharm). However, Skaria’s analysis in this connection primarily focuses on Gandhi’s ideas in Hind Svarāj (1909), and does not give any specific account on Gandhi’s thought in his later life.\(^{56}\) Instead, Skaria attempts to directly adapt the ideas in Hind Svarāj to interpret Gandhi’s later concept of secularism during the 1940s. Therefore, Skaria’s work is insufficient.

Gandhi’s concept of religion was constructed upon his distinct Hindu metaphysics of ātmā whose essence was its ineffability. In later life, Gandhi admitted that some aspects of his religious thought were


\(^{54}\) M. Kalārthī (ed.), Śrīmad Rājścandra ane Gāndhījī, Gujarāt Vidyāpīṭh, Amdāvād, 2000, pp. 93–126. Rājścandra uses various philosophical expressions containing ātmā, such as ātmajñān (ibid., p. 97, pp. 109–10), ātmadarśan (ibid., p. 97), ātmāsvapna (ibid., p. 97), ātmānā aśōvarya (ibid., p. 106), ātmavīcār (ibid., p. 114), ātmārūṣi (ibid., p. 115), ātmasvarūp (ibid., p. 125), and so on.


\(^{56}\) Even during Gandhi’s South African period, there were some crucial differences between Gandhi’s and Rājścandra’s thought. See my forthcoming article, ‘Brahmacarya as romance?’. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X16000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press
substantially irreconcilable with Rājendra’s Jainism; in particular, from the mid-1920s onwards, Gandhi broadened the meaning of his concept of ātmā, as he struggled to grasp the ‘true’ definition of brahmacarya.

The limitations of Rājendra’s Jainism

From the mid-1920s onward, Gandhi began to recognize the need to redefine his concept of brahmacarya. It is noteworthy that, during the period of this intellectual turning point, Gandhi also published the prefaces of AK and Śrīmad Rājendra as we have seen. In the Navjīvan of 12 April 1925, he remarks as follows: ‘It seems to me that the definition and the scope of brahmacarya are slowly slowly broadening (kṣane kṣane vadhto) and today I am not such a brahmācārī who can give a perfect definition.’

One year later, in an article entitled ‘On Brahmacarya’ in the Navjīvan of 4 April 1926, Gandhi defines brahmacarya as follows:

Brahmacarya means the way to know/identify ātmā (Brahm) (ātmane (Brahmne) olakhvāno mārg). Therefore, the abstinence of all sensory organs (indriyono nigrāh) primarily means to renounce (tyāg) indulging in sensory pleasure (visaybhog) from speech (vācā) and body (kāyā) for [both] woman or [and] man.

Then, in a private letter to Prabhudas Bhikhabhai written on 21 July 1926, Gandhi explains the value of brahmacarya as follows:

Its [brahmacarya’s] value (kimmat) lies in great efforts (māhāprayatn) to restrain (daman) the sensory organ (indriya), and restraining which results into directing the sensory organs towards ātmā, which is able to generate such a spiritual power (śakti) that can pervade the whole universe (ākhā brahmānd).

About eight months later, in the Young India of 24 March 1927, Gandhi defines brahmacarya as follows:

It is as easy as it appears to be difficult, for brahmacharya is a quality of the soul [ātmā]; and your souls are not dead but slumbering. They are only waiting to be aroused. It seems difficult to arouse them because we have become unbelievers.

60 CWMG, vol. 33, p. 145.
As the quotations above imply, Gandhi began to feel the need to redefine his concept of brahmacarya from the mid-1920s onwards. This was because Gandhi’s brahmacarya was in the end ‘a quality of soul’ (‘ātmā’), whose essence was indefinable. As Gandhi broadened his understanding of ātmā, he also had to keep redefining his concept of brahmacarya. From 1926 onwards, Gandhi acknowledged that his brahmacarya was not a mere restriction, but a more positive practice through which women and men could ‘know/identify ātmā (Brahm)’. Moreover, Gandhi indicated that, when this realization took place, by means of proper restraint of the sensory organs, ‘such a spiritual power (sakti) that can pervade the whole universe (ākhā brahmāṇḍ)’ would be generated. This spiritual power was elsewhere explained as ‘slumbering soul [ātmā]’. Thus, from the mid-1920s onwards, Gandhi began to define his brahmacarya in relation to the universal spiritual power (sakti) of ātmā (hereafter, I will call this ātma-sakti).61

In parallel with this broadening, Gandhi also developed a new perspective towards women. Contrary to Rājendra’s austere Jain concept of brahmacarya, Gandhi discovered positive aspects to bodily contact with women. In a letter dated 18 May 1947, Gandhi wrote to Amrit Kaur that ‘[m]y touch has been for our mutual uplift’.62 This new perspective towards women was primarily based upon his belief in mystical femininity; Gandhi believed that ‘woman is the incarnation of ahimsa’.63 Gandhi’s secretary Pyarelal Nayar also reports that Gandhi once remarked that ‘[o]nly by becoming a perfect Brahmachari can one truly serve the woman’.64 Gandhi harshly criticized the secluded kind of brahmacarya, which prohibits the cultivation of the natural relationship between men and women.65

On 8 June 1947, Gandhi finally declared in his official publication, Harijanbandhu, that his view of brahmacarya was fundamentally different from Rājendra’s. Entitled ‘The fence of brahmacarya (Brahmacaryanī
vāḍy), this was the second article of five in a series on brahmacarya published in 1947. In this article, Gandhi wrote that ‘ultimately, brahmacarya is a mental condition (mānsik sthiti),’ and specified the limitations of some conventional views on brahmacarya:

[These] fences (vāḍo) are believed to exist among us: [1] a brahmachārī should not stay among the population/settlement of women, animals, [and] impotents (napumṣako); [2] [a brahmachārī] should not preach to a single woman or a group of only women; [3] [a brahmachārī] should not sit on a mat with women; [4] [a brahmachārī] should not look at any part of women’s bodies; [7] [a brahmachārī] should not use oily substances like milk, curd, [and] ghee; [9] [a brahmachārī] should not take a bath and have [his body] coated [with oil]. I read all these in South Africa. . . .

[Not only a brahmachārī, but] I also think that the one who is striving to become a brahmachārī (prayatn´s śil brahmachārī) does not need the above-mentioned fences either. Brahmacarya is not a thing that can be observed forcefully against one’s mind. . . . [Brahmacarya] is to be the controlling of mind (manne vaś). One who escapes from the essential touch of woman (strīnā āvaśyak sparś) is not at all making efforts to become a brahmachārī.66

These restrictions are also described as ‘certain rules laid down in India’ in Harijan67 and Gandhi elsewhere criticized them as ‘the orthodox conception of the ninefold wall’.68 Gandhi represented these ‘fences’ or ‘forced restrictions’ as orthodox and widespread views about brahmacarya in India. However, Gandhi first came to be acquainted with these ideas through his reading of Moksamālā—the seminal work written by Rājandra. Although Gandhi was highly conscious of this work, saying as he did that ‘I read all these in South Africa’ in the above quoted lines, he cited Rājandra’s words anonymously. The original material can be found in lesson 69 of Moksamālā, entitled ‘Nine fences of brahmacarya (Brahmacaryanī nav vāḍ)’, in which Rājandra enumerates the fences as follows:

These nine fences are properly described here.

1. Vasti (‘Population’): A brahmacārī sādu should not stay in a place where a woman, an animal, or a neutral person (paḍaṅg) reside. [. . . ]

2. Kathā (‘Narrative’): A brahmacārī should not preach (dharmaṇa padeś) to a group of only women or a single woman. [. . . ]

66 ‘Brahmacarya vāḍ’ in the Harijanbandhu of 15 June 1947, numbers and emphasis added.
3. Āsan (‘Seat’): A brahmacārī should not sit with women on one seat. A brahmacārī should not sit where a woman has sat for a while. [. . . ]

4. Indriyanirākṣaṇ (‘Sensory-Introspection’): A brahmacārī sādhu should not see any part of women’s bodies. [. . . ]

5. Praṇīt (‘Composition’): Do not by and large take any sweet-tasting and oily substances like milk, curd, [and] ghee. The semen is increased (vīryaniḥ vyṛddhi) and madness (unmād) is generated by them, and sexual desire (kām) is aroused by them. [. . . ]

6. Vībhūṣaṇ (‘Decoration’): A brahmacārī should not take/have a bath, an oil-coating, a flower, and so on.69 [Numbers original; underlining added]

Gandhi directly reflects six of Rājcandra’s ‘nine fences’ presented here, in the same order as Rājcandra, skipping only the fifth, sixth, and eighth fences, where Rājcandra prohibits a brahmacārī from becoming involved in other couples’ sex life (fifth), indulging in the memory of past sexual pleasure in married life (sixth), and overeating (eighth).70 Therefore, it seems that Gandhi cited Rājcandra’s concept of brahmacārya, for some reason without crediting its author, and criticized it as an austere and secluded philosophy focused merely on external restrictions, especially the avoidance of women. For Gandhi, brahmacārya meant ‘the controlling of mind (manne vaś)’: he insisted that ‘pure brahmacārya (śuddh brahmacārya)’ was possible for a person whose sensory organs were completely oriented to ātmā, regardless of whether that person actively associated with women.71

The influences of ‘modern thought’

I have so far discussed the crucial differences between Rājcandra’s and Gandhi’s views on brahmacārya. Given these differences, we may wonder, under what influences did Gandhi come to broaden his ideas on brahmacārya in relation to his distinct metaphysics of ātmā?

Veena Howard’s recent work points out that Gandhi’s brahmacārya by no means involved seclusion, but is instead best seen as an ‘ascetic

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69 Rājcandra, Mokṣamālā, pp. 185–7.
70 Ibid.
71 For example, see ‘Brahmacarya vāḍ’ in the Harijanbandhu of 15 June 1947; ‘Īśvar kyāṁ ne koṇ?’ in the Harijanbandhu of 22 June 1947; and ‘Ek mūñjhvan’ in the Harijanbandhu of 6 July 1947.
activism’ integrating two opposed attempts, at ‘spiritual freedom (nivr.tti)’ and ‘worldly engagement (pravr.tti)’, respectively.\footnote{Howard, \textit{Gandhi’s Ascetic Activism}, pp. 1–2.} Howard expounds \textit{in extenso} on this original aspect of Gandhi’s brahmacarya in relation to its Hindu ‘traditional roots’.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 81–122.} Similarly, some other scholarly works on Gandhi’s brahmacarya also emphasize the traditional mythology of \'erotic\' interactions between Krśna and Gopis illustrated in Purāṇik texts such as Bhāgavatapurāṇa and Gīta Govinda.\footnote{Lal, ‘Nakedness, nonviolence, and Brahmacharya’, pp. 130–3; Parekh, \textit{Colonialism, Tradition and Reform}, pp. 202–6, 225–7; Howard, \textit{Gandhi’s Ascetic Activism}, p. 159.} It is true that Gandhi was to some degree acquainted with these stories, and intensively read some of the original Hindu scriptures. However, when considering Gandhi’s redefinitions of \\
\textit{brahmacharya} in terms of his indefinable concept of ātmā, I want to suggest that certain modern influences on Gandhi’s thought may also be crucial.

One example of such a statement by Gandhi can be found in a discussion with Swami Anand and Kedar Nath held between 14 and 16 March 1947. According to N. K. Bose, the discussion was ‘entirely private’\footnote{Bose, \textit{My Days with Gandhi}, p. 149.}; it was held in Bihar just 12 days after Gandhi and Manu left Noakhali, where the memorable initial phase of the \\
yajñā took place. The content of the discussion thus provides an important evidence to understand some of the foundational ideas behind the yajña. While criticizing ‘the orthodox conception of the ninefold wall of protection in regard to brahmacharya’ as ‘inadequate and defective’,\footnote{Pyarelal, ‘Brahmacharya’, p. 588.} Gandhi expressed his view as follows:

Even today, so far as the people in general are concerned, I am putting before them for practice what you call my old ideas. At the same time, for myself, as I have said, I have been \textit{deeply influenced} by modern thought. Even amongst us there is the Tantra school, which has influenced Western savants like Justice Sir John Woodroffe. I read his works in Yeravada prison. You have all been brought up in the orthodox tradition. According to my definition, you cannot be regarded as true Brahmacharis.\footnote{Ibid., p. 589. Also see \textit{CWMG}, vol. 87, p. 91, emphasis added.}

Sir John Woodroffe, whose name is quoted by Gandhi here, is acknowledged to be the founding father of modern tantric scholarship. Gandhi read his books, especially \textit{Shakti and Shākta}\footnote{I use the second edition of the work in this article. J. Woodroffe, \textit{Shakti and Shākta: Essays and Addresses on the Shākta Tantrashastra} [SS], Luzac, London, 1920.} (1918; hereafter
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SS) from 23 to 30 December 1923, during the incarceration period in Yarvadā Jail.⁷⁹ As I have discussed previously, Gandhi began to recognize the need for the redefinition of brahmacarya just one year after this incarceration period.

When considering the conceptual relationship between Gandhi’s brahmacarya and Woodroffe’s works, the following two aspects are in particular worth mentioning: (1) the realization of ātma in relation to the maternal, female, or androgynous principle of šakti; (2) the way of arousing (kundalinī) šakti or the concept of ūrdhvaretā.

For the above first point, it is notable that Woodroffe illustrates the ‘Mother-worship’, ‘Cult of the Mother’, or ‘Shakti cult’ within his unique (neo-)Vedāntic framework⁸⁰ of ‘ātmā’, ‘Paramātmā’, or ‘Jīvātmā’ in SS. In stark opposition to the prevalent colonial discourse on the superiority of the hyper-masculinity,⁸¹ šakti worship requires a female or androgynous principle of ‘Shakti’ or ‘Shiva-Shakti’ as the means for šaktas to reach their ultimate liberation of ‘Moksha’—that is to say, the union between ātmā and the ‘Reality’, the ‘Whole’, or the ‘Pūrṇa’. As discussed above, Gandhi’s ideas on brahmacarya became feminized from the mid-1920s onwards, and developed in connection to his concept of ātma-śakti. Although he did not use the term ardhanārisvar, he also began to make references to the attainment of the idealistic condition of ‘impotency’ (‘napumāsaktva’), in which the ‘distinction between man and woman’ is completely eradicated.⁸²

Second, there is the argument on ātma-śakti elaborated in the chapter on ‘Kundalini Yoga’ in SS.⁸³ In this chapter, Woodroffe gives detailed accounts for the ‘arousing of Kundalini Shakti’ by ‘Śādhanās’. Woodroffe’s other seminal work, Serpent Power (1919),⁸⁴ is specially devoted to this theme. The idea of ūrdhvaretā (the one whose semen (vīrya) goes upwards to be sublimated into šakti) was one of the key concepts for understanding Gandhi’s view of brahmacarya from the mid-1920s.⁸⁵ Unlike Rājendra’s negative view of ‘semen’ (‘vīrya’) (see the

⁷⁹ GA, vo. 23, p. 177.
⁸⁰ See my footnote 94.
⁸² See in particular GA, vol. 77, p. 22.
⁸⁵ See my footnote 86. In chapter six, ‘Practice (Yoga: Laya-Krama)’ (ibid., pp. 196–264), Woodroffe gives a detailed account of the meaning of ūrdhvaretā: ‘if the
underlined part of my last quotation from Rājendra’s work in the previous section), Gandhi insisted that semen or the sexual urge itself can, with significant effort and certain mental training, be transformed (expressed in Gujarati as vīryanum parivartan) into the celestial spiritual energy of ātma-śakti.86

Vīrya [semen] is controlled, and the force which under the influence of sexual desire develops into gross seed is made to flow upwards (Urdhvaretas), control is had over both Manas and Prāna. With Prānāyāma the semen (Shukra) dries up. The seminal force ascends and comes back as the nectar (Amrita) of Shiva-Shakti’ (ibid., p. 213). Woodroffe also prescribes the meaning of brahmacarya as the preservation of semen, on the basis of using materials such as Hathayogaprādīpikā and Yogatattva Upāniṣad. He points out that the latter text especially ‘shows the connection between semen, mind, and life’, and continues: ‘[i]n the early stages of Hathayoga Sādhana the heat goes upwards, the penis shrinks, and sexual powers are largely lost. Coition with emission of semen at this stage is likely to prove fatal. But a Siddha regains his sexual power and can exercise it’ (ibid., p. 204, note 2). Also see ibid., p. 221, pp. 225–6, p. 231, pp. 234–5, 239–40.

86 ‘Secret/intimate chapter (Guhya prakarana)’ in ‘General knowledge about health (Ārogya vise sāmānya jñān)’ (1913) is one of the most important resources for understanding the meaning of Gandhi’s concept of semen-retention (vīrya-saṅgrah). It is noteworthy that, while, in the 1913 version of the work, Gandhi used a masculine expression vīryavān for the condition of successful semen-retention (GA, vol. 12, p. 37), in the revised version of the article written in 1942 (‘The key to health (Ārogyanīcāvī’), the concept was replaced with the term ārdhvaretā (GA, vol. 77, p. 22). The latter concept appears in Gandhi’s writings from the mid-1920s onwards. Although I cannot discuss the matter extensively in this article, the metaphysical connotations behind semen retention are the key to deciphering Gandhi’s complicated ideas on sexuality. Gandhi used various terms both in Gujarati and English to articulate his view of sexuality, such as vīrya, ‘seminal fluid’, ‘vital energy’, ‘vitality’, kām, visay, vikār, and so on, and elsewhere insisted that the ‘sexual urge’ itself was ‘a fine and noble thing’ (Gandhi, Self-Restraint v. Self-Indulgence, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1947, p. 137; it should also be noted that Gandhi’s concept of ‘regeneration’, which is to say, the sublimation of one’s vital energy or semen into creative spiritual energy, as elaborated in the beginning part of Self-Restraint v. Self-Indulgence, was derived from William Lotus Hare’s 1926 article ‘Generation and regeneration’. In this article, Hare exposit on this theme partly in relation to the kundalini yoga. See the ‘Organ of the mind’ section in Hare’s article, compiled in The Open Court, vol. 40, no. 3, March 1926, p. 138), while repudiating its use for visaybhog or sexual indulgence. Gandhi believed that the transformation or regeneration of vīrya or vital energy into the subtle spiritual energy of ātma-śakti was far more important than its use for procreation. He recognized that such techniques of semen retention require long training (CWMG, vol. 31, p. 353), and acknowledged that certain related yogic practices easily fail and cause harmful outcomes (CWMG, vol. 26, p. 167; vol. 33, p. 336; SGV, vol. 65, p. 386). Although it is often pointed out that there is no distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ in Gandhi’s thought, this does not mean at all that he did not take into account the specific context to which his words were addressed. In his view, concrete requirements for brahmacarya should be variously prescribed depending on the spiritual maturity of each practitioner. See in particular ‘Brahmacarya vād’ in Harijanbandhu of 15 June 1947 and ‘Ek mūnjhvan’ in Harijanbandhu of 6 July 1947.
However, if Gandhi was ‘deeply influenced’ by Woodroffe’s thought as he reported in the private conversation, then the following question must arise. Even though Gandhi’s brahmacarya did not indicate either physical avoidance of women or political exclusion of them, how could his ideas that ultimately aimed to overcome embodied sexuality all together be reconciled with some elements in tantric thought (vāmācāra, particularly), which were widely viewed by Gandhi’s contemporaries as representing the most primitive, idolatrous, and immoral side of the Indian mind in terms of sexuality and political violence?

By carefully looking into the peculiarity of Woodroffe’s tantric thought, we may be able to acquire a clue to answer this question. As Hugh B. Urban argues convincingly, Woodroffe’s accounts of tantras were highly apologetic and moderate in tone, constructed as part of his conscious effort to dismantle the negative image of tantras among his contemporary colonialists. Besides, as Urban also points out, Woodroffe’s tantric scholarship was largely derived from his intensive study of Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, the work that Woodroffe called ‘woman’s śāstra’. The following three distinct characteristics in Mahānirvāṇa Tantra are especially resonant throughout Woodroffe’s works: (1) the feminine principle of śakti is seen as active, yet entirely ‘benevolent’ and compassionate; (2) the metaphysical framework of śakti worship is utterly complimentary to (neo-)Vedāntic theories;

87 Gandhi’s views on embodied sexuality requires further intensive examinations. See my footnotes 86 and 96.
89 As Urban and others argue convincingly that, since the scholarship on tantras by no means allows it to be defined ‘monothetically’ within a singular and unified category, we need to carefully examine the features and the context of the use of the word tantra in each text. Ibid., pp. 6, 271.
90 Ibid., pp. 135–47.
91 Ibid., pp. 142–3.
92 SS, p. 329.
93 ‘In comparison to most other Śākta texts, which depict the goddess as a horrifying, violent power, the image of Kāli in the Mahānirvāṇa is remarkably benevolent and “sanitized” . . . [S]he is “the ocean of nectar of compassion ... whose mercy is without limit”.’ Urban, Tantra, pp. 65, 146. Also see ‘Is Shakti force?’, in SS, pp. 436–9.
94 ‘Unlike most Bengali tantras’, S. C. Banerji argues, ‘the Mahānirvāṇa identifies the supreme reality not with the goddess Śakti or Kāli, nor with Śiva or any other personal deity; rather it is an unusually philosophical, abstract, Vedāntic view of the divine as the one impersonal, omnipresent Brahman, described “Upaniṣadic terms”.’ S. C. Banerji, Tantra in Bengal, Manohar, New Delhi, 1992, p. 106, cf. Urban, Tantra, p. 65. Also see ibid., pp. 135, 139–40, 142, and Woodroffe’s chapters of ‘Tantra Shāstra
and Veda’ (pp. 32–62), ‘Shakti and Shākta’ (pp. 63–103), ‘Māyā-Shakti’ (pp. 156–99), and ‘Shakti and Māyā’ (pp. 200–15) in SS.

The ‘M’s’ stand for the initial letters of the pāñcatattva (five substances) utilized for the tantric ritual in either symbolic or actual way: māmsa (meat), matsya (fish), madya (wine), mudrā ( parched grain), and maithuna (sexual intercourse).

Urban, Tantra, p. 142. Woodroffe, for instance, explains that ‘the names of panchatattva are used symbolically for operations of a purely mental and spiritual character’. Tantra of the Great Liberation: Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, translated by Arthur Avalon, Dover, New York, 1972, p. cxix. Also see ‘Panchatattva (the secret ritual)’, in SS, pp. 325–77. However, in this respect, the ideas behind Gandhi’s experiments with brahma-carya cannot be considered equal to Woodroffe’s mere symbolic interpretation of tantras. While there is no report of his having had sexual intercourse with women in his experiments, Gandhi did put his philosophy into actual practice—he began to sleep naked together with women in one bed, where they had certain physical interactions. Therefore, Gandhi’s ideas should be differentiated from the purely symbolic type of tantra. As Gandhi did mention during his mahāyajña, his experiments were solely ‘unique’ (see the quote of my footnote 135) and should be regarded as his own distinct variant; Woodroffe’s influence was not the only essential origin of Gandhi’s later concept of brahma-carya. In this respect, also see my footnotes 86 and 98, and my forthcoming article, ‘Brahmacarya as romance?’.

I wrote elsewhere that, although Gandhi himself often remarked that he had been ‘influenced’ by other thinkers, this ‘purported notion of “influence”’ is indubitably problematic since Gandhi, who never successfully identified a “religious guru” in his life, was a pillar of discreetness in sifting through the ideas of other thinkers so that he integrated them into his own’. See my forthcoming article, ‘Brahmacarya as romance?’.

In spite of my argument emphasizing the influence of the Western Orientalists, I certainly do not want to conclude with any cut-and-dried constructivist theory of ‘imagined Hinduism’. Although I cannot elaborate on this point in detail in the present article, some other modern thinkers, namely Vivekananda and Edward Carpenter, whose works also include some expositions of tantric thought, initially obtained their knowledge from what may be called ‘indigenous’ gurus—
During the early 1930s, Gandhi conducted a number of public fasts as part of his full-fledged campaign against untouchability. On one occasion, on 8 May 1933, Gandhi commenced a memorial fast in Poona which lasted for the exceptionally long period of 21 days.\(^9^9\) A notable aspect of this fast was Gandhi’s mystical experience, which went on behind the scenes. He later confessed that this fast was dictated under the ‘voice (āvāj) of ātmā’—a special ‘spiritual inspiration’ (‘prṛṇā’) that suddenly occurred around midnight of 30 April, while he was awake.\(^1^0^0\) He made it plain that the inspiration came in the form of a human voice: ‘The voice was exactly like some person (manusya) was saying something to us, and was certain.’\(^1^0^1\) During the fast, Gandhi never advocated for the abandonment of untouchability from a political perspective, but strived instead to achieve ‘purification of ātmā’ (‘ātmāśuddhi’) in order to spontaneously bring about a conversion in people’s minds.\(^1^0^2\)

After this incident, Gandhi’s belief in the intimate interconnection between external social conditions and the internal condition of his ātmā seems to have been rapidly solidified.\(^1^0^3\) A few months

Ramakrishna and Ramaswami, respectively; Gandhi did read their works (Rajayoga for the former and From Adam’s Peak to Elephanta for the latter) and, crucially, read the former’s work extensively (I elaborated on this issue in my forthcoming article, ‘Brahmacarya as romance?’). Woodroffe also seemed to acquire his theories under the guidance of a local guru—Śiva Candra Vidyārṇava Braṭṭācārya. In this respect, there is an intriguing argument provided by Project Associate Professor Kana Tomizawa of Tokyo University challenging the widespread constructivist theory of (affirmative) Orientalism. Tomizawa explores the origin of the use of the term ‘spirituality’ in English discussion of the nineteenth-century India, and contends that the modern use of the term did not emerge on the initiative of the West, but was disseminated especially by people associated with Ramakrishna. “Indo no Spirituality” to Orientalism: 19-seiki Indoshūhen no Yōrei no Kōsatsu’, Contemporary India, vol. 3, 2013, pp. 49–76.

\(^9^9\) The longest among his total of 17 fasts in India. He also conducted 21-day fasts in 1924 and 1943.

\(^1^0^0\) Gandhi described his experience as ‘exceptional’ (‘asādhāran’) (GA, vol. 55, p. 249) and referred to it repeatedly in his later years (GA, vol. 67, p. 75; vol. 68, p. 172).

\(^1^0^1\) GA, vol. 55, pp. 249–73–4.


\(^1^0^3\) Most famously, when a devastating earthquake took place in Bihar on 15 January 1934, Gandhi observed as follows: ‘For me there is vital connection between the Bihar
later, in July 1933, Gandhi changed his programme of ‘mass civil disobedience’ (‘sāmudrāyik savinaybhaṅg’) to ‘individual satyagraha’ (‘vyaktigat satyagraha’). Moreover, on 30 April 1935, Gandhi, who sought to live and work ‘in solitude’, established the Sevāgrām Āśram at Wardā; in contrast to the Satyagraha Āśram, meant to train national servants, the former was intended ‘to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization [ātmadarśan]’.

From the 1930s onwards, Gandhi’s conviction thus became firmer that outer political reform could only be achieved by inner transformation of his ātmā. Indeed, this politico-spiritual belief in ātmā was what lay behind Gandhi’s eventual ideas on secularism and his contemporaneous work for reconciliation in response to the communal riots after 1946; he believed that communal conflict could by no means be resolved unless he could successfully realize in himself a ‘unique individuality’ (‘anokhum vyaktitva’) that reflects his perfect ‘purification of ātmā’.

In this section, I will illuminate the philosophy behind Gandhi’s political individualization from the 1930s onwards, by exploring his concept of ‘individuality’ (‘vyakti, vyaktitva’) in relation to ātmā and brahmacarya. To do so, I will mainly examine the following two texts: Gandhi’s private notes for his Āśram inmate Surendranāth, and a Gujarati diary written by Manu during the Noakhāli yajña.

The notes for Surendranāth

Gandhi often corresponded with Surendranāth on various religious issues, such as āsan exercise, moks, dharm, and adharm, and so on. From 1932 onwards, they also began to discuss issues pertaining to brahmacarya and ātmā. On 1 July 1947, Gandhi wrote a letter calamity and the untouchability campaign. . . . Whilst the Bihar calamity damages the body, the calamity brought about by untouchability corrodes the very soul. Let this Bihar calamity be a reminder to us that, whilst we have still a few more breaths left, we should purify ourselves of the taint of untouchability and approach our Maker with clean hearts’ (Tendulkar, Mahatma, p. 248). For the details on how this statement triggered controversy, see ibid., pp. 246–52.

104 D. G. Tendulkar, Gandhiji, His Life and Work, Karnatak, Bombay, 1944, p. 248.
106 GA, vol. 34, p. 66.
to Surendranāth elaborating on ātmā in the context of Sāṅkhya philosophy.\textsuperscript{110} Gandhi’s private notes for Surendranāth that I consult in this section also refer to brahmacarya, ātmā, and some terms originating in Sāṅkhya philosophy such as vyakti (n., adj., individual; person[al], but also with various metaphysical connotations) and gun (quality/attribute/property/virtue). We are unable to identify the exact date of these notes but, considering the matters that Gandhi discussed in them, they are likely to have been written at least after the 1930s.\textsuperscript{111}

The contents of the notes are not systematically presented. They consist of 15 fragmentary arguments on the themes of ātmā, vyakti, and brahmacarya. Gandhi first provides his account on ‘the sahaj (“innate/natural”) gun of ātmā’ in relation to ‘the gun of a vyakti’:

The sahaj gun of ātmā is, indeed, the gun of a vyakti. The vyakti which has ultimate peace (param sānti) is sātvik. The vyakti which has the worst turbulence (sabse adhik aśānti) is called rājasī or vāsāmyār (passionate) nature. And the vyakti which has neither of these guns and is ignorant (ajñān) is of ‘tāmasī’ nature, which represents darkness (andhakār) or ignorance (ajñān).\textsuperscript{112}

Gandhi notes here that the ‘sahaj gun of ātmā’ substantially reflects the nature of the ‘gun of a vyakti’.\textsuperscript{113} He further argues that the ‘gun of a vyakti’ can be divided into three basic components: sātvik, rājasī, and tāmasī. The one whose gun is sātvik allegedly embodies ‘ultimate peace’.

In order to accurately decipher these quoted lines, we should be aware that the Sanskrit concept of vyakti has various meanings, including ‘individuality’ and ‘personality’, but also the metaphysical connotation of ‘manifestation’,\textsuperscript{114} originally derived from Sāṅkhyan metaphysics. The concept of vyakti (‘manifestation’) or vyakta (‘manifested’) in Sāṅkhyan metaphysics covers not only external objects and the visible sensory faculties (indriyas), but also the internal

\textsuperscript{110} Gāndhī, Bihār pachī Dilhi, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{111} Unfortunately, since only 82 volumes of GA have been published so far, the Gujarati original texts of these notes are not available here. Therefore, I have chosen to use the translated Hindi excerpt from SGV (vol. 95, pp. 259–61). However, just as many of the important concepts of Gandhi’s religious thought were derived from Sanskrit, these concepts as well were shared in both his Gujarati and his Hindi writings.
\textsuperscript{112} SGV, vol. 95, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{113} We should note that Gandhi by no means states here that the ‘gun of ātmā’ is equivalent to the ‘gun of a vyakti’. Instead, he carefully adds the word ‘sahaj’ before ‘gun of ātmā’.
mental faculties (antahkaraṇa) of manas, ahankāra, and buddhi, all of which emerge from the prakṛti of avyakta (‘the unmanifested’). In contrast to the subjective–objective distinction drawn between mind and body in modern Western philosophy, in Sāṅkhya metaphysics, with the exception of puruṣa (or (param)ātman in Vedānta), everything else, including internal mental faculties, are regarded as ‘objects’ (‘drṣṭya’). Therefore, the ‘subjectivity’ (‘драstr’) of puruṣa is transcendental for both mental and physical entities. When exploring Gandhi’s concept of vyakti, we must note that, throughout his life, he treated problems related to both visible external matters and the psychological or phenomenological conditions of his mind. Gandhi’s vyakti can thus be understood as a psycho/phenomenologico-physical concept in the Western philosophical sense.

After elaborating on the relationship between ‘the sahaj gun of ātman’ and ‘the gun of a vyakti’, Gandhi further expounds on his concept of brahmacarya: ‘The body (sarīr) certainly can achieve perfect brahmacarya (pūrṇa brahmacarya) as well as perfect truth (pūrṇa satya). But, there will be some violence/killing (hiṃsā) in actions such as breathing (sāṃs). The perfect liberation (mukti) from this cannot be attainable.’115 Thus, although the achievement of a perfect brahmacarya is, indeed, possible in this world, as long as one has a body and lives in the world, he/she cannot be completely exempt from exerting hiṃsā to subtle living beings, which may also be caused by ‘breathing’. Here, Gandhi encounters the existential dilemma caused by the inescapable physical reality of hiṃsā.

Gandhi further elaborates on his idea of the ‘introspection of ātman (ātma-nirvikṣaṇ)’, seen as a useful means for the ‘assurance of ātman’: ‘The meaning of the introspection of ātman (ātma-nirvikṣaṇ) is the continuous assurance (satat pratīti) of ātman, and so on.’116

After considering the ‘perfect brahmacarya’ and the meaning of ‘introspection of ātman’, Gandhi’s argument goes on to deal with the ‘perfect knowledge’ of ātman and sthitprajña:

Being omniscient (sarvajña) means [obtaining] perfect knowledge (pūrṇa jñān) of ātman. Liberation (mukti) means complete detachment (pūrṇa anāsakti) from worldly affairs (sāṃsārik mālom). Being sthitprajña means to stay imperturbable (āvicalit) from pleasure/happiness (sukh) and suffering (dukh), [to maintain] non-possession (aparigrah), impartiality (tattasthata), the relief

115 SGV, vol. 95, p. 260.
116 Ibid.
(chukṭkārā) from the feeling of being or non-being (hone athvā na hone kī bhāvanā), the state of nothingness (śūnya kī sthiti), the liberation (mukti).\footnote{SGV, vol. 95, p. 260.}

It is particularly noteworthy here that the attainment of ‘sthitprajñā’ is construed as transcendental both to ‘suffering’ and ‘pleasure/happiness’ as well as ‘being’ and ‘non-being’.

Finally, in the last segment of the notes, Gandhi elaborates on the meaning of the elimination of the ‘self’:

Being selfless (nisvārth) means the abandonment (parityāg) of his selfishness/self-interest (svārth). If we eliminate ‘self (sva)’, we become selfless (nisvārth). Suffering/behaving sad (dukhī) while seeing suffering of the world (samsār ke dukh) means continuing [our] service-work (sevā-kārya) without wish for rewards (parinām kī icchā). [It is the condition in which we] renounce (tyāg) the illusion of the world (samsār kā moh) for the sake of ātmā.\footnote{SGV, vol. 95, pp. 260–261.}

Gandhi perceptively distinguishes the concepts of ‘self’ (‘sva’) and ātmā, encouraging the elimination of the former. This entails, in part, the complete renunciation of the ‘wish for rewards’. It should be noted that the extinguishment of the self or the condition of ‘being selfless’ does not mean staying cloistered from the world; rather, Gandhi asserts, it is a condition where someone voluntarily takes on the ‘suffering of the world’ as it is ‘suffering’ (‘[s]uffering/behaving sad while seeing suffering of the world’). Thus, liberation is promised to the person who exterminates the self by embracing sua sponte suffering as suffering and continues to serve the secular world without any secular purpose, but only for the sake of the ātmā.

Gandhi in this sense believed that the ideal guna of a vyakti can only be attained when one does not escape from the secular world, but observes the world (both in the physical and the psychological/phenomenological sense) as it is, thus becoming the ultimate Seer or realizing the transcendental subjectivity of the Self (puruṣ, paramātmā): this state is, arguably, what Gandhi attempted to achieve throughout his life—ātmadarśan (self-realization).

\textit{The Noākhālī Mahāyajña}

During the 1940s, the idea of individuality (vyaktitva) was pursued in the most radical manner in Gandhi’s last experiments with
brahmacarya, namely, the yajña. While undertaking his experiments, Gandhi even acknowledged that he had been ‘deeply influenced’ by modern tantric thought, as discussed.

The first phase of the yajña was undertaken in Noakhali from 19 December 1946 to 25 February 1947; then, after a three-month hiatus, it continued until Gandhi’s assassination in New Delhi on 30 January 1948. This first phase of yajña in Noakhali often served as a reference point for Gandhi later on, and had a special meaning to him, so that he called it his mahāyajña.

There are two foundational studies based upon first-hand knowledge of Gandhi’s stay in Noakhali. These are the works by Gandhi’s secretaries, N. K. Bose and Pyarelal Nayar. However, although both works provide some insights into the philosophy behind Gandhi’s yajña, their analyses are primarily constructed with reference to Gandhi’s own words only. As Veena Howard points out, during the yajña, Gandhi referred to Manu with the Gujarati word bhāgīdār, meaning ‘shareholder’ or ‘participant’ (and I would like to note also ‘consort’) rather than a mere passive devotee. In a related point, one distinctive aspect of the Noakhali yajña is that the word ‘we’ (‘ame’) rather than ‘I’ (‘hum’) was repeatedly used; in this light, it seems that the yajña should not be understood as a solo attempt by Gandhi, but as a collaborative work with Manu. Although Howard highlights the significance of the word bhāgīdār, her analysis is also limited in that she only examines Gandhi’s own words; to better understand this collaborative aspect, it is indispensable to examine Manu’s words as well.

Therefore, in this section, I will consult Manu’s Gujarati diary, entitled Eklo Jāne Re: Gāndhijīnī Noākhālinī Dharmayātrānī Dāyri (Go Your Own Way: The Diary of Gandhiji’s Religious Pilgrimage; hereafter GNDD), the only historical material covering the day-to-day activities of Gandhi and Manu from 19 December 1946 to 2 March 1947. By so doing, I will illuminate the fundamental purpose behind the yajña; the realization of a ‘unique individuality’ (‘anokhum vyaktitva’) by Gandhi and Manu.

119 Bose, My Days with Gandhi; Pyarelal, ‘Brahmacharya’.
121 See my footnotes 1 and 28.
According to GNDD, the correspondence between Manu and Gandhi discussing the communal uprisings in Bengal started on 28 October 1947, about a week before Gandhi departed from New Delhi to Bengal. Then, in a letter written on 1 December 1947, Manu expressed her strong willingness to join Gandhi’s reconciliation work in Bengal and sought his permission to take part in his work.122 Gandhi accepted Manu’s request and, on 19 December 1947, Manu arrived at Noakhali with her father, Jayasukhal Gandhi.

On the night of Manu’s arrival, Gandhi stayed with her in a bedroom. Manu writes in GNDD that, around midnight, Gandhi told her that ‘you [Manu] should understand properly your religion/duty (dharm)’. Gandhi requested that Manu should consult with her father regarding whether she should really stay at Noakhali. Then they slept, and Gandhi woke up at 3:30 a.m. After finishing his morning prayer, Gandhi asked Manu once again for her decision. Manu responded: ‘I am ready to undertake whatever hardship or trial until I die. I have complete faith (sampūraṇa śraddhā) and trust (vīśvās) in you.’123

After spending three weeks doing work for communal unity in Noakhali, on 10 January 1947, Gandhi gave Manu an exceptionally long talk on brahmacarya for 40 minutes after the morning prayer. He told Manu that ‘today’s talk is pivotal (pōy(o)) for your life-formation (jīvangaḥdātra).’124 He also defined brahmacarya: ‘... to observe brahmacarya means to be nirvikār (detached from sexual desire/passion).’125 At the end of the talk, Gandhi told Manu that ‘[a]lthough [I am a] male (purus), I have become your mother/ma (mā)’.126

The next night, Manu writes in GNDD, she received affectionate bodily touch from Gandhi:

Bāpji laid down on the bed at 10:30 [p.m.]. I rubbed oil on his head, pressed his legs, and bowed down (praṇām karyā) as usual. He caressed me with his hand, [his touch] filled with parental affection (Temne vātsalyabhāryā hathe mane pampāli). I could not exactly recall when I had fallen asleep.127

In N. K. Bose’s work, which refers only to Gandhi’s own words, Gandhi’s brahmacarya is interpreted as amounting to the treatment of women

122 GNDD, p. 4.
123 Ibid., p. 11.
124 Ibid., p. 75.
125 Ibid., p. 73.
126 Ibid., p. 75.
127 Ibid., p. 79, emphasis added.
as ‘instrument[s]’ in his experiments—experiments that are taken to reflect Gandhi’s unconscious psychological ‘repression’. However, nowhere in GNDD does Manu say that she ever felt that she was treated as an instrument. Instead, what is repeatedly mentioned is Gandhi’s motherly/parental affection and Manu’s voluntary willingness to participate in the yajña. Manu said that, notwithstanding Gandhi’s bodily caresses, she quickly fell asleep.

Indeed, the psycho-physical experiments to unify the ātmās in the sexual binary of man (Gandhi) and woman (Manu) in one bed were viewed by Gandhi as a parallel practice to bring communal unity between Hindus and Muslims: ‘I have called this Hindu–Muslim–unity (Hindū–Muslim–ektā) yajña, and in this yajña, there should not be [even] a little dirt (melum). If [there is] just a little dirt in Manu, she’ll end up with adverse outcomes.’ As indicated here, activity for ‘Hindu–Muslim–unity’ also stands for yajña for Gandhi. Moreover, this yajña was dependent upon not only Gandhi’s mental condition, but also Manu’s. Thus, the yajña was not ‘my’, but ‘our Purāṇik yajña’ (‘āpnā purāṇik yajña’).

On 20 December, in a conversation with Jayasukhal, Gandhi remarked that ‘[m]y strong wish (prabāl icchā) is to bring into light the hidden guns (chūpā guno) in the girl [Manu] that I have been noticing’. Then, on 11 February, Gandhi told Manu that a part of the purpose of his yajña was to foster Manu into an ‘ideal mother’:

I believe that among millions of sisters, I as a mother, reared only one daughter, [and] If I can present an ideal mother (mātāno ādārś), only then I can gain the satisfaction of ātmā (ātmasantoś) to serve the daughters of the whole world (ākha jagat)! Gandhi attempted not only to become a mother himself, but also to bring up Manu as the ‘ideal mother’ and to present her to the world as the perfect specimen for all women.

Gandhi also explained that his experiments of yajña were of a ‘unique’ (‘anokho’) kind—an essential attempt to bring about tapāscaryā and ‘love’. He saw these as necessary elements for communal

126 Bose, My Days with Gandhi, p. 151.
129 GNDD, p. 64, 76, 109, pp. 131–2, 134–5.
130 Ibid., p. 98.
131 Ibid., p. 8.
132 Ibid., p. 25.
133 Ibid., p. 12.
134 Ibid., p. 161.
reconciliation: ‘This yajña is unique (anokho).\textsuperscript{135} I am here doing tapaścaryā to cultivate brotherhood (bhāicāro) to appease [people] by love (prem).\textsuperscript{136} Gandhi did not view the concept of tapaścaryā as an abstract metaphor; rather, he believed that the power of tapaścaryā was substantially effective in the communal riots.\textsuperscript{137} Etymologically, the word tapaś is derived from the Sanskrit root tap, meaning the ‘heat’ from a burning sacrifice. It can also be construed to refer to the spiritual energy gained from religious suffering or penance.\textsuperscript{138} N. K. Bose reports that, during the morning of 20 December 1947, Gandhi told Bose, referring to Manu, that the ‘heat will be great’ in Gandhi’s ‘bold and original experiment’.\textsuperscript{139}

Furthermore, these effects of tapaścaryā produced in the yajña were also explained by Gandhi in relation to the ‘science of mind’ (‘mannum vijñān’), as compared with ‘micro science’ (‘sūkṣm vijñān’).\textsuperscript{140} Manu summarizes the ‘science of mind’ as she learnt it from Gandhi as follows:

Bāpuji told me about his own garland of thought (vicārmālā) that the small thing of our mind relates to the atmosphere of the whole country (ākhā deśnā vātāvaran), how desire functions in the mind, or [that] such a desire in every person affects the deed of every person. At the moment, there has been Hindu–Muslim enmity (Hindū-Muslim vaimasya), for which Bāpuji thinks that each person in the country is more important [responsible].\textsuperscript{141}

It is notable that Gandhi’s private discussion referring to tantric thought that I have cited in the previous section took place just 12 days after Gandhi and Manu left Noakhali, where they had experimented with these ideas of the ‘science of mind’ and tapaścaryā.

Gandhi elsewhere explained that the effects of brahmacarya depended on the condition of mind, and the quality of a person’s mind would be manifested by all his/her daily activities: ‘The result reflects the mental condition/atmosphere (mānsik vātāvaran) of the person. Even if a person does not speak, what personal quality he/she possesses is

\textsuperscript{133} See my footnote 30.
\textsuperscript{136} GNDD, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{137} Gandhi later remarked on the ātma-śakti as follows: ‘When the śakti of ātmā (ātmāni śakti) awakes, when it rises (uday pāme che), it obtains a victory in the secular world (duniyā)’. Gândhī, Bihārī Kōmī Āgamām, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{139} Bose, My Days with Gandhi, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{140} GNDD, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
recognized by the habits of sleeping, eating, and behaving.\textsuperscript{142} Thus, to Gandhi, ‘the one who knows and acts accordingly is the true knower (sāco jñānti)’.\textsuperscript{143} The scientific effect of mind could be mediated only through his/her actual daily practice.

A brahmacārī could produce external effects—this was also because, by purification of his/her mind or ātmā, in other words, by becoming entirely nirvikār, the innermost part of his/her ātmā would be realized: that was paramātmā:

[T]he primal duty (pratham kartavya) of a person is to satisfy [his/her] ātmā in the form of paramātmā by pure spirit (suddh bhāvanā)—heart (hyday). [This is] what I have been trying to do. I believe that this is an integral part (avibhājya aṅg) of the yajña.\textsuperscript{144}

However, such an endeavour to ‘satisfy [his/her] ātmā in the form of paramātmā’ through the yajña was not necessarily subjective to the satisfaction of other people’s demands; far from it, it might even cause disgruntlement among and criticism by them:

I believe that in order to acquire satisfaction of ātmā (ātma-santos.), a person has to tolerate whatever denunciation (phitakār) and suffering (duhkh) from others, as he/she is attempting, caring of others automatically becomes less. He/she should not be worried. Ātmā is indeed paramātmā, then let yourself suffer the countless difficulties.\textsuperscript{145}

Therefore, as indicated in Gandhi’s private notes for Surendranāth, the satisfaction or realization of ātmā can only be achieved when one voluntarily takes on ‘suffering’ while strenuously attempting to pursue one’s paramātmā.

Furthermore, Gandhi explained that, in order to become a nirvikār brahmacārī, one must eliminate the ‘surficial self’:

It can be called complete yajña (pūro yajña) only when we renounce (tyāg) [our] surficial self (svārth-mātr). The renouncement of selfishness (svārthno tyāg) means to discard I-ness (humpānum), my-ness (mārāpanum). This is my brother, and that is a stranger, this is my sister and that is a stranger, there should not be such a feeling in mind. Thus, he/she will be able to dedicate everything to God/Kṛṣṇa (Kṛṣṇārpan). If one serves [God] as a servant, keeping God always in [his/her] mind, he/she remains eternally happy (nitya sukhī rahe

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 114.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 157.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
che). For him/her pleasure/happiness and suffering (sukh-duḥkh) are one and the same (sarkhām j che).\(^{146}\)

This state of achieving eternal happiness that transcends both ‘pleasure/happiness’ and ‘suffering’ was also called sthitprajña:

If I become ‘sthitprajña’ and continue to work, whatever happens, everything is equal (sarkhum) to me. ‘Knowing that both pleasure (sukh) and suffering (duḥkh) are equal (sāṅkar jāne)’. Certainly, my attempt is going towards that direction only. I hope and also firmly believe that it will not take as many days as to reach towards success than the days that have been spent in the past attempts.\(^{147}\)

What is striking in GNDD is that this attainment of nirvikār brahmacārī, sthitprajña, or the satisfaction of paramātmā is described by Gandhi as a kind of universal ethics applicable to all human beings, regardless of gender or religion. During Gandhi’s trip with Manu from Vijaynagar to Haimchandi in Noakhali, they were joined by Col. Jivansinha, who was a Muslim and an active supporter of Gandhi’s work for communal unity. Gandhi repeatedly taught Jivansinha about 16 ‘beautiful maxims’ (‘sundar vacnāmyto’),\(^{148}\) in which specific Hindu terms such as brahmacārī, (param)ātmā, and sthitprajña were not used, probably respecting Jivansinha’s personal faith. However, the content of these maxims still clearly represented the ultimate purpose of Gandhi’s yajña: to become an ideal brahmacārī. For example, in the maxims, Gandhi remarked that ‘one who can control the mind and one’s own self achieves crowning glory’.\(^{149}\) Gandhi also elaborated on the androgynous nature of a man: ‘The half of man is woman.’ He also referred to the highest ideal of a ‘holy woman’ (‘sādhvi strī’) and one who treated others equally regardless of their genders.\(^{150}\) After having taught these things to Jivansinha, Gandhi eventually told him that, if a person truly observed these maxims, and reflected them in his/her daily life, his/her ‘individuality’ would become ‘unique’:

‘I am convinced that within 15 days, the individuality (vyaktitva) of the individual (vyakti) will become unique (anokhum).’\(^{151}\)

\(^{146}\) Ibid., p. 15.
\(^{147}\) Ibid., p. 179.
\(^{148}\) Ibid., pp. 155-7.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., p. 156.
\(^{150}\) Ibid., p. 157.
\(^{151}\) Ibid., p. 157. For other possible translations for the word anokhum, see my footnote 30.
At the end of this talk, Gandhi concluded that these maxims or ‘very precious laws’ (‘bahu kīmti kāyadāo’) for every person to become ‘happy’ (‘sukhī’) were fortunately ‘shown in [all the] religious canons (dharmaśāstro)’.\textsuperscript{152} Manu also explained that these maxims could be applicable to ‘all humanity (manusya-mātṛ; all those who are humans)’.\textsuperscript{153} Gandhi further says ‘if we can follow and meditate upon them, then today we can hail ourselves as the “best” people (pṛajā) in the secular world (duniyā)’\textsuperscript{154}.

Thus, in the Noākhālī yajña, Gandhi collaborated with Manu and undertook the severest task in order to become a nirvikār brahmacārī who achieves the transcendental ideal of motherliness or womanliness, sthitprajāna, or the satisfaction of paramātmā. Gandhi regarded this endeavour as a universal ethics, required for each individual in his country to realize his or her unique individuality. There was no distinction between men and women or Hindus and Muslims in the application of this ethics.

However, this universal ethics of individuality was by no means to be enforced upon people by top-down legislation or ‘orthodox’ religious laws. The only way for the ethics to be disseminated to other people was for it to actually be lived. In fact, it was this individual living ethics that provided the foundation for Gandhi’s principle of secularism during the last years of his life.

### Secularism and individual religion

Gandhi left Noakhali on 2 March 1947; staying in Bihar until 30 March before moving to New Delhi. Two months later, in June and July, he published five consecutive articles on brahmacārya in his official journal, Harijanbandu. On 9 August, Gandhi set out for Calcutta to engage in reconciliation work in response to the communal uprisings. He spent the day of Independence there, and returned to New Delhi on 8 September, where he remained until his assassination on 30 January 1948.

It was during this period after Independence that Gandhi began to advocate most passionately the principle of secularism. This idea of secularism thus represents the very last phase of Gandhi’s intellectual

\textsuperscript{152} GNDD, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p. 156.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 157.
evolution. In this section, I will explore the relationship between Gandhi’s secularism and his concept of ‘unique individuality’, which he sought to achieve in his experiments in the yajña.

Although Gandhi began to propagate his idea of secularism most ardently after Independence, he had gradually come to recognize the necessity of the principle already from the early 1940s. However, Gandhi’s first explicit reference to the idea of religious individualization/personalization along with the creation of the ‘secular state’ came in a conversation with a Christian missionary, held sometime before 22 September 1946. In this conversation, Gandhi made the following statement:

If I were a dictator, religion and State would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it. The State would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern!

You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion.

If we only read the first six quoted sentences here, Gandhi’s words seem to represent a kind of secularism guaranteeing negative liberty of individual religion and, indeed, the previous works only give considerations to these sentences. However, Gandhi elucidates his distinct idea of ‘personal concern’ clearly in the next emphasized part, which echoes his words in the mahāyajña of Noakhali: ‘[t]he result reflects the mental condition of the person. Even if a person does not speak, what personal quality he/she possesses is recognized by the habits of sleeping, eating, and behaving.’ Indeed, this conversation took place just before Gandhi left New Delhi for Bengal to take part in the work for the communal unity; as mentioned in the previous section, this was also the period when the correspondence with Manu began. There is presumably an intimate link between Gandhi’s

155 The first official article in which Gandhi used the English term ‘a secular state’ was published in the Harijan of 25 January 1942 (CWMG, vol. 75, p. 237). Although not using the word ‘secular’, Gandhi had already begun to emphasize the importance of Indian religious plurality particularly from 1940, anticipating the creation of Pakistan (CWMG, vol. 72, pp. 26–7).

156 The conversation was recorded by Pyarelal and was later published in the Harijan of 22 September 1946 (CWMG, vol. 85, pp. 328–9).

157 CWMG, vol. 85, p. 328, emphasis added.

psycho-physical experiments in the *yajña* and his public political statements on the religious individualization.

It is apparent that Gandhi’s idea of ‘personal concern’ was not equivalent to mere negative liberty or what Sangari called ‘the right of individuals to freely profess and practice any values subject to public order and morality’. The rest of Gandhi’s conversation with the missionary clearly indicates this. The missionary ‘[a]sked [Gandhi] which movement, for example, women’s, political, scientific or religious, would have had the most far-reaching influence in the world of tomorrow and would be considered 50 years hence as having had the greatest impact on world affairs as a whole and for the greatest good of mankind’. Then Gandhi ‘said it was wrong to bracket religious movement with the rest’, and answered:

It is the religious movement that will dominate the future. It would do so today but it does not, for religion has been reduced to a Saturday or a Sunday affair; *it has to be lived every moment of one’s life. Such religion, when it comes, will dominate the world.*159

As stated here, Gandhi’s idea of religion as a ‘personal concern’ was clearly differentiated from religion as ‘a Saturday or a Sunday affair’. As Gandhi said, religion ‘has to be lived every moment of one’s life’, and such religion would entail the potential to ‘dominate the world’.

Later, from June to July 1947, Gandhi published the series of five articles on *brahmacarya*. In one of the articles, which I have discussed in the previous section, ‘The fence of *brahmacarya*’, Gandhi remarked that ‘ultimately, *brahmacarya* is a mental condition’ and that ‘an outward conduct is the identification (*olakh*) of [his/her mental] condition (*sthiti*), [and] its sign (*niśāni*). All these statements on the experiments with *brahmacarya* reflect back on Gandhi’s words on the concept of individual religion quoted above.

On 21 July 1947, Gandhi explicated the purpose of the *yajña* in a private letter:

I have become a mother/ma (*mā*) to that girl [Manu]. And spending my time in fulfilling the purpose, I wish [to reveal] one great ethical mystery (*ek mahān naitik rahasya*) to the whole world (*jagat*)—similar to truth (*satya*), nonviolence (*ahimsā*), and so on, which I have shown. . . . Therefore, God (*Īśvar*) on the right opportunity has given me the means (*sādhan*) by which I can present before the world (*samsār*) that if people develop motherly perspective (*mātrāvijñāt*) in their mind, the emancipation (*uddhār*) of humanity (*mānavaṇjāt*) may take place.160

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159 *CWMG*, vol. 85, p. 328, emphasis added.
The ‘great ethical mystery’ referred to by Gandhi here, as I have examined in the previous section, is the realization of a ‘unique individuality’ in the yajña—that is to say, the realization of the transcendental ideal of ‘woman’ or ‘mother’ for both men and women.

Two weeks later, in the Harijan of 3 August, Gandhi again elaborates on the meaning of his religion as a personal matter:

I can only say that their religion must be very poor stuff if it admits of change like one’s clothes. Religion (binding faith), is made of sterner stuff; it is a deep personal matter, more personal than honour. To be true, it must be able to defy coercion of the extremest type.161

Gandhi’s concept of individual religion was, therefore, not merely a personal matter like changing one’s clothes, but a ‘deep personal matter’ that ‘must be able to defy coercion of the extremest type’.

On 16 August, the day after Independence, Gandhi had a conversation with Rev. John Kellas.162 Kellas asked Gandhi about ‘the relation between education, religion and the State’, and Gandhi ‘expressed the opinion that the State should undoubtedly be secular’. However, when Gandhi was expressing his ideas on secularism, he ‘incidentally remarked’ that ‘[w]e have discarded foreign power, [but] not the unseen foreign influence’ of ‘British political supremacy’. Thus, it is indicated that the separation of religion and the state in Gandhi’s view was not to be pursued simply on the British model. Instead, his secularism would be a distinctly Indian type relieved from ‘unseen foreign influence’—a term that seems to refer to what Gandhi had criticized throughout his life, namely the ‘modern civilization’ (‘¯adhunik sudh¯ar’).

On 13 November 1947, Gandhi again explained his views on ‘individual religion’ (‘vyaktigat dharm’), this time in relation to the concrete situation at the time, which involved many instances of severe religious intimidation:

He [who compels the worship of a particular religion] can do as much as to cut off my throat, let him do, [but] we hold our religion that we call personal religion (nij¯i dharm) or individual religion (vyaktigat dharm). Any force (t¯akat) in the secular world (duniy¯a) cannot destroy this religion. . . . But the person who is steadfast in holding the religion will only listen to the command of God (Īśvar kā ādes), no one else.163

161 CWMG, vol. 88, p. 421, emphasis added.
162 CWMG, vo. 89, pp. 51–2; Gândhí, Kalkattāno Camatkār, pp. 36–7.
Gandhi further explained that individual religion could by no means be enforced by external political pressure because it was a deep transcendental and ontological matter. Theocratic ‘compulsion’ (jabarjasti) was thus never compatible with Gandhi’s principle of secularism:

And each individual (vyakti) must have complete independence/autonomy (svatantratā) pertaining to religion. [However,] homogeneity (samāntā) is seen in religion and in so many other matters of people (prajā) who are living under one national flag. It pains me a lot to find people with such a common background/sameness (badhī samān) in their strength indulging in much of civil strife and resorting to violence (mārāmārīnī hade) in terms of religion. There should be no compulsion (jabarjasti) in religion.

However, while Gandhi was strongly opposing to any ‘compulsion’ of the particular religion, all his political efforts were deeply based upon his distinct Hindu metaphysics of ātmā. In a conversation with an English journalist held sometime before 4 September 1947, Gandhi clarified his ideas on individual religion as follows:

[Interviewer] [T]he root of all of Gandhiji’s activities was the desire for moksha, emancipation. But why was not this aspect emphasized sufficiently?

Gandhiji replied by taking recourse to a simile. He said the desire for moksha was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone other than the individual himself. The world was interested in the fruits, not the root. For the tree itself, however, the chief concern should be not the fruit, but the root. It was in the depth of one’s own being that the individual had to concentrate.

Gandhi explicitly stated here that his ‘chief concern’ was ‘the desire for moksha’, characterized as ‘the root’ of his political activities. However, ‘[t]he world was interested in the fruits, not the root’ and, since the root ‘was in the deep of one’s being that the individual had to concentrate’, the only thing he could do was to reveal the root by means of its ‘fruits’. In other words, Gandhi’s individual belief in ātmā should not be directly articulated by words in his public political statements on secularism, but only implied in them, and must rather, or concurrently, be lived by him every moment of his life.

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164 See my footnotes 39 and 44.
166 CWMG, vol. 89, p. 143, emphasis added.
Given these considerations, Gandhi intended to exemplify the ‘root’ of his religio-secular concerns in his actual lived life. This is why Gandhi decided to embark upon his public ‘fasts’ (‘upavās’), contemporaneous to his increasing valorization of secularism. Through his fasts, Gandhi staked his own life to achieve a perfect realization of ātmā. However, Gandhi elsewhere cautioned that the fast was an extremely delicate matter, and must be commenced with the purest selfless motivation: ‘Fasting cannot be undertaken mechanically. It is a powerful thing but a dangerous thing if handled amateurishly. It requires complete self-purification [ātmasuddhi], much more than is required in facing death, without a thought of retaliation’. Therefore, in order to make himself ready to undertake the delicate practice of fasting, Gandhi must have gone through the severest tests of the ‘introspection of ātmā’ in his yajña. In other words, Gandhi’s last experiments with brahmacarya to become nirvikār should be interpreted as an indispensable prerequisite for his last religious fasts.

During Gandhi’s very last fast in New Delhi from 13 to 18 January, he expressed the meaning of the fast as follows:

[12 January 1948] My fast will be over when I’m convinced that people across religions have reached a compromise/meeting of hearts (dil mil gae haim) not due to any pressure from outside, but considering it as their religion/duty (dharm).  

[17 January 1948] From any angle, my fast (upavās) should never be understood as political (rājnaítik). It should be understood in the response to the compelling voice (jabardast ācāy) of inner ātmā (antarātmā). After suffering great torment (mahāyāṭmā), I have made a decision not to take food.

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167 Akeel Bilgrami highlights the distinct characteristic of Gandhi’s ‘exemplary action’: ‘Exemplary action takes place of principles [in moral psychology]. If someone fails to follow your example, you may be disappointed but you would no longer have the conceptual basis to see them as transgressive and wrong and subject to criticism. So the integration Gandhi wished to achieve (the integration of non-violence with total non-criticism) is as plausible as is the moral position stressing exemplars.’ A. Bilgrami, ‘Gandhi’s integrity: the philosophy behind the politics’, Postcolonial Studies, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, p. 88. Also see ibid., pp. 86–8, 90–2.


169 Gandhi explains in AK that the purification ‘means to become nirvikār from mind (man), word (vacan), and body (kāyā)’ (AK, p. 529). Therefore, Gandhi seems to have recognized the special importance of brahmacarya for the fast as the means to purify ātmā (GA, vol. 40, pp. 65–6).

170 The fast was undertaken from 1 to 4 September 1947, in Calcutta, and then the second fast took place from 13 to 18 January 1948, in New Delhi.


172 Ibid., p. 331, originally spoken in Hindi but recorded in Gujarati letters.
In Gandhi’s view, the individual religion should never be compelled by any outward pressures, but is expected to be accepted voluntarily by people ‘considering it as their religion/duty’. It was also stated that, although Gandhi’s fast was by no means urged by any political ‘compulsion’, it was commenced by a special kind of compulsion—that is to say, the inner irresistible voice of the ātmā.

Therefore, Gandhi’s political insistence on the state secularity and his simultaneous religious practice of the epic fasts were complementary. Gandhi’s secularism had no relation to the kind of secularism that does not involve an element of deep individual pursuit of one’s religion/duty. At the same time, Gandhi’s secularism was not at all close to theocracy, which forces a particular religious view by external pressure.

Gandhi’s metaphysical concept of ātmā was the only fundamental principle behind his idea of secularism. He believed that, when an individual thoroughly realized his/her own ātmā, it would be united together with other people’s ātmās. Gandhi’s last two fasts were considered to be the means to bring about the union of the separated ātmās caused by the communal uprisings. Gandhi time after time stated that his goal was to unify people’s ātmās during the period between Independence and the commencement of his fast in Calcutta on 1 September 1947:

[21 August 1947] If Pakistan and Hindustan will be true (sāchuṇ), then it will be one, as if the bodies (sarīr) are separated but the ātmā is one.173

[23 August 1947] If our hearts (hrday) are one, then I say that Muslim brothers can worship the Mother Kāli (Kālīmātā) and Hindus can also freely go to Masjid.174

[24 August 1947] Everything happens when there is true unity (kharī ektā).175

Subsequently, on 26 August, Gandhi also expressed his ideal of sthitprajña:

But, if a person has dedicated everything to Bhagvān, why should he worry? Thus, I might be probably unfaithful (aviśvāsī) to God (Īsvar). If such a faith is there, [that is to say,] if I become a sthitprajña, then I will dance (nacuṇī). But, my efforts continue.176

173 Gāndhī, Kalkattāno Camatkār, p. 46.
174 Ibid., p. 49.
175 Ibid., p. 51.
176 Ibid., pp. 58–4.
After saying these words, from 1 September, Gandhi commenced a 73-hour religious fast. Manu described the effect that Gandhi’s fast brought about in Calcutta as a ‘miracle’ (‘camatkār’); the communal riot in Calcutta was immediately pacified, almost overnight (although a recrudescence of rioting occurred a fortnight later). Regardless of any positivistic evaluation of this purported ‘miracle’, what is noticeable for our present argument is that, during the fast, Gandhi allegedly experienced unprecedented satisfaction of his ātmā or God: ‘In this fast, I am more peaceful (śānt) than in any other fast’; ‘[...] I feel that God (Īśvar) is with me.’

Gandhi’s religious fast in Calcutta enabled him to feel an exceptional satisfaction of his ātmā. As mentioned above, it was his simultaneous psycho-physical experiments in the yajña that exerted the prerequisite role for the fast. Therefore, neither of these, namely (1) the insistence on the separation of the state and religion, (2) the severest inner introspection of ātmā by yajña, nor (3) the deep individual purification and pursuit of ātmā by fasting, should have been excluded from Gandhi’s political platform of secularism.

On 17 August, two days after Independence, Gandhi expounded on his ideal of secular Independent India. He believed that the protection of individual religion was the only means to lead people’s personal concerns to one God:

What he [Gandhi] wished to do was to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual. Then only India could be great, for it was perhaps the one nation in the ancient world which had recognized cultural democracy, whereby it was held that the roads to God were many, but the goal was one, because God was one and the same. In fact the roads were as many as there were individuals in the world.

These words were originally spoken on 17 August, but were published in the Harijan of 31 August 1947, one day before Gandhi embarked upon the above-mentioned fast in Calcutta.

When we are fully regardful of the various metaphysical implications underlying Gandhi’s political secularism, we will finally be able to grasp the intended meaning of his ‘real democracy’ as illustrated in the ‘Congress Objectives’ in Article 8 of the ‘A.I.C.C. [All-India Congress Committee] Resolution’ published in the Harijan of 23 November 1947:

177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., p. 80.
Political independence having been achieved, the Congress must address itself to the next great task, namely, the establishment of real democracy in the country and a society based on social justice and equality. Such a society must provide every man and woman with equality of opportunity and freedom to work for the unfettered development of his or her personality.\textsuperscript{180}

Gandhi similarly expressed his idea of the ‘gifted personality’ (‘pratibhāśāli vyakti’) in conversation with Rajendra Prasad on 18 November 1947.\textsuperscript{181} Gandhi’s ideal of a secular democratic India was that of a country that would not only protect the rights of every individual to religion in the negative sense, but, far more importantly, encourage people to ‘work for the unfettered development’ of his or her own unique individuality/personality: the idealistic condition under which every individual becomes subject only to the command of (param)ātmā.

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To sum up, Gandhi’s secularism during his last years, which emphasized the separation of religion from the state/politics, or so to speak the ‘privatization’ of religion, was not itself the end (sādhya) of his thought. Instead, the individualization/personalization of religion reiterated in his secularism was the means/method (sādhan) to realize (darśan) the pramātmā or ‘one God’ in the secular world. For Gandhi, demanding that religion should be ‘an entirely personal matter’ and simultaneously that ‘politics (rājkārya) be a part of religion’\textsuperscript{182} were complementary projects. By defending religious individualization, Gandhi implicitly included the embodied meaning of the search for the ātmā, wherein he undertook the experiments with brahmacārya and the epic fasts so as to work squarely through the reality of existential suffering. Therefore, what might be termed Gandhi’s methodological secularism was substantially different from teleological secularisms propagating the value of ‘modernization’ or ‘reason’ as its end, and merely guaranteeing the negative liberty of secular humanism. The only means/method for religion to go beyond its ‘individual quality’ (‘vyaktigat gun’) was for religion to be ‘deeply individual/personal’—that is to say, ātmik. This, arguably, was the metaphysics underlying Gandhi’s secularism during the last phase of his life.

\textsuperscript{180} CWMG, vol. 90, p. 542, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{181} Gāndhī, Dīlīhīmāṃ Gāndhījī, vol. I, p. 305.
\textsuperscript{182} Gāndhī, Bihār pachī Dilhī, p. 350.
On the night of 31 December 1947, the first turning of the new year after Independence, and also just one month before his assassination, Gandhi spoke to some Englishmen who had come along with Amrit Kaur to see him about his purpose of life. Manu recorded Gandhi’s words in her last series of Gujarati diaries, *Dilhīmaṇ Gāndhījī (Gandhiji in Delhi)*, as follows:

The independent/autonomous religion (*svatantr dharm*) can be achieved perfectly, [but] we have not seen it [yet], that is as much as to say, we have not seen God (*Īśvar*), have we? Therefore, what I want to do and what I have been eagerly doing for the last 60 years is ātmadarśan [self-realization]; that is what I want to do. I do not boast of my perfect success at it. But, little by little, I am going towards it. And my every secular/worldly engagement (*pravrñtī*) is carried out just from this perspective.183

183 Gāndhī, *Dilhīmaṇ Gāndhījī*, vol. II, pp. 204–5. These words also appear in Pyarelal Nayar’s *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1958, p. 697, without any reference. However, there is no equivalent word for ‘ātmadarśan’, i.e. ‘self-realization’, in Pyarelal’s *Last Phase*. The equivalent line was only expressed as ‘it is this that has been the goal of my aspiration and striving for the last sixty years’. Furthermore, the last line of the quoted passage, translated here as ‘And my every secular/worldly engagement is carried out just from this perspective’, was entirely omitted in *Last Phase*. Pyarelal presumably cited these materials from the original manuscript of Manu’s Gujarati diary and loosely translated them into English. Since Manu’s diary was officially published by Navajivan only in 1966, after *Last Phase* (in 1958), Pyarelal would not have been able to provide a published reference for this conversation.