

# *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 Rājcandra'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 *śakti*, 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' (*'anokhuṃ vaktitva'*) in his last religious experiments with *brahmacharya*, 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'.<sup>1</sup> In the preface of *Satyānā 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 sāṅśātkār*), [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 (*rājya prakaraṇī kṣetr*) is also subject to this thing [perspective].<sup>2</sup>

Later, in the concluding chapter, 'Pūrṇāhuti',<sup>3</sup> Gandhi remarked: 'One who says religion (*dharm*) is not related to politics (*rājya prakaraṇ*)

<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use the following abbreviations in footnotes: *GA* for *Gāndhījīno Akṣardeh: Mahātmā Gāndhīnām Lakkhāno, Bhāṣaṇo, Patro Vagereno Saṅgrah*, 82 vols, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1967–92; *SGV* for *Sampūrṇ Gāndhī Vāṅgmay*, 97 vols, Prakāśan Vibhāg, Sūcanā aur Prasāraṇ Mantrālay, Bhārat Sarkār, Naī Dillī, 1958–94; *CWMG* for *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 vols, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956–94; *GNDD* for Manubahen Gāndhī, *Eklo Jāne Re: Gāndhījīnī Noāḱālīnī Dharmayātrānī Dāyri*, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1954; *AK* for M. K. Gāndhī, *Satyānā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā*, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1947; *AB* for M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, vol. I, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> *Pūrṇāhuti* is the concluding rite of burning oblation in *yajña*.

does not know religion.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Parel pertinently argues in this connection that Gandhi's *Autobiography* represents 'the dynamic nature of the relationship of politics to *moksha*'.<sup>5</sup> This dynamism in Gandhi's philosophy is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of his religio-political conception of *satyāgraha* (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'.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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'.<sup>8</sup> This embryonic recognition ultimately led Gandhi to advocate the principle of secularism, pushing 'against his own earlier insistence on the fusion of

<sup>4</sup> AK, p. 529.

<sup>5</sup> A. Parel, *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> 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 Devanāgarī 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Sangari, 'Narrative of restoration', p. 3; B. Chandra, *History of Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2009, p. 328.

(the spirit of) religion and politics'.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Chandra argues that Gandhi's secularism in his last years represented a similar effort at secularization to that which occurred in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi's idea of secularism is also interpreted by Sangari as 'Nehruvian',<sup>13</sup> in the sense that it was derived 'partly from Protestantism and a bourgeois notion of individual freedom',<sup>14</sup> where it guaranteed 'the right of individuals to freely profess and practice any values *subject* to public order and morality'.<sup>15</sup>

Another interpretation is propounded by Ajay Skaria.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Chandra and Sangari's arguments, Skaria argues that Gandhi's

<sup>9</sup> Sangari, 'Narrative of restoration', p. 17, emphasis added, material in parentheses in the original.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Chandra, 'Gandhiji', pp. 12–13, emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> 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, 1989, pp. 453–69.

<sup>14</sup> Sangari, 'Narrative of restoration', p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> A. Skaria, "'No politics without religion": of secularism and Gandhi', in *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres*, V. Lal (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 173–210.

secularism in his last years was substantially ‘consistent’ with his previous ideas on religious politics.<sup>17</sup> Skaria, primarily examining Gandhi’s *Hind Svarāj* (1909), asserts that the latter’s concept of religion was not premised upon any otherworldly, transcendent God or on any Enlightenment reason,<sup>18</sup> but instead that it was originally inspired by Jain ascetic Śrīmad Rājendra’s (also known as Rāyācandbhāi Rāvjībhāi Mahetā, 1867–1901) ideas on *dayādharma* (religion of compassion), which were intimately concerned with secular ‘everyday transactions’.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the word *duniyā* used in *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.<sup>20</sup> 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’.<sup>21</sup>

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’ (*‘rājkāraṇ, rājyaprakaraṇ’*); never did he propound, despite the assertion by Chandra, the *secularization* of religion. Instead, Gandhi repeatedly advocated, with his all strength, for a distinct means (*sādhan*) of *individualization/personalization* of religion (the words ‘individual(ity)’ and ‘personal(ity)’ were used interchangeably by Gandhi as the equivalents to the Gujarati word *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 *the most radical deepening*—in Gandhi’s term, ‘broadening’ (*‘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.

<sup>17</sup> Skaria, ‘No politics without religion’, pp. 175, 203.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189–92.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177–80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191–2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 187, 202, 205–6.

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<sup>22</sup> (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 (*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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Gandhi advocated his private religious views on sexuality 'in the midst of intensely political articles'<sup>25</sup> as he repeatedly began to assert the urgent need for political secularism. The obscured logic of Gandhi's 'science of mind' (*mannuṃ vijñān*'), the integration of his internal and external concerns, cannot be made intelligible through the interpretations provided by previous works.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Neither her birth nor death dates are known, but she was 17–18 years old during the experiments.

<sup>23</sup> L. Rudolph and S. H. Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2006; J. S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2000; A. Sharma, *Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> The articles are the following: 'Meṃ kem śarū karyuṃ?' ('How did I start?') in the *Harijanbandhu* of 8 June 1947; 'Brahmacarya vād?' ('The fence of *brahmacarya*') in the *Harijanbandhu* of 15 June 1947; 'Īśvar kyām ne koṇ?' ('Where and who is God?') in the *Harijanbandhu* of 22 June 1947; 'Nāmsādhanānām cihṇ' ('The sign of name exercise') in the *Harijanbandhu* of 29 June 1947; and 'Ek mūñjhvaṇ' ('A confusion') in the *Harijanbandhu* of 6 July 1947.

<sup>25</sup> 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.*).

<sup>26</sup> 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 *brahmacharya* have already been published<sup>27</sup>; 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 *brahmacharya* 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.<sup>28</sup>

This article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will explore the central metaphysical<sup>29</sup> 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,

<sup>27</sup> Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*; P. Nayal, 'Brahmacharya', in *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. I, P. Nayal (ed.), Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1956, pp. 569–605, E. H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, Norton, New York, 1993, pp. 395–409; S. Kakar, 'Gandhi and women', in *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality*, S. Kakar (ed.), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990, pp. 85–128; B. Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, Sage, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 191–227; V. Lal, 'Nakedness, nonviolence, and brahmacharya: Gandhi's experiments in celibate sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 1/2, 2000, pp. 105–36; G. Kumar, *Brahmacharya: Gandhi and His Women Associates*, Vitasta, New Delhi, 2006; N. F. Gier, 'Was Gandhi a tantric?', *Gandhi Marg*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2007, pp. 21–36; V. R. Howard, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism: Renunciation and Social Action*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2013, pp. 123–61. I would also like to thank Professor Tridip Suhrud for sending me his unpublished manuscript on Gandhi's *brahmacharya*.

<sup>28</sup> GNDD (the diary between 4 November 1946 and 4 March 1947); *Bihārni Komī Āgamām*, Navjivan, Amdāvād, 1956 (the diary between 7 March and 24 May 1947); *Bihār pachī Dillī*, Navjivan, Amdāvād, 1961 (the diary between 25 May and 30 July 1947); *Kalkattāno Camatkār*, Navjivan, Amdāvād, 1956 (the diary between 1 August and 8 September, 1947); *Dilhīmaṅ Gāndhījī*, vol. I, Navjivan, Amdāvād, 1964 (the diary between 9 September and 30 November 1947); *Dilhīmaṅ Gāndhījī*, vol. II, Navjivan, Amdāvād, 1966 (the diary between 1 December 1947 and 30 January 1948).

<sup>29</sup> 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 plentitudinous 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 Rājendra'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-)Sāṅkhyan 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' (*anokhum*<sup>30</sup>*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

<sup>30</sup> The Gujarati word *anokhum* has meanings of 'unique', 'altogether different', 'uncommon', and 'extraordinary', as well as 'not separate' and 'joint'. G. Deśpād (ed.), *Gujarātī-Aṅgrejī Kōś*, Yunivarsiṭī Granthnirmāṇ Borḍ, Gujarāt Rājya, Āmdāvād, 2002, p. 37.

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 ‘Sanātānī Hindū’ thought, more often than not, the English translation barely conveys the full intended meanings of the Gujarati original texts.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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

<sup>31</sup> 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 Gujarātō no Gengo, Bungaku’, *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2009, pp. 177–94.

<sup>32</sup> 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.).

<sup>33</sup> 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,<sup>34</sup> entitled *An Autobiography: My Experiments with Truth*<sup>35</sup> (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 (*puruṣārth*) of his life; he outlines what religious efforts are required to achieve 'seeing/sight/vision/worship/realization' ('*darśan*') of the 'glimpse' ('*jhāṅkhi*') of what he calls variously 'independent/autonomous, eternal Truth' ('*svatantr, cirsthāyī satya*'), 'supreme God' ('*parmeśvar*'), 'pure Truth' ('*viśuddh satya*'), 'supreme God as Truth' ('*satyarūpī parmeśvar*'), and 'God of Truth' ('*satyanārāyan*') (hereafter, I will collectively call these 'Truth/God'). In other words, Gandhi elaborates on how the pursuit (*śodh*) of his Truth/God can be aided by 'gross truth' ('*sthūl satya*'), 'vocal truth' ('*vācāvuṃ satya*'), and 'imagined truth' ('*kalpeluṃ satya, kalpanik satya*'); these are 'voice (*vācā*)-like' and 'thought (*vicār*)-like' truths.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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).

<sup>34</sup> From which Chapters 29–43 of Part V were translated by Pyarelal Nayar.

<sup>35</sup> The words '*An Autobiography*' do not appear in the title of the first edition (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*). They were added beginning with the second edition, published in 1940.

<sup>36</sup> In *AB*, these various rich expressions are conflated into the terms 'relative truth' and 'absolute truth'.

<sup>37</sup> *AK*, p. 7.

along with *buddhi*, Gandhi here refers to *ātmā*<sup>38</sup> and, elsewhere, he often remarked that, where *buddhi* could not reach, the ‘faith’ (*śraddhā*) in *ātmā* would be imperative.<sup>39</sup> 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 ‘Pūrṇāhuti’ section.<sup>40</sup> 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’.<sup>41</sup> More importantly, while the former was theologically based upon the ‘ontological dualism’ between

<sup>38</sup> In *AB*, the related part was translated into the words ‘my reason and my heart’ (*AB*, p. 6).

<sup>39</sup> For example, in 1932, Gandhi stated: ‘Our own *jīva* 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.), *Mahādevbhāīnī Dāyirī*, vol. I, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1948, p. 137.

<sup>40</sup> In counting these words, I included compounds such as *mahātmā*, *ātmadarśan*, *ātmanirikṣan*, *antarātmā*, *ātmāsuddhi*, and *āsuddhātmā*.

<sup>41</sup> B. Parekh, *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 ontological aspects of human events. *Satyāgraha* or the force of *ātma* (*ātmabala*) cannot be regarded as a historical object, but can only be observed from the perspective of *ithihās* (literally meaning ‘it so happened’ according to Gandhi’s explanation). See M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Svarāj*, Navjīvan, Amdāvād, 1979, pp. 183–5.

an individual and transcendent ‘God’,<sup>42</sup> 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’.<sup>43</sup>

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’ (*‘jāṇvānī vastu’*).<sup>44</sup> 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’.<sup>45</sup> The *ātmā* (*paramātmā*) as Truth/God was *something* or *someone* whose ‘glimpse’ (*‘jhāṅkhi’*) 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’.<sup>46</sup>

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*)<sup>47</sup>; religion (*dharm*) means ethics (*nīti*); ethics observed from the perspective of *ātmā*, it is religion (*ātmānī dṛṣṭe pālelī nīti te dharm*).<sup>48</sup>

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

<sup>42</sup> Parekh, ‘Gandhi and his translators’, p. 165.

<sup>43</sup> Parekh, *Gandhi’s Political Philosophy*, p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> In 1932, Gandhi stated that ‘*ātmā* or God (*Īśvar*) is not the object of knowledge (*jāṇvānī vastu*). He himself is the knower (*jāṇnār*)’ (Parekh, *Mahādevbhāimī Dāyri*, p. 137). Also see *Harijanbandhu*, 18 August 1946.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, p. 175.

<sup>47</sup> Gandhi used both ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ as English equivalents to the Gujarati word *nīti*. 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 *nīti* as ‘ethics’.

<sup>48</sup> *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.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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*—intrinsicly 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.<sup>51</sup> 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

<sup>49</sup> *AB*, p. 5, underlined segment in the original omitted here.

<sup>50</sup> This point has not been discussed by either Bhikhu Parekh or Tridip Suvrud.

<sup>51</sup> 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. 483). 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*.

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 Yarrowda 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 (*dharm*) is a quality of *ātmā* (*ātmāno guṇ*) and is present in visible (*dṛśya*) or invisible (*adṛśya*) form in [all] humankind. Through religion, we can know the duty of human life (*manuṣyajīvanam kartavya*). Through religion, we can know our true relation with others. It is apparent that all these things will continue until we know/identify ourselves (*potāne ... oḷakhīe*). Thus, religion is the means (*sādhan*) by which we know/identify ourselves.<sup>52</sup>

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

<sup>52</sup> *GA*, vol. 32, p. 8.

various books on Indian philosophies, including Rājendra's own book, *Mokṣamālā* (1884).<sup>53</sup> In these letters, Rājendra emphasized the essential role of *ātmā* in his own Jain metaphysics. Gandhi's first letter to Rājendra enclosed 27 questions about the essence of religion; his first question was 'What is *ātmā*?' (*Ātmā śum che?*). Rājendra's answer to this question was the longest of all his answers in the first letter, and Rājendra's view of the essence of *ātmā* or *jīva* was repeatedly articulated throughout his first letter as well as his subsequent letters.<sup>54</sup> In later days, Gandhi explained several times that his interaction with Rājendra, who devoted his life to the attainment of *ātmadarśan*, had been one of the largest religious influences on his life.<sup>55</sup> 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 Rājendra's thought (*dayādharma* 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.<sup>56</sup> 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

<sup>53</sup> Śrīmad Rājendra Ravjībhaī, *Mokṣamālā*, Śrīmad Rājendra Āśram, Agās, 2010. See AK, part 2, chap. 15; J. T. F. Jordens, *Gandhi's Religion: A Homespun Shawl*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998, pp. 47–60; Parel, *Gandhi's Philosophy*, pp. 14–17; Skaria, 'No politics without religion', pp. 177–80. Also see my forthcoming article, 'Brahmacarya as romance? Some unknown "traditional" origins of Gandhi's religious politics', in *Gandhi in a Globalized World*, V. Lal and I. Perczel (eds), Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

<sup>54</sup> M. Kalārthī (ed.), *Śrīmad Rājendra ane Gāndhījī*, Gujarāt Vidyāpīṭh, Amdāvād, 2000, pp. 93–126. Rājendra uses various philosophical expressions containing *ātmā*, such as *ātmajñān* (ibid., p. 97, pp. 109–10), (*ātma*)*darśan* (ibid., p. 97), *ātmavapaṇ* (ibid., p. 97), *ātmānā aīśvarya* (ibid., p. 106), *ātmavicār* (ibid., p. 114), *ātmārthī* (ibid., p. 115), *ātmavarūp* (ibid., p. 125), and so on.

<sup>55</sup> GA, vol. 3, p. 218; vol. 9, pp. 290–1; vol. 13, pp. 135, 271–4, 282–3; vol. 25, p. 340; vol. 32, pp. 1–9; vol. 37, pp. 246–52; vol. 43, p. 111; AK, part 2, chap. 1 and 15.

<sup>56</sup> Even during Gandhi's South African period, there were some crucial differences between Gandhi's and Rājendra's thought. See my forthcoming article, 'Brahmacarya as romance?'

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 *brahmacārī* who can give a perfect definition.'<sup>57</sup>

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* (*Brahme*) *oḷakhvāno mārg*). Therefore, the abstinence of all sensory organs (*indriyono nigrāh*) primarily means to renounce (*tyāg*) indulging in sensory pleasure (*viśaybhog*) from speech (*vācā*) and body (*kāyā*) for [both] woman or [and] man.<sup>58</sup>

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 (*mahāprayatn*) 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 brahmāṇḍ*).<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *GA*, vol. 26, p. 402.

<sup>58</sup> *GA*, vol. 30, p. 229, parentheses for 'Brahm' in the original.

<sup>59</sup> *GA*, vol. 31, p. 167.

<sup>60</sup> *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 (*śakti*) 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 (*śakti*) of *ātmā* (hereafter, I will call this *ātma-śakti*).<sup>61</sup>

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'.<sup>62</sup> This new perspective towards women was primarily based upon his belief in mystical femininity; Gandhi believed that 'woman is the incarnation of ahimsa'.<sup>63</sup> 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'.<sup>64</sup> Gandhi harshly criticized the secluded kind of *brahmacarya*, which prohibits the cultivation of the natural relationship between men and women.<sup>65</sup>

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* (*Brahmacaryani*

<sup>61</sup> Gandhi used various expressions, such as *divya śakti*, *mahā śakti*, *amogh śakti*, *sarv śakti*, and *vīryaśakti*. Gandhi most explicitly defines his ideas on *ātma-śakti* in the third article of the five series on *brahmacarya* ('Īśvar kyāṃ ne koṇ?') published in the *Harijanbandhu* of 22 June 1947: 'As a matter of fact, God (*Īśvar*) is *śakti*, is *tattva*; it is pure consciousness (*śuddh caitanya*), is all-pervading (*sarvavyāpak*) . . . . There is the great *śakti* (*mahā śakti*) we call God (*Īśvar*), which has its laws of usage; but it is quite clear that in order to find such laws, we have to work much harder. The name of such law [expressed] in one word is *brahmacarya*.'

<sup>62</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 87, p. 108.

<sup>63</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 71, p. 208.

<sup>64</sup> Pyarelal, 'Brahmacharya', p. 578, emphasis in original.

<sup>65</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 67, pp. 194–8.

vāḍ)’, 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 *brahmacārī* should not stay among the population/settlement of women, animals, [and] impotents (*napuṃsako*); [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 *brahmacārī*, but] I also think that the one who is striving to become a *brahmacārī* (*prayatnśīl brahmacārī*) 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 *brahmacārī*.<sup>66</sup>

These restrictions are also described as ‘certain rules laid down in India’ in *Harijan*<sup>67</sup> and Gandhi elsewhere criticized them as ‘the orthodox conception of the ninefold wall’.<sup>68</sup> 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 *Mokṣamālā*—the seminal work written by Rājendra. 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 Rājendra’s words anonymously. The original material can be found in lesson 69 of *Mokṣamālā*, entitled ‘Nine fences of *brahmacarya* (*Brahmacaryanī nav vāḍ*)’, in which Rājendra enumerates the fences as follows:

These nine fences are properly described here.

1. *Vasti* (‘Population’): A *brahmacārī sādhu* 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 (*dharmopades*) to a group of only women or a single woman. [. . .]

<sup>66</sup> ‘Brahmacarya vāḍ’ in the *Harijanbandhu* of 15 June 1947, numbers and emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 88, p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> Pyarelal, ‘Brahmacharya’, pp. 588, 599–600.

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. *Indriyanirīkṣaṇ* ('Sensory-Introspection'): A *brahmacārī sādhu* should not see any part of women's bodies. [...]
7. *Praṇīt* ('Composition'): Do not by and large take any sweet-tasting and oily substances like milk, curd, [and] ghee. The semen is increased (*vīryanī vṛddhi*) and madness (*unmād*) is generated by them, and sexual desire (*kām*) is aroused by them. [...]
9. *Vibhūṣaṇ* ('Decoration'): A *brahmacārī* should not take/have a bath, a[n] [oil-]coating, a flower, and so on.<sup>69</sup> [Numbers original; underlining added]

Gandhi directly reflects six of Rājendra's 'nine fences' presented here, in the same order as Rājendra, skipping only the fifth, sixth, and eighth fences, where Rājendra 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).<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it seems that Gandhi cited Rājendra's concept of *brahmacarya*, 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, *brahmacarya* meant 'the controlling of mind (*manne vaś*)': he insisted that 'pure *brahmacarya* (*śuddh brahmacarya*)' was possible for a person whose sensory organs were completely oriented to *ātmā*, regardless of whether that person actively associated with women.<sup>71</sup>

### *The influences of 'modern thought'*

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

Veena Howard's recent work points out that Gandhi's *brahmacarya* by no means involved seclusion, but is instead best seen as an 'ascetic

<sup>69</sup> Rājendra, *Mokṣamālā*, pp. 185–7.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> For example, see 'Brahmacarya vād' in the *Harījanbandhu* of 15 June 1947; 'Īśvar kyāṃ ne koṇ?' in the *Harījanbandhu* of 22 June 1947; and 'Ek mūñjhvaṇ' in the *Harījanbandhu* of 6 July 1947.

activism' integrating two opposed attempts, at 'spiritual freedom (*nivr̥tti*)' and 'worldly engagement (*prav̥rtti*)', respectively.<sup>72</sup> Howard expounds *in extenso* on this original aspect of Gandhi's *brahmacarya* in relation to its Hindu 'traditional roots'.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, some other scholarly works on Gandhi's *brahmacarya* also emphasize the traditional mythology of *erotic* interactions between Kṛṣṇa and Gopis illustrated in Purāṇik texts such as *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and *Gīta Govinda*.<sup>74</sup> 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 *brahmacarya* 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'<sup>75</sup>; it was held in Bihar just 12 days after Gandhi and Manu left Noakhali, where the memorable initial phase of the *yajña* 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',<sup>76</sup> 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 *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.<sup>77</sup>

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 *Shakti and Shākta*<sup>78</sup> (1918; hereafter

<sup>72</sup> Howard, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81–122.

<sup>74</sup> Lal, 'Nakedness, nonviolence, and Brahmacharya', pp. 130–3; Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 202–6, 225–7; Howard, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism*, p. 159.

<sup>75</sup> Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Pyarelal, 'Brahmacharya', p. 588.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 589. Also see *CWVG*, vol. 87, p. 91, emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> I use the second edition of the work in this article. J. Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shākta: Essays and Addresses on the Shākta Tantrashāstra* [SS], Luzac, London, 1920.

SS) from 23 to 30 December 1923, during the incarceration period in Yarovā Jail.<sup>79</sup> 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 *śakti*; (2) the way of arousing (*kuṇḍalīnī*) *śakti* or the concept of *ūrdhvaṛetā*.

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 framework<sup>80</sup> of 'ātmā', 'Paramātmā', or 'Jīvātmā' in SS. In stark opposition to the prevalent colonial discourse on the superiority of the hyper-masculinity,<sup>81</sup> *śakti* worship requires a female or androgynous principle of 'Shakti' or 'Shiva-Shakti' as the means for *śāktas* 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 *ardhanārīśvar*, he also began to make references to the attainment of the idealistic condition of 'impotency' ('*napuṃsaktva*'), in which the 'distinction between man and woman' is completely eradicated.<sup>82</sup>

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

<sup>79</sup> GA, vo. 23, p. 177.

<sup>80</sup> See my footnote 94.

<sup>81</sup> See A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 48–54.

<sup>82</sup> See in particular GA, vol. 77, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> SS, pp. 403–29.

<sup>84</sup> J. Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power: Being the Shat-Chakra-Nirūpana and Pādukā-Panchaka: Two Works on Tantrik Yoga*, Luzac, London, 1919.

<sup>85</sup> See my footnote 86. In chapter six, 'Practice (Yoga: Laya-Krama)' (ibid., pp. 196–264), Woodroffe gives a detailed account of the meaning of *ūrdhvaṛetā*: '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 *vīryaṇuṃ parivartan*) into the celestial spiritual energy of *ātma-śakti*.<sup>86</sup>

Vīrya [semen] is controlled, and the force which under the influence of sexual desire develops into gross seed is made to flow upwards (Ūrdhvaretas), 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 *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* and *Yogatattva Upaniṣad*. He points out that the latter text especially 'shows the connection between semen, mind, and life', and continues: '[i]n the early stages of Haṭhayoga 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.

<sup>86</sup>'Secret/intimate chapter (Guhya prakaraṇ)' in 'General knowledge about health (*Ārogya viśe 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 (*Ārogyaṇī cāvī*)'), the concept was replaced with the term *ūrdhvaretā* (*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*, *viśay*, *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 expounds on this theme partly in relation to the *kuṇḍalinī 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 *viśaybhog* 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 mūñjhvaṇ' 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<sup>87</sup> 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?<sup>88</sup>

By carefully looking into the *peculiarity* of Woodroffe’s tantric thought,<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> Besides, as Urban also points out, Woodroffe’s tantric scholarship was largely derived from his intensive study of *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*,<sup>91</sup> the work that Woodroffe called ‘woman’s *śāstra*’.<sup>92</sup> 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<sup>93</sup>; (2) the metaphysical framework of *śakti* worship is utterly complimentary to (neo-)Vedāntic theories<sup>94</sup>;

<sup>87</sup> Gandhi’s views on embodied sexuality requires further intensive examinations. See my footnotes 86 and 96.

<sup>88</sup> H. B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2010, p. 134.

<sup>89</sup> 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.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135–47.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142–3.

<sup>92</sup> *SS*, p. 329.

<sup>93</sup> ‘In comparison to most other Śākta texts, which depict the goddess as a horrifying, violent power, the image of Kālī 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.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Unlike most Bengali *tantras*’, S. C. Banerji argues, ‘the *Mahānirvāṇa* identifies the supreme reality not with the goddess Śakti or Kālī, 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 Śāstra

(3) and the ritual sexual interaction (the ‘*maithuna*’ of the five M’s<sup>95</sup>) is primarily interpreted in the mental and spiritual planes.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, Gandhi may have found no objection to reading Woodroffe’s works, and in fact the latter’s works seem to have enabled the former’s radical new interpretation of *brahmacarya*.

In the previous scholarship on Gandhi’s *brahmacarya*, represented by Veena Howard’s work, its unique aspects have been much studied in relation to the Hindu ‘traditional roots’. However, these arguments disregard the fact that some of these traditional roots of *brahmacarya* were, indeed, mediated by modern Western thinkers—in other words, reimported to Gandhi via the West.

Any comprehensive study of Gandhi’s Hinduism must patiently engage with the complexity and multi-layeredness of the ‘influences’<sup>97</sup> on Gandhi, and their interrelations with each other, while avoiding being too fixated on existing theoretical frameworks.<sup>98</sup>

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*.

<sup>95</sup> The ‘M’s’ stand for the initial letters of the *pañcatattva* (five substances) utilized for the tantric ritual in either symbolic or actual way: *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *madya* (wine), *mudrā* (parched grain), and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse).

<sup>96</sup> Urban, *Tantra*, p. 142. Woodroffe, for instance, explains that ‘the names of *pañcatattava* are used symbolically for operations of a purely mental and spiritual character’. *Tantra of the Great Liberation: Mahānirvāna Tantra*, translated by Arthur Avalon, Dover, New York, 1972, p. cxix. Also see ‘Panchatattava (the secret ritual)’, in *SS*, pp. 325–77. However, in this respect, the ideas behind Gandhi’s experiments with *brahmacarya* 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 *mahāyājñā*, 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 *brahmacarya*. In this respect, also see my footnotes 86 and 98, and my forthcoming article, ‘*Brahmacarya* as romance?’.

<sup>97</sup> 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?’.

<sup>98</sup> 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’ guru—

*Ātmā and individuality*

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.<sup>99</sup> 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' (*preṛṇā*) that suddenly occurred around midnight of 30 April, while he was awake.<sup>100</sup> He made it plain that the inspiration came in the form of a human voice: 'The voice was exactly like some person (*manuṣya*) was saying something to us, and was certain.'<sup>101</sup> During the fast, Gandhi never advocated for the abandonment of untouchability from a political perspective, but strived instead to achieve 'purification of *ātmā*' (*ātmāsuddhi*) in order to spontaneously bring about a conversion in people's minds.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup> 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 Bhaṭṭācārya. 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.

<sup>99</sup> The longest among his total of 17 fasts in India. He also conducted 21-day fasts in 1924 and 1943.

<sup>100</sup> Gandhi described his experience as 'exceptional' (*asādhāraṇa*) (*GA*, vol. 55, p. 249) and referred to it repeatedly in his later years (*GA*, vol. 67, p. 75; vol. 68, p. 172).

<sup>101</sup> *GA*, vol. 55, pp. 249, 73–4.

<sup>102</sup> *GA*, vol. 55, p. 258; D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, vol. III, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 190–7.

<sup>103</sup> 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’ (*‘sāmudāyik savinaybhāṅg’*) to ‘individual *satyāgraha*’ (*‘vyaktigat satyāgraha’*). Moreover, on 30 April 1935, Gandhi, who sought to live and work ‘in solitude’, established the Sevāgrām Āśram at Warda<sup>104</sup>; in contrast to the Satyāgraha Āśram, meant to train national servants, the former was intended ‘to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization [*ātmadarśan*]’.<sup>105</sup>

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’ (*‘anokhuṃ 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 Noākhālī *yajña*.

### *The notes for Surendranāth*

Gandhi often corresponded with Surendranāth on various religious issues, such as *āsan* exercise,<sup>106</sup> *mokṣ*,<sup>107</sup> *dharm*, and *adharm*,<sup>108</sup> and so on. From 1932 onwards, they also began to discuss issues pertaining to *brahmacarya* and *ātmā*.<sup>109</sup> 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.

<sup>104</sup> D. G. Tendulkar, *Gandhiji, His Life and Work*, Karnatak, Bombay, 1944, p. 248.

<sup>105</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 63, p. 240.

<sup>106</sup> *GA*, vol. 34, p. 66.

<sup>107</sup> *GA*, vol. 35, p. 30.

<sup>108</sup> *GA*, vol. 38, p. 121.

<sup>109</sup> *GA*, vol. 49, pp. 248–9, 304–6.

to Surendranāth elaborating on *ātmā* in the context of Sāṅkhya philosophy.<sup>110</sup> 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 *guṇ* (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.<sup>111</sup>

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") *guṇ* of *ātmā*' in relation to 'the *guṇ* of a *vyakti*':

The *sahaj guṇ* of *ātmā* is, indeed, the *guṇ* of a *vyakti*. The *vyakti* which has ultimate peace (*parm śānti*) is *sātvik*. The *vyakti* which has the worst turbulence (*sabse adhik aśānti*) is called *rājasī* or *vāsnāmyī* (passionate) nature. And the *vyakti* which has neither of these *guṇ*s and is ignorant (*ajñān*) is of 'tāmasī' nature, which represents darkness (*andhakār*) or ignorance (*ajñān*).<sup>112</sup>

Gandhi notes here that the '*sahaj guṇ* of *ātmā*' substantially reflects the nature of the '*guṇ* of a *vyakti*'.<sup>113</sup> He further argues that the '*guṇ* of a *vyakti*' can be divided into three basic components: *sātvik*, *rājasī*, and *tāmasī*. The one whose *guṇ* 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',<sup>114</sup> 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

<sup>110</sup> Gāndhī, *Bihār pachī Dilhī*, p. 249.

<sup>111</sup> 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.

<sup>112</sup> *SGV*, vol. 95, p. 259.

<sup>113</sup> We should note that Gandhi by no means states here that the '*guṇ* of *ātmā*' is equivalent to the '*guṇ* of a *vyakti*'. Instead, he carefully adds the word '*sahaj*' before '*guṇ* of *ātmā*'.

<sup>114</sup> M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Nataraj Books, Springfield, Virginia, 2014, p. 1029.

mental faculties (*antaḥkaraṇa*) 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 Sāṅkhyan metaphysics, with the exception of *puruṣa* (or (*param*)*ātman* in *Vedānta*), everything else, including internal mental faculties, are regarded as 'objects' (*dṛśya*). Therefore, the 'subjectivity' (*draṣṭṛ*) 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 guṇ* of *ātmā*' and 'the *guṇ* of a *vyakti*', Gandhi further expounds on his concept of *brahmacarya*: 'The body (*śarīr*) certainly can achieve perfect *brahmacarya* (*pūrṇ brahmacarya*) as well as perfect truth (*pūrṇ satya*). But, there will be some violence/killing (*hiṃsā*) in actions such as breathing (*sāms*). The perfect liberation (*mukti*) from this cannot be attainable.'<sup>115</sup> 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 *ātmā* (*ātma-nirīkṣaṇ*)', seen as a useful means for the 'assurance of *ātmā*': 'The meaning of the introspection of *ātmā* (*ātma-nirīkṣaṇ*) is the continuous assurance (*satat pratīti*) of *ātmā*, and so on.'<sup>116</sup>

After considering the 'perfect *brahmacarya*' and the meaning of 'introspection of *ātmā*', Gandhi's argument goes on to deal with the 'perfect knowledge' of *ātmā* and *sthitprajña*:

Being omniscient (*sarvajña*) means [obtaining] perfect knowledge (*pūrṇ jñān*) of *ātmā*. Liberation (*mukti*) means complete detachment (*pūrṇ anāsakti*) from worldly affairs (*sāṃsārik māmlom*). Being *sthitprajña* means to stay imperturbable (*avicalit*) from pleasure/happiness (*sukh*) and suffering (*dukh*), [to maintain] non-possession (*aparigrah*), impartiality (*taṭasthatā*), the relief

<sup>115</sup> *SGV*, vol. 95, p. 260.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

(*chukṭkāra*) from the feeling of being or non-being (*hone athvā na hone kī bhāvanā*), the state of nothingness (*sūnya kī sthiti*), the liberation (*mukti*).<sup>117</sup>

It is particularly noteworthy here that the attainment of ‘*sthitiprajñā*’ 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 (*nivārth*) means the abandonment (*parityāg*) of his selfishness/self-interest (*svārth*). If we eliminate ‘self’ (*sva*), we become selfless (*nivārth*). Suffering/being sad (*dukhī*) while seeing suffering of the world (*saṃsār ke dukh*) means continuing [our] service-work (*sevā-kārya*) without wish for rewards (*pariṇām kī icchā*). [It is the condition in which we] renounce (*tyāg*) the illusion of the world (*saṃsār kā moh*) for the sake of *ātmā*.<sup>118</sup>

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/being 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 *guṇ* 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).

### *The Noākhālī Mahāyajña*

During the 1940s, the idea of individuality (*vyaktitva*) was pursued in the most radical manner in Gandhi’s last experiments with

<sup>117</sup> *SGV*, vol. 95, p. 260.

<sup>118</sup> *SGV*, vol. 95, pp. 260–261.

*brahmacharya*, 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.<sup>119</sup> 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.<sup>120</sup> In a related point, one distinctive aspect of the Noākhālī *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: Gāndhījīnī Noākhālīnī Dharmayātrānī Ḍāyri*<sup>121</sup> (*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.

<sup>119</sup> Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*; Pyarelal, ‘Brahmacharya’.

<sup>120</sup> V. R. Howard, ‘Rethinking Gandhi’s celibacy: ascetic power and women’s empowerment’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2013, pp. 155–6.

<sup>121</sup> 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.<sup>122</sup> 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 (*sampūrṇ śraddhā*) and trust (*viśvās*) in you.'<sup>123</sup>

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 (*pāy(o)*) for your life-formation (*jīvanghaḍtar*)'.<sup>124</sup> He also defined *brahmacarya*: '... to observe *brahmacarya* means to be *nirvikār* (detached from sexual desire/passion).'<sup>125</sup> At the end of the talk, Gandhi told Manu that '[a]lthough [I am a] male (*puruṣ*), I have become your mother/*mā* (*mā*)'.<sup>126</sup>

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 (Temṇe vātsalyabharyā hathe mane paṃpālī)*. I could not exactly recall when I had fallen asleep.<sup>127</sup>

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

<sup>122</sup> *GNDD*, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79, emphasis added.

as ‘instrument[s]’ in his experiments—experiments that are taken to reflect Gandhi’s unconscious psychological ‘repression’.<sup>128</sup> 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*.<sup>129</sup> Manu said that, notwithstanding Gandhi’s bodily caresses, she quickly fell asleep.<sup>130</sup>

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 (*meluṃ*). If [there is] just a little dirt in Manu, she’ll end up with adverse outcomes.’<sup>131</sup> 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 paurāṇik yajña*).<sup>132</sup>

On 20 December, in a conversation with Jayasukhal, Gandhi remarked that ‘[m]y strong wish (*prabala icchā*) is to bring into light the hidden *guṇs* (*chūpā guṇo*) in the girl [Manu] that I have been noticing’.<sup>133</sup> 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 ādarś*), only then I can gain the satisfaction of *ātmā* (*ātmasantos*) to serve the daughters of the whole world (*ākhā jagat*)!<sup>134</sup>

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 *tapāścaryā* and ‘love’. He saw these as necessary elements for communal

<sup>128</sup> Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, p. 151.

<sup>129</sup> *GNDD*, p. 64, 76, 109, pp. 131–2, 134–5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

reconciliation: ‘This *yajña* is unique (*anokho*).<sup>135</sup> I am here doing *tapāścaryā* to cultivate brotherhood (*bhāicāro*) to appease [people] by love (*prem*).<sup>136</sup> Gandhi did not view the concept of *tapāścaryā* as an abstract metaphor; rather, he believed that the power of *tapāścaryā* was *substantially* effective in the communal riots.<sup>137</sup> Etymologically, the word *tapas* 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.<sup>138</sup> 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’.<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, these effects of *tapāścaryā* produced in the *yajña* were also explained by Gandhi in relation to the ‘science of mind’ (*‘mannuṃ vijñān’*), as compared with ‘micro science’ (*‘sūkṣm vijñān’*).<sup>140</sup> Manu summarizes the ‘science of mind’ as she learnt it from Gandhi as follows:

Bāpujī 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 vātāvaraṇ*), 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 Bāpujī thinks that each person in the country is more important [responsible].<sup>141</sup>

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 *tapāścaryā*.

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 vātāvaraṇ*) of the person. Even if a person does not speak, what personal quality he/she possesses is

<sup>135</sup> See my footnote 30.

<sup>136</sup> *GNDD*, p. 162.

<sup>137</sup> Gandhi later remarked on the *ātma-śakti* as follows: ‘When the *śakti* of *ātmā* (*ātmānī śakti*) awakes, when it rises (*uday pāme che*), it obtains a victory in the secular world (*duniyā*)’. Gāndhī, *Bihārī Komī Āgamām*, p. 217.

<sup>138</sup> See W. O. Kaelber, ‘Tapas, birth, and spiritual rebirth in the Veda’, *History of Religions*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1976, pp. 343–86.

<sup>139</sup> Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, p. 101.

<sup>140</sup> *GNDD*, p. 49.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

recognized by the habits of sleeping, eating, and behaving.’<sup>142</sup> Thus, to Gandhi, ‘the one who knows and acts accordingly is the true knower (*sāco jñānī*)’.<sup>143</sup> 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 (*śuddh bhāvanā*)—heart (*hrday*). [This is] what I have been trying to do. I believe that this is an integral part (*avibhājya aṅg*) of the *yajña*.<sup>144</sup>

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-santoṣ*), a person has to tolerate whatever denunciation (*phītakār*) and suffering (*duḥkh*) 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.<sup>145</sup>

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 (*humpanuṃ*), my-ness (*mārāpanuṃ*). 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*

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

*che*). For him/her pleasure/happiness and suffering (*sukh-duḥkh*) are one and the same (*sarkhām j che*).<sup>146</sup>

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 (*saṅkar 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.<sup>147</sup>

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 vacnāmṛto’*),<sup>148</sup> 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’.<sup>149</sup> 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’ (*‘sādhvī strī’*) and one who treated others equally regardless of their genders.<sup>150</sup> 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*).’<sup>151</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 155–7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>151</sup> 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 (*dharmasāstro*)’.<sup>152</sup> Manu also explained that these maxims could be applicable to ‘all humanity (*manusya-mātr*; all those who are humans)’.<sup>153</sup> Gandhi further says ‘if we can follow and meditate upon them, then today we can hail ourselves as the “best” people (*prajā*) in the secular world (*duniyā*)’.<sup>154</sup>

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, *sthitprajña*, 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 *brahmacarya* 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

<sup>152</sup> *GNDD*, p. 157.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>154</sup> *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.<sup>155</sup> 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.<sup>156</sup> 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.*<sup>157</sup>

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.<sup>158</sup> 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

<sup>155</sup> 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).

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

<sup>157</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 85, p. 328, emphasis added.

<sup>158</sup> Chandra, 'Gandhiji', p. 11; Skaria, 'No politics without religion', p. 174.

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.*<sup>159</sup>

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 *brahmacharya*. In one of the articles, which I have discussed in the previous section, 'The fence of *brahmacharya*', Gandhi remarked that 'ultimately, *brahmacharya* is a mental condition' and that 'an outward conduct is the identification (*olakh*) of [his/her mental] condition (*sthiti*), [and] its sign (*niśāntī*)'. All these statements on the experiments with *brahmacharya* 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 (*sāadhan*) by which I can present before the world (*samsār*) that if people develop motherly perspective (*mātr̥dṛṣṭi*) in their mind, the emancipation (*uddhār*) of humanity (*mānavjāt*) may take place.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>159</sup> CWMG, vol. 85, p. 328, emphasis added.

<sup>160</sup> Gāndhī, *Bihār pachī Dilhī*, p. 371.

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.*<sup>161</sup>

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.<sup>162</sup> 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’ (*ādhunik sudhār*).

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 (*nijī dharm*) or individual religion (*vyaktigat dharm*). Any force (*tākat*) in the secular world (*duniyā*) cannot destroy this religion. . . . But the person who is steadfast in holding the religion will only listen to the command of God (*Īśvar kā ādeś*), no one else.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>161</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 88, p. 421, emphasis added.

<sup>162</sup> *CWMG*, vo. 89, pp. 51–2; Gāndhī, *Kalkattāno Camatkār*, pp. 36–7.

<sup>163</sup> *SGV*, vol. 90, p. 26.

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.<sup>164</sup> Theocratic ‘compulsion’ (*jabarjastī*) 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 (*jabarjastī*) in religion.<sup>165</sup>

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*.<sup>166</sup>

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.

<sup>164</sup> See my footnotes 39 and 44.

<sup>165</sup> Gāndhī, *Dilhīmaṃ Gāndhījī*, vol. I, p. 276.

<sup>166</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 89, p. 143, emphasis added.

Given these considerations, Gandhi intended to *exemplify*<sup>167</sup> 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 [*ātmaśuddhi*], much more than is required in facing death, without a thought of retaliation’.<sup>168</sup> 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.<sup>169</sup>

During Gandhi’s very last fast<sup>170</sup> 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*).<sup>171</sup>

[17 January 1948] From any angle, my fast (*upavās*) should never be understood as political (*rājnaitik*). It should be understood in the response to the compelling voice (*jabardast āvāj*) of inner *ātmā* (*antarātmā*). After suffering great torment (*mahāyātnā*), I have made a decision not to take food.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>167</sup> 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.

<sup>168</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 85, p. 481. See also *GA*, vol. 31, p. 371; vol. 55, pp. 248–52; *CWMG*, vol. 90, pp. 202–3, 408–11; *Harijanbandhu*, 21 April 1946.

<sup>169</sup> 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).

<sup>170</sup> 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.

<sup>171</sup> *Gāndhī, Dilhīmaṃ Gāndhījī*, vol. II, p. 277.

<sup>172</sup> *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 (*sācḥuṃ*), then it will be one, as if the bodies (*śarīr*) are separated but the *ātmā* is one.<sup>173</sup>

[23 August 1947] If our hearts (*hṛday*) are one, then I say that Muslim brothers can worship the Mother Kālī (*Kālīmātā*) and Hindus can also freely go to Masjid.<sup>174</sup>

[24 August 1947] Everything happens when there is true unity (*kharī ektā*).<sup>175</sup>

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

But, if a person has dedicated everything to *Bhagvān*, why should he worry? Thus, I might be probably unfaithful (*aviśvāsī*) to God (*Īśvar*). If such a faith is there, [that is to say,] if I become a *sthītprajñā*, then I will dance (*nacḥuṃ*). But, my efforts continue.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Gāndhī, *Kalkattāno Camatkār*, p. 46.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.

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*')<sup>177</sup>; 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.'<sup>178</sup>

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.<sup>179</sup>

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:

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>179</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 89, pp. 56–7.

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*.<sup>180</sup>

Gandhi similarly expressed his idea of the ‘gifted personality’ (*‘pratibhāsālī vyakti’*) in conversation with Rajendra Prasad on 18 November 1947.<sup>181</sup> 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* (*sādhyā*) 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’<sup>182</sup> 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 *brahmacarya* 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 guṇ’*) 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.

<sup>180</sup> *CWMG*, vol. 90, p. 542, emphasis added.

<sup>181</sup> Gāndhī, *Dilhīnam Gāndhījī*, vol. I, p. 305.

<sup>182</sup> 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, *Dilhīmaṃ 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 *ātma darśan* [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 (*pravṛtti*) is carried out just from this perspective.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>183</sup> Gāndhī, *Dilhīmaṃ Gāndhījī*, vol. II, pp. 204–5. These words also appear in Pyarelal Nayal's *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1958, p. 697, without any reference. However, there is no equivalent word for '*ātma darśan*', 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.