Article

Sevā as a Postcapitalist Model for Environmental and Collective Well-Being in the Postsecular Age

Michal Erlich [1,*] **and Ricki Levi** [2]

1   Jindal India Institute, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat 131001, India
2   Jindal School of Environment and Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat 131001, India; rlevi@jgu.edu.in
*   Correspondence: michal.erlich@jgu.edu.in

Abstract: This paper analyzes the Hindu concept of *sevā*—selfless service—as a theo-ethical practice that reconfigures the relationship between religion and economy, offering a snapshot of an Indian perspective on the convergence between postsecularism and postcapitalist discourses. Rather than being reducible to acts of charity, *sevā* integrates spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions that challenge the neoliberal emphasis on individual self-interest and material accumulation. Rooted in the pursuit of liberation and relational well-being, *sevā* frames economic and moral agency in terms of embeddedness, reciprocity, and care. To illustrate *sevā*'s unique attributes, the paper engages with two case studies. The first explores Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, where *sevā* is articulated through a non-anthropocentric ethic of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), obliging the reconstruction of eco-economic mechanisms and environmental responsibility. The second examines contemporary guru-bhakti communities in Delhi's urban peripheries, where *sevā* functions as spiritual discipline (*sādhana*), a means for communal uplifting, and the expression of *kalyāṇ*—holistic well-being that transcends individual boundaries. In both contexts, *sevā* emerges as a practice that intervenes in and reshapes socio-economic life. By foregrounding *sevā* as a lived practice, the paper situates Indian religious traditions as a distinctive contribution to broader postcapitalist and postsecular debates. It argues that *sevā* offers an alternative model of personhood and ethical intentionality—one that contests dominant binaries of spiritual/material, secular/religious, and human/nature, and reimagines human flourishing through the lens of relational ontology and collective responsibility.

Keywords: Hinduism; religion sevā; postcapitalism; postsecularism; Mahatma Gandhi; Gandhian environmental thought; guru; guru-bhakti communities; kalyāṇ; ahiṃsā

1. Introduction

"Service (*sevā*) to man is service to God: One of the important principles Swami Vivekananda learned from his Master was 'Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva', 'to serve Jiva as Shiva'. Since man is potentially Divine, service to man is indeed service to God." (Belur Math)[1]

"Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in his creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service (*sevā*) of all". (Mohandas Gandhi 1936a, p. 240)

"The main objective of SEVA (Sustainable—agriculture & Environment Voluntary Action) is to empower marginalized communities through traditional knowledge, grassroots innovations, and conservation of agricultural biodiversity. SEVA intends promoting people's movement with Gandhian principles." (SEVA NGO)[2]

"In our culture, service is regarded as the highest virtue. 'Seva Paramo Dharma'— service is the supreme duty... Service holds a place even higher than devotion, faith, or worship... True service is selfless, devoid of personal gain or recognition." Narendra Modi[3]

These quotations reflect the wide resonance, popularity, and versatility of *sevā* in contemporary India. *Sevā* is a central principle in Indic philosophy and religious traditions, spanning various public spheres, such as politics, Hindu nationalism, social welfare, environmentalism, and diverse religious groups—from Hindus and Sikhs to Jains and Buddhists, and occasionally even Muslims.[4] The basic meaning of *sevā* is selfless service that is not directed toward personal reward.[5] In Sikhism, it can also carry the meaning "to worship, to adore, to pay homage through the act of love (Virdee 2005, p. 13)". Whether framed as a path to *mokṣa* (liberation), a civic duty, or a tool for ecological and social justice, *sevā* emerges as a unifying principle across a wide spectrum of actors and motivations.

Sevā is a unique concept as it is deeply rooted in religious spheres yet consistently and effortlessly flows into public, seemingly "secular" domains. It manifests in myriad ways: volunteering in health camps or participating in nationalist trainings of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist volunteer organization); feeding the poor in the *guru-parivār* ('guru-family', i.e., the guru-centered spiritual community); performing temple rituals; joining political campaigns; or cleaning the Ganga River during a middle-class yoga retreat in Rishikesh. It also encompasses caring for elders, protecting forests, producing food through sustainable methods and engaging in water-harvesting efforts—including collection, conservation, and irrigation initiatives. Because *sevā* is a concept that has accompanied Indic thought for over a millennium and is widely used across diverse contexts today, it carries multiple associations and manifestations, and at times appears so flexible that it risks losing cohesive meaning.

Yet we maintain that some of *sevā*'s core characteristics endure across these varied spheres: true *sevā* is an act in the world, directed toward others—humans, gods, or nature— as part of religious-spiritual practice, and it results in a form of collective well-being that transcends the limits of the individual. It is important to note that as with many religious concepts, *sevā* is not inherently positive or egalitarian. In certain nationalist contexts and uses, such as those shaped by RSS ideology, *sevā* can be framed within exclusionary visions of collective well-being, restricted to Hindus and the Hindu nation-state (S. Patel 2010; Beckerlegge 2003).[6] Sevā can also be manipulated within religious setups, serving as a tool for exploitation under charismatic but avaricious gurus who demand resources, loyalty, or labor under the guise of spiritual service (Warrier 2003; Lucia 2014; Srinivas 2008; Pandya 2015; Gooptu 2016; McKean 1996). And still, across all domains of usage, practitioners view *sevā* as a form of *sādhanā*—a means for spiritual progression (Bennett 1993; V. R. Patel 2012). In contemporary Hinduism, *sevā* emerges as a dominant practice for progressing toward religious and soteriological goals, cultivating *kalyān* (spiritual and worldly well-being), gaining spiritual merit (*puṇya*), and achieving *mokṣa*—freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). In the current theological epoch of Kali Yuga (the dark age), where *dharma*—the right moral action—is considered obscured or lost, *sevā*, rendered with devotion and without self-interest, becomes a central means of spiritual progression in contemporary India's public religious discourses.[7]

We further argue that the contemporary theory and practice of sevā are shaped by the modern capitalist ideal of the self-reliant, self-made individual, while simultaneously

undermining neoliberal values, offering a meaningful alternative to them. On the one hand, *sevā* is a self-effort that individuals undertake to achieve worldly and religious-spiritual well-being. In many contemporary settings, *sevā* serves as a tool for self-improvement and empowerment, drawing on values such as discipline, productivity, and personal responsibility—qualities often associated with neoliberal and capitalist frameworks (Warrier 2003; Lucia 2015). On the other hand, *sevā* is always performed toward others (beings or nature) and hence places the individual in ethical and caring relationships. In doing so, *sevā* challenges neoliberalism by rejecting mainstream capitalist assumptions about human nature, society, and the relationship with the natural world. The dominant neoliberal perspective emphasizes rationality and competition, promoting the maximization of self-interest—typically framed as individual choice—while often severing decisions from their social and ecological consequences. It also upholds a narrow metric of success: the accumulation of wealth and individual gain.

The paper shows that as a theo-ethical practice, *sevā* subverts neoliberal logics of individualism, greed, and economic rationality by reimagining the human not as *Homo Economicus* but as a relational, caring, and morally embedded being. *Sevā* promotes a holistic worldview in which well-being is not a standalone achievement, nor measured solely in material terms, but understood as a relational and ethical condition grounded in care, connection, and responsibility. Here, one's well-being is reflected in the capacity to offer *sevā*—to nature, to fellow devotees, and to those in need—and in one's embeddedness within networks of mutual support. Rather than isolating the individual as an economic unit, *sevā* fosters a sense of shared abundance and collective agency. It thus functions as a moral and disruptive force that challenges the neoliberal logics—logics that have harmed both marginalized communities and the environment—and offers a foundation for a more cooperative, compassionate, and postcapitalist social vision.

Moreover, we propose that *sevā* offers valuable insights into postsecularity, not merely as an example of religion's continued relevance in the public sphere or as a practice that fundamentally unsettles the binary between religious and secular domains. Rather, *sevā* emerges as a transformative force that reshapes the contours of public life, ethics, and collective responsibility. As a case study, the theory and practice of *sevā* throw light on the constructive role of religion in re-shaping and enriching domains typically regarded as "secular." It is an example to the ways in which religion—when engaged ethically—can enhance social solidarity, moral imagination, and civic engagement. As argued by Matthew Robinson (2023), religions share a fundamental social and existential drive that, through dialogue, can build shared values and strengthen social cohesion in pluralistic, postsecular societies.

The many historical and contemporary nuances of *sevā* across South Asia have been extensively explored in existing scholarship and fall beyond the scope of this paper.[8] Instead, we approach *sevā* through a postcapitalist lens, proposing it as both a theoretical framework and a lived alternative to dominant neoliberal values. To develop this argument, we examine the concept of *sevā* from both 'below'—through an ethnographic lens—and 'above'—through philosophical and theoretical reflection. We position *sevā* as a religious-secular concept and a theo-ethical praxis with postsecular characteristics, bearing economic, social, and soteriological significance for both individuals and broader society. The paper presents two case studies: the first situates *sevā* within the environmental dimensions of Gandhian philosophy, highlighting its role in ecological discourse and activism. The second explores the practice of *sevā* within the guru-bhakti tradition, focusing on its expression in hyperlocal urban communities in Delhi's impoverished peripheries. Together, these cases demonstrate how religious principles can shape a more equitable and sustainable public and private life. Before turning to them, we offer a brief theoretical discussion on

postsecularity in the Indian context and its relation to postcapitalism, followed by a short introduction to *sevā*.

2. India, *Sevā* and the Postsecular Condition: Beyond Western Dichotomies

2.1. India and Postsecularism

Postsecularism does not have a single definite definition. Perhaps the only definite thing that one can say is that it concerns the continuing presence of religion in the public sphere today. The prefix "post-" signifies either a condition, even disappointment, resulting from the decline of secularism or one that emerges after its initial establishment. At times, it seems that postsecularism is not much more than a "societal condition" in which religion persists and remains publicly relevant despite expectations of secularization. For example, Vikram Kapoor, drawing on Kyrlezhev (2008) and Hodkinson and Horstkotte (2020) explains that "from a postsecular perspective, the world cannot be divided into distinct religious and non-religious categories that are so intertwined that they become indistinguishable. In such a situation, multiple forms of secularism coexist with diverse expressions of religiosity, resulting in a significant departure from traditional religions (Kapoor 2025)". Robinson, quoted earlier, attempting to sort out the issue, explains that postsecularism highlights the ongoing presence and influence of religion in modern, pluralistic societies, not as a return to pre-secular times, but as a condition where religious and secular worldviews coexist, interact, and require mutual communication (Robinson 2023).

Often, postsecular discourse is more than descriptive; it constitutes a normative call for voluntary, open, and reciprocal engagement between diverse belief systems within the public (and secular) sphere. Drawing on and interpreting Jürgen Habermas work on postsecularism, Robinson argues that the postsecular condition demands a mutual learning process in which religious actors translate their moral intuitions into universally accessible language, while secular actors acknowledge the enduring ethical insights of religious traditions (Robinson 2023; Habermas 2008). He further draws on Friedrich Schleiermacher's concept of sociable communication to emphasize that such engagement must be mutual and self-legislated, aimed at co-constructing shared ethical understandings of human life (Robinson 2023). In this sense, the postsecular does not indicate a return to premodern religiosity but, as Robinson puts it, gestures toward new models of public reason—ones in which religious and secular actors become co-authors of the ethical and social order (Robinson 2023). This vision also resonates with Charles Taylor's concept of the "immanent frame" and José Casanova's emphasis on the continued public visibility of religion (Taylor 2007; Casanova 1994).

The criticism of postsecular discourse lies precisely in its underlying definitions: while it aims to transcend the religious–secular divide, it often remains entangled in that very binary, thereby reinforcing the (Eurocentric) segregation and polarization between the categories of "secular" and "religious" that it seeks to overcome. For example, Asad (2003) and Masuzawa (2005) state that religion itself is a category created by a colonial process, and as a result, secularism is, in fact, a continuation of Western hegemony. The postsecular call of Habermas to allow religions to participate in public discourse (Habermas 2008) has also led to criticism that the postsecular theory still accepts secularism as a central, supreme, and rational paradigm and, therefore, seeks to translate religion into secular language. Saba Mahmood argues that such Western perspectives overlook the ways in which non-Western religions operate beyond the framework of European Christianity. She emphasizes that in many Muslim contexts, religion functions not merely as a belief system but as a legal and cultural framework, and therefore cannot be separated from, or reintegrated into, the public sphere in the manner that Habermas suggests (Mahmood 2015). Moreover, the postsecular

discourse—particularly in its Habermasian form—focuses on rational and cooperative communication, yet pays insufficient attention to the emotional, cultural, and historical conditions that shape such dialogue (Robinson 2023).

In India, religion has always been part of the public sphere and has played a significant role in shaping social and political life (Verma 2017). As Verma notes, the notion that religion belongs solely to the private sphere is indefensible for those who understand religion as offering foundational and non-negotiable principles for structuring public order (Verma 2017). For over a decade, scholars have debated the relevance of the "postsecular age" to the Indian context. This discussion is often framed in terms of two *darśanas*, or perspectives. One argues that the concept of postsecularism is largely irrelevant to India, since the country was never fully "secular" to begin with, or remains in a pre-secular phase. Accordingly, the Western constructs of secularism and postsecularism have limited analytical value when applied to developing countries—including India (Vaddiraju 2024).

The second perspective contends that if the postsecular condition is defined by the coexistence of multiple forms of secularities and religiosities—enabling dynamic interplay between different conceptions of the sacred, both immanent and transcendent—then India has long exhibited postsecular characteristics, perhaps even since antiquity. Rajeev Bhargava, for example, points that since ancient times, India allowed coexistence of theistic and atheistic philosophies, enabling people to move between them. Religious pluralism, tolerance, and the integration of the sacred into political, ethical, and cultural domains have been enduring features of Indian public life (Bhargava 2015). As Bhargava suggests, while the West may have entered a postsecular era in 1986—when Wilfred Cantwell Smith famously questioned the utility of the "secular/religious" binary—this interwoven reality has existed in India since time immemorial (Bhargava 2015). In this sense, India is an alternative modernity (Gaonkar 2001), one in which religion and public life are not opposed but mutually constitutive—challenging core assumptions of Western secularism.

So, what are we left with? Is postsecularism relevant in the Indian context? We argue that India—precisely because of its unique position—has something crucial to offer to the global, and particularly Western, postsecular discourse and the broader secular crisis. While this paper focuses on *sevā*, it is essential to recognize that *sevā* does not stand alone. Rather, it draws meaning and force from a broader constellation of Indic concepts such as *dharma* (righteous action), *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), *kalyāṇ* (holistic well-being), and *karuṇā* (compassion). Together, these interconnected frameworks articulate a vision that integrates ethics, spirituality, and social responsibility. They envision the individual not as an isolated, self-interested agent, but as an inherently connected being, embedded in networks of mutual care, duty, and responsibility toward both human and non-human others. In this way, India's philosophical and religious resources offer an alternative to hyper-capitalist models of individualism and self-maximization, providing a theo-ethical foundation for reimagining economic life, human relations, and ecological stewardship. Thus, India's long-standing postsecular condition may serve as a powerful source for rethinking the entanglement of economy, morality, and spirituality in a postcapitalist world.

2.2. Postcapitalism and Religion

In recent decades, particularly since the 2008 economic crisis, criticism of capitalism, especially in its neoliberal form, has intensified. While such critiques have traditionally emerged from leftist and anti-capitalist movements, they are now increasingly voiced by other sectors, including religious institutions (such as the Catholic Church and other Christian bodies), conservative political movements, and even segments of the business community (Almanova 2020; Mason 2015; Varoufakis 2015). The *Occupy Wall Street* movement was a primary grassroots response to the 2008 economic crisis. The scholars Paul

Cloke, Callum Sutherland, and John Williams researched how the movement demonstrated the ways postcapitalist and postsecular discourses converge. During the protests, secular and religious activist groups collaborated, setting aside their theological differences and prioritizing their common criticism of capitalism. Additionally, it enabled the reinterpretation of religious narratives into the protesting campaign's strategy, like the "Golden Calf" symbol criticized Wall Street's greed and the imperative of accumulation of wealth. In this way, they demonstrated that the collaboration between secular and religious groups motivated an influential learning process, altering both worldviews. Hence, the secular and religious narratives reshaped one another, creating a more inclusive and ethical resistance to neoliberalism (Cloke et al. 2016).

By highlighting that capitalism stems from a dichotomized mindset, the concept of postcapitalist discourse reflects a growing recognition of capitalism's profound inadequacies in addressing the urgent challenges of the 21st century. Political and democratic crises, socio-economic and cultural breakdowns, and the escalating environmental crisis all demand holistic and systemic thinking (Almanova 2020; Mason 2015; Varoufakis 2015). In this regard, postcapitalist discourse aligns with postsecular discourse in at least one key respect: both reject rigid and exclusionary distinctions—such as the binary between religion and secularism, or between economy and ethics (broadly understood as encompassing the individual, society, and the environment). This convergence will be further illustrated and reinforced through an Indian perspective.

Beyond critiquing the fatal crises of capitalism, postcapitalist discourse proposes alternative economic models and value systems (Alexander et al. 2022). A central theme in this discourse is the redefinition of *Homo Economicus*—"the Economic Man"—a concept rooted in capitalist humanism. Within this framework, greed is not a vice to be restrained but a virtue to be cultivated; it becomes a moral imperative. Human society is seen as a collection of isolated individuals, each motivated to maximize personal self-interest—paradoxically contributing, unintentionally, to societal well-being. The notion of "survival of the fittest" is framed as a natural law, justifying inequality and competition (Mason 2015; N. Klein 2014; Raworth 2018; Varoufakis 2015).

Postcapitalist thinkers challenge this reductive understanding of human motivation, which privileges individual gain through virtues like greed and competition. Instead, they advocate for a richer and more nuanced view of human nature—one that foregrounds cooperation, empathy, and compassion. These values, they argue, are not peripheral but central to economic life, shaping both the meaning of humanity and the mechanisms through which economies function (Alexander et al. 2022; Raworth 2018; Mason 2015).

A notable contribution to this discourse is the project Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics (2022), in which a group of philosophical anthropologists proposed an alternative concept: *Homo Amans*—"the human person as a loving being" (Van Nes et al. 2022, p. 4). This concept emphasizes care, love, hope, and sympathy as fundamental instincts and motivations underlying human economic behavior (Van Nes et al. 2022). In this project, the Abrahamic religions, predominantly Christianity, but also Judaism and Islam play a central role in redefining *Homo Economicus*. Values and virtues such as charity, prudence, justice, love, and empathy articulate a more holistic, relational, and ethical vision of human nature, sharply contrasting with the detached, hyper-rationalist, utilitarian individual of the secular capitalist paradigm (McCloskey 2022; R. Klein 2022; Di Somma 2022). Moreover, by redefining the meaning of humanity within the economic sphere, postcapitalism advocates for a more egalitarian and communal socio-economic model—one that stands in contrast to dominant structures such as the joint-stock company and the corporate system (Alexander et al. 2022; Raworth 2018; Mason 2015). Building on this framework, the present paper introduces the notion of *sevā* from Indian lived religious

and philosophical traditions, aiming to further contribute to the emerging body of research that seeks to rethink and redefine *Homo Economicus*.

2.3. Sevā as a Theo-Ethical Theory and Praxis

Sevā, as selfless service, is a religious practice—*sādhanā*—that inherently entails laborious, time-consuming service to others. *Sevā* is not done only with one's body. It is a holistic act that, traditionally and in everyday usage, has three forms: service rendered by the body (*tan sevā*); by wealth and materials (*dhan sevā*); and by the mind (*man sevā*).[9]

The theological foundations of *sevā* as *sādhanā* draw from two distinct yet interwoven strands of Hindu thought. One centers on guru- or god-oriented *sevā* and is mostly based on the Bhakti tradition. Here, the devotee's *sevā* to the guru is a means of reciprocating divine gifts—such as knowledge, teaching, blessings, and grace—an expression of love, and a religious praxis of surrendering one's ego to the divine (Jacobsen 2018). The other kind is *mānav-sevā*: the sustained offering of service by gurus, saints, renunciates, and devotees to humanity (*mānav*) in the form of charity and philanthropy (Jacobsen 2018). *Mānav-sevā* draws on the non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita Vedānta and Neo-Vedanta, which hold that all being and existence is one (Brahman), and thus, providing *sevā* to others is itself *sādhanā* (V. R. Patel 2012).

The two approaches are not contradictory and can easily coexist. Both forms of *sevā* relate closely to the Bhagavad Gītā and its teachings on *karma yoga*[10]—*sevā* is considered the highest action: an act performed not from ego or attachment to outcomes, but from a motivation of service and devotion (V. R. Patel 2012). While the first kind has ancient roots traceable to the Vedic and Bhakti traditions (Mlecko 1982), the second emerged in the nineteenth century with Hindu reform movements (Beckerlegge 2006).[11]

The continued relevance and popularity of *sevā* today can be attributed, in part, to its resonance with modern ideals of self-effort and agency. Even when framed as *sādhanā*—a spiritual discipline—*sevā* can align with capitalist narratives of individual empowerment. While earlier expressions of *sevā* emphasized surrender and service to a deity or guru, in the twentieth century it became associated with improving one's existential condition and achieving physical and mental well-being (Warrier 2003; Lucia 2015). In contrast, concepts such as *karma* are often seen as shaped by forces beyond the individual's control, especially when linked to past lives. In this light, the modern framing of *sevā* as a tool for self-care marks a distinctly contemporary shift.[12]

Alongside *sevā* as a tool for self-care and individual betterment, the following case studies illustrate how its theo-ethical theory and praxis affirms principles of solidarity, economic justice, and values such as compassion and human dignity, offering a subtle yet powerful challenge to dominant capitalist ideals and narratives. The following discussion centers on *mānav-sevā* as a religious path that fosters both spiritual and worldly flourishing—not only for the individual, but also for their broader surroundings, including local communities and the natural world. These examples demonstrate how economic futures might be reimagined beyond profit, guided instead by shared ethical commitments and collective well-being.

3. *Sevā* in Gandhian Environmentalism

3.1. The Roots of Gandhi's Environment Thought

At the age of eighteen, in 1888, Gandhi sailed to England to study law. During his time in England, and increasingly during his extended stay in South Africa, Gandhi became interested in the "other" of the dominant Western intellectual tradition. His appeal to the Western marginal streams of thought was reflected in his membership in the British Vegetarian Society, his engagement with members of the Theosophical movement, and the

influence of thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, and Leo Tolstoy (Lal 2009; Khoshoo and Moolakkattu 2010; Nandy 2018). These cultural influences also shaped the Western environmental movement, giving rise to multiple discourses such as animal rights, human-nature perspectives, and alternative ecological-economical mechanisms (Nash 1989; Kawall 2016). Moreover, they shaped Gandhi's environmental thought. However, he was also highly influenced by Indian philosophies and religions, hence can be seen as a "bridge" between Western and Eastern environmentalism (Khoshoo and Moolakkattu 2010).

Therefore, Gandhi's influence on Indian and global environmentalism is profound. In the Indian context, from its early roots in the 1970s with the *Chipko Andolan* (the "tree hugging" movement) to the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (anti-dams movement), and more recently, the *Navdanya Andolan*—(the agroecological movement) led by the philosopher Vandana Shiva and Anupam Mishra, a key figure in reviving traditional water-harvesting systems—Indian environmentalists have referred to Gandhi as their "Patron Saint" (Guha 1998; James 2004; Khoshoo and Moolakkattu 2010; Fisher 2018; Levi and Mishori 2015). As a result, contemporary environmental thinkers and activists continue to embody Gandhian principles, extending Gandhi's impact beyond traditional environmentalism. Globally, Gandhi's influence is evident in the work of figures such as economist E.F. Schumacher, founder of ecological economics; philosopher Arne Naess, a pioneer of deep ecology; and the *Voluntary Simplicity* movement—all of whom are seen as part of Gandhi's broader legacy in global environmental thought (Bakshi 2012; Singh 2021). This paper explores Gandhi's environmental philosophy through the concept of *sevā* as a postcapitalist model for environmental well-being in the postsecular age.

3.2. Non-Anthropocentrism, Ahiṃsā and Sevā

Ahiṃsā (nonviolence, non-injury) is a key concept in many Indian traditions. Gandhi is often portrayed as a modern interpreter of the concept of *ahiṃsā* (Brown 2011). In his view, *ahiṃsā* plays a foundational role in describing the relationships between human beings and the natural systems that sustain them. Most often, and much to his dislike, *ahiṃsā* was translated into English as nonviolence, implying a negation or absence of violence. However, Gandhi argued that *ahiṃsā* is not merely a negation or reversal of violence but an active expression of 'Love' (Brown 2011). In his attempt to define *ahiṃsā*, Gandhi was highly influenced by Christianity, especially Tolstoy's work "The Kingdom of God is Within You" (1893) (Mohandas Gandhi 1927b). Gandhi said:

> "It [*ahiṃsā*] is the greatest and the most active force in the world. One cannot be passively non-violent. Ahiṃsā means 'love' in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than the 'love' defined by St. Paul [....] *ahiṃsā includes the whole creation, and not only humans*[13]". (Mohandas Gandhi 1936b, Young India 14.03.1936)

This statement indicates that the notion of 'Love' in Christianity was a central reference in defining Gandhi's *ahiṃsā*. However, it also restricts its limits—its application only to humans.[14] This love, which Gandhi claims cannot be found in Christianity, can be found in certain Indian schools of thought—and in this sense, they form the foundation of Gandhi's non-anthropocentric approach. This is a cardinal point when seeking to understand the environmental layers of his thought. To fully grasp it, one must understand how certain environmental approaches have explained the roots of the ecological crisis. Following this, we will elaborate on the connection between *ahiṃsā and Sevā*.

The broad recognition of the environmental crisis in the early 1960s gave rise to a vast body of literature exploring its underlying causes (Nash 1989). Two central and opposing frameworks emerged in response. The first, commonly called "techno-optimism," holds that for every environmental problem humanity may encounter, modern science and

continuously advancing technologies will ultimately provide effective solutions (Danaher 2022). The second framework, best exemplified by the philosophical school *of deep ecology*, contends that the environmental crisis is, in fact, a manifestation of a more profound ethical crisis—one whose solutions must be sought through philosophical, religious, and spiritual inquiry (Sessions 1995). Thinkers in this tradition also interpret various aspects of the environmental crisis as symptoms of a broader perceptual breakdown rooted in Western thought and consciousness structures. These patterns, they argue, are further entrenched in neoliberal capitalist socio-economic systems (Capra 1995). From a theological aspect, this perspective resonated strongly with the well-known paper by historian Lynn White:

> "Since the roots [of the ecological crisis] are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny (...). Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion that the world has seen. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." (White 1967, p. 2)

This approach identifies the roots of the environmental crisis in anthropocentric modes of thought embedded in Western monotheistic religions, philosophy, and science (Capra 1995). The central critique of this worldview lies in its hierarchical structure, which portrays humans as separate from—and superior to—nature. Consequently, humans possess intrinsic value, while nature is viewed only in instrumental terms, primarily as a resource for human use and benefit. Against this backdrop, Western environmental discourse began turning toward non-anthropocentric frameworks, which offer alternative models of human–nature relationship. These perspectives position the human being as an integral part of nature, subject to its laws, living in harmony with ecological systems, and recognizing nature's intrinsic worth (Nash 1989; Sessions 1995).

The Indian philosophical and religious traditions represent a significant source of such non-anthropocentric worldviews.[15] It has inspired a robust body of scholarship that highlights its distinctive vision of environmental ethics. This tradition emphasizes a relational and reverential view of nature, framing the human–nature connection in terms of "care for the environment" (Dwivedi 2000, p. 19), describing nature as "sacred" (James 2004, p. 345), and attributing to it "intrinsic value" (Framarin 2011, pp. 285–86).

Gandhi's conception of *ahiṃsā*, which is deeply rooted in Indian traditions led him to embrace a non-anthropocentric perspective. In this context, we argue that non-anthropocentrism can be seen as a defining feature of Indian postsecularism and even might reinforce the argument regarding India's enduring postsecularism. This perspective aligns with a broader postsecular view that rejects binary oppositions—such as the divide between the secular and the religious or between humans and nature. Instead, it envisions the public domain as a holistic and intersectional space where religiosity is interwoven with socio-economic structures.

However, how is *ahiṃsā* connected to the notion of *seva*? As mentioned, *ahiṃsā* is not merely the negation or absence of violence; rather, it is the recognition that violence exists both in nature and within every human being—in our thoughts, speech, and actions (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a). Yet, *ahiṃsā* does not imply that violence is the 'true' nature of humanity. The idea of "the survival of the fittest," which Gandhi rejected as a fallacious modern maxim, is not, in his view, a law of the natural world (Bakshi 2012). Instead, *ahiṃsā* is a form of introspection—a deep engagement with human nature that holds the potential to transform violent consciousness and behavior. It is realized through active affinity, compassion, solidarity, empathy, and deep relational bonding practices. *Ahiṃsā* embodies the capacity to identify with the 'other'—extending beyond human beings to

include all forms of life. For Gandhi, it reflects the true essence of existence and represents the highest fulfilment of human potential.

In this sense, the practice of *ahiṃsā* can lead a person toward deeper awareness, recognizing the self as interconnected with others and rooted in the unity of all existence.[16] Thus, *ahiṃsā* becomes an act of *sādhana*—a spiritual discipline and path of inner transformation, capable of shifting violent consciousness and behavior. If we understand *ahiṃsā* as 'love' and *sevā* as 'an act of love,' then *sevā* becomes the *sādhana* of *ahiṃsā*—the active practice of abandoning the ego, acting without selfishness, achieving fearlessness, and being in a state beyond self-centeredness. Gandhi says: "The only way to find God[17] is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service (*sevā*) of all." (Mohandas Gandhi 1936a, p. 240).

Furthermore, *ahiṃsā* is a central means of attaining what Gandhi considered a 'genuine' form of civilization—one whose ultimate aim is to foster self-realization. He writes: "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves" (Mohandas Gandhi 1909, p. 54). In other words, achieving self-realization requires a departure from violent conditions. Notably and directly relevant to our discussion—this process necessitates the establishment of "ahiṃsāic" socio-economic structures that support, enable, and promote self-observation and self-recognition. As we shall see, capitalism, the current dominant economic model, mass production industrialization, and the "greed is right" moral framework—are, according to Gandhi, fundamentally opposed to this vision. It undermines the capacity for self-realization and thus contradicts civilization's 'true' purpose. With this understanding, we are now prepared to explore the concept of '*environmental sevā*' in Gandhi's thought.

3.3. 'Environmental Sevā' as a Postcapitalist Model for a Postsecular Age

> "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom [Britain] is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip [the] world bare like locusts." (Mohandas Gandhi 1928, Young India 20.12.1928)

From the concept of *ahiṃsā*, as presented so far, emerges a fundamentally different understanding of human beings, society, and their relationship with the natural environment—one that sharply contrasts with the capitalist notion of *homo economicus*. Gandhi's humanism views the individual as deeply entangled with other forms of otherness—both human and natural—and intentionally oriented toward reinforcing these bonds through care, compassion, and solidarity, thereby fostering a more intentional and sustainable society. Alongside Gandhi's above statement, it also proposes an alternative economic mechanism to the dominant mass production model governing modern global economies. As such, these aspects of Gandhi's philosophy align not only with the critiques posed by postcapitalist discourse but can also serve as a theoretical foundation for envisioning alternative postcapitalist economic systems.

Gandhi's critique of the mass production model centered on three key points. First, it is a centralized ("corporate economic model"), top-down system of production that tends to concentrate capital, resources, and labor in the hands of a few. This concentration might lead to unequal patterns of wealth distribution, deepening social disparities and exacerbating economic inequality. Second, Gandhi recognized the ill effects of the global nature of the mass production mechanism. Rooted in European colonialism, economic globalization facilitated the universalization of labor, production, and consumption. This gave rise to

long and highly complex supply chains, exploitative labor conditions, and abusive use of natural resources (Guha 1998; Weber 1999, 2011). In this sense, Gandhi identified global mass production as a root cause of the environmental crisis. Third, capitalism's relentless drive for economic growth generates artificial wants and perpetuates needs, ultimately fostering greed that is fulfilled through material consumption. According to Gandhi, these dynamics lead humanity away from the path of self-realization, reinforcing the conditions that preserve harm toward other human beings and the natural world. Gandhi said:

> "I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer its goal...I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites, and to go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic." (Mohandas Gandhi 1927b, Young India 17.03.1927)

Therefore, Gandhi advocated for "production by the masses" as an alternative mode of industrialization. The decentralization of production creates favorable conditions for fragmentation of the means of production, which may lead to a more equitable distribution of capital and, consequently, a more egalitarian society (Weber 1999, 2011).

Moreover, because decentralization involves the localization of both production and consumption, it aligns with the principle of 'ecological *ahiṃsā*—that is, maintaining a balance between resource extraction, the use of appropriate technologies, and the capacity to meet human needs through local means wherever possible. For Gandhi, most human needs should be fulfilled locally. This is the core tenet of *swadeshi* (self-reliance) and *swaraj* (self-rule) (Bakshi 2012; Singh 2021). Localizing the means of production thus sets in motion a series of positive outcomes: it reduces the ecological footprint and environmental degradation, while also enabling the development of more just and equitable economic systems—ultimately contributing to a more egalitarian society. This vision lies at the heart of what we regard as Gandhi's concept of *environmental sevā*: an act that simultaneously acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans and nature, employs ecologically sensitive technologies that respect the regenerative capacity of ecosystems, and restrains individual greed.

Communal economic and social structures grounded in this approach reflect an ethical economic mechanism, one that serves both society and the environment. In this context, *sevā* is an act of love, performed with the intention of benefiting the entire ecosystem. *Sevā*, as selfless service not directed toward exclusive personal reward, stands in stark contrast to the logic of interest maximization and profit-seeking that defines the *homo economicus* ideal. *Ahiṃsā* as *sevā* becomes a form of *sādhana*, which leads toward self-realization. In this manner, an "ahiṃsāic" socio-economic order" is not merely a moral utopia but an essential condition for human growth and evolution—one that is fully aligned with the rhythms and integrity of nature.

In this context, *ahiṃsā* as "environmental *sevā*"—a radical form of love, if we may call it so—offers a distinctive lens through which to understand evil in postsecular discourse. Various thinkers such as Nigel Wright, René Girard, and Walter Wink have argued that evil need not be viewed solely as a metaphysical category (Cloke 2011). A postsecular approach challenges the rigidity of theological dogma and classical theodicy, instead framing evil as a material, ethical, and spiritual force. This force is manifested in human behavior, ecological crises, and modern socio-economic institutions (Cloke 2011). In this view, evil is embedded in what Wink calls the *interiorities of power systems*—visible within corporations and governments and can be addressed through ethical, religious-inspired practicalities (Wink 1998). Within this framework, religion is not viewed as an outdated authority but

rather as a moral resource offering powerful tools—particularly virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, and nonviolence for confronting contemporary forms of evil.

In this regard, Gandhi's compass of *Advaita* (non-dualism)—his relentless aspiration to attain union with the "other,"—through the practice of *environmental sevā*, reflects a profound moral and spiritual insight. Rooted in his inclusive, pan-religious openness, Gandhi acknowledges the deep complexity and inner contradictions of human nature and humanity's existential entanglement with violence. He writes: "We are helpless mortals caught in the conflagration of *hiṃsā* (violence) [...]. The very fact of his living—eating, drinking and moving about—necessarily involves some *hiṃsā*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute" (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a, pp. 543–44). In this sense, Gandhi positions evil or violence as an existential and psychological condition. However, by practicing environmental *sevā* as *sādhana*—a path of spiritual cultivation and ethical discipline—the individual progresses toward self-realization and overcomes dualism and divisions (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a).

Gandhi's 'environmental seva', then, is not only aligned with postsecular discourse in reintroducing religious and ethical imagination into the public sphere, but also in reframing economic and social structures as sites of moral inquiry. His critique of capitalism, particularly the "greed is good" culture embedded in *homo economicus* and the mass-production model of industrialization, presents a powerful indictment of a system he sees as ecologically, economically, socially, and spiritually violent. This offers an expanded interpretation of evil as the product of economic mechanisms, specific configurations of industrial production, and the corporate structure. In this regard, we can view Gandhi's call to reorganize the entire economic system and its institutions as holding the potential to diminish evil as a material force.

4. *Sevā* in Hyperlocal Guru-Bhakti Communities in Delhi's Peripheries

4.1. *Sevā in Guru-Bhakti Communities—An Introduction*

"Only those who have something can give something. If you feel, 'I have nothing. I am nothing,' what can you give? How will you give? Even if the Devī (goddess) herself asked for your *sevā* you would say, 'I cannot. I do not have the time, money, [or] power.' My beloved community, we say, 'Do *sevā* with your body, wealth, and mind (*tan*, *dhan*, *man*).' But only those who feel the divine power (*divya śakti*), who feel the wellspring of *kalyāṇ* flowing from them, can provide for others. It is a feeling. It does not mean you have to be a multimillionaire to do *sevā*. Am I? Each one of you can do it. If you feel, 'I have food,' you can feed others. If you feel, 'I have time,' you can give some to others. If your body is healthy, you can do some work for others. If you have gained peace of mind, you can ease the minds of others. If you have obtained true happiness, you can give smiles to others."[18]

> Rājeśvarānand

> "You have received a human birth for the explicit purpose of becoming a god (*devtā*) so abundant (*pracur*) in *kalyāṇ* that you can really provide for others. It is very difficult to get a human birth. It means you have gone through an endless number of births to arrive at a human life. It is a golden opportunity. The next step is becoming god, not regressing into animal nature. This is what I teach."

> —Rājeśvarī Devā[19]

Over more than two years of intensive ethnographic fieldwork (2015–2017, 2019) with hyperlocal guru-bhakti communities on Delhi's peripheries, the gravity and centrality of *sevā* emerged clearly through everyday practices, conversations with devotees, and the teachings of local gurus. The two gurus quoted above—Śrī Rājeśvarī Devā and Śrī

Rājeśvarānand—prioritize *sevā* over any other ritual or religious activity. Each leads a hyperlocal guru-bhakti community located on Delhi's geographical, economic, and sociocultural margins.[20] The gurus and their devotees, many of whom belong to lower socioeconomic classes, often live in poverty. Most are internal migrants from states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh, and they come from diverse cultural backgrounds, castes, and mother tongues.[21] Still, they form a cohesive community, united by shared hardships. These hyperlocal religious communities—each comprising several hundred devotees—are a widespread yet under-researched phenomenon that constitutes a significant part of the socio-cultural and religious fabric of Delhi's peripheral neighborhoods, home to millions of residents.

It is not surprising that in such communities from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—where gurus and devotees, often face existential needs—the ideal of selfless service is the "supreme *dharma*". In these contexts, where the state is largely absent, devotees' *sevā* is often the only available resource capable of generating well-being for both individuals and the wider community. It functions as both a unifying principle that binds individuals into a collective and as a practical means of addressing the existential needs of community members. In these communities, the pragmatic, even measurable, ideal of *sevā* is the center of all communal activities, rather than abstract ideas such as *bhakti* (devotion). Men and women alike, lower and upper caste devotees, cook in the open-to-all temple kitchen,[22] clean and decorate the temple, go on door-to-door rounds to collect money for the community, volunteers at health camps and *melās*, run schools for the neighborhood children, and provide all kinds of help to other needed members of the community and neighbourhood. Moreover, devotees define other activities—such as singing *bhajans* and playing musical instruments during *satsaṅg* (devotional gathering), and leading a *yajñá* ritual—as *sevā*.[23] During the COVID-19 lockdowns, which hit Delhi's poor neighborhoods hard, it was these communities, which were skilled in providing *sevā*, that survived much better and could even help others around them at the height of the crisis.[24]

The ideal of *sevā* is not inherently egalitarian or subversive; its meaning and function are shaped by the structures in which it operates. As studies on hyper-gurus have shown (Warrier 2003; Lucia 2014; Srinivas 2008; Pandya 2015; Gooptu 2016; McKean 1996), in large-scale spiritual organizations with millions of predominantly middle-class followers, *sevā* is often framed as a religious duty—an expected return for the guru's ongoing benevolence. However, devotees cannot adequately reciprocate the metaphysical gift that the guru provides, and as a result, they remain in a state of subordination and dependence, serving the guru continuously in an unending attempt to compensate through *sevā* (Lucia 2014). In many of these contexts, *sevā* has become a key mechanism for generating wealth, prestige, and institutional power (Lucia 2014; Warrier 2003). This contrast highlights the need for a more nuanced, context-sensitive approach to *sevā* and the diverse manifestations of the contemporary guru-bhakti phenomenon.

Sevā, as a central element in the hyperlocal guru-bhakti communities has many theological and socio-economical aspects. However, this short discussion emphasizes how, through *sevā* an alternative ideal to the neoliberal, self-interested "economic person" emerges and, simultaneously, a new definition of what it means to be in a state of well-being, which goes beyond the limits of the individual self. To do so, this part of the paper looks at the intimate relationship and interdependence, in these communities, between *sevā* and their idea of *kalyāṇ*, that is well-being. It is important to not, that everyone who enters such communities is already familiar with the concept of *sevā* in various contexts—such as selfless service to the state, to parents, or to deities in temples—and during the process of socialization, with time, newcomers absorb these community's specific theology and nuances of *sevā*.

4.2. Sevā as Dharmic Practice on the Path to Kalyāṇ

Gurus and devotees in the hyperlocal guru-bhakti communities use the word *kalyāṇ* to describe the ultimate goal of their religious path and the single most precious thing one can achieve by belonging to and participating in their communities. *Kalyāṇ* is a desirable, holistic, utopian state of being that facilitates a range of pursuits: worldly and extra worldly, secular and religious, mundane and soteriological, material and spiritual. Being in a *kalyāṇic* state means having (some level of) physical and mental health, economic and social security, and religious and spiritual realization. Achieving only health and wealth is not enough for obtaining *kalyāṇ*. Accordingly, one can have money but not *kalyāṇ*. Progressing on the religious-spiritual path and living a righteous (*dharmic*) life is a necessary part of *kalyāṇ*.

In these hyperlocal communities, the highest form of *dharma*, in the sense of righteous or ethical conduct and *the* religious act is true *sevā*, and the karmic outcome of such conduct is *kalyāṇ*:

> "Friends! Those hands that are engaged in serving (*sevā me lage*) the poor are millions of times more sacred than those hands that are praying in the temple. Those feet that sacrifice their happiness and walk to serve someone gain millions of times more virtue than those that are feet while walking on a pilgrimage."[25]

More than any other action, such as conducting rituals, attending temples, and going on pilgrimages, doing *sevā* is the dharmic act, which encompasses a wide range of practices—from material donation (*dhan*) to physical labor (*tan*) and emotional investment (*man*). More than a moral obligation, *sevā* is for the gurus and devotees a form of *sādhana*—a disciplined spiritual path—that leads to *kalyāṇ*, a state of total well-being. Significantly, *kalyāṇ* in this context is imagined as a universal and egalitarian ideal, available to anyone regardless of caste, gender, destiny, or *karma*. It promises success in all domains of life, from money to liberation (*mokṣa*), and is thought to be the direct result of individual effort, commitment, and hard work (Erlich 2022). In this way, the concept of *kalyāṇ* reflects—and is shaped by—the ethos (some would say myth) of the modern capitalist city, which holds out the dream of the self-made, self-reliant individual. Yet, by defining *the* dharmaic act as *sevā*, these communities also subtly repurpose that capitalist ethic: *kalyāṇ* is not achieved through competition or accumulation but through relational giving, service, and shared spiritual aspiration—always situated within the frame of the community.

An upward spiral exists between *kalyāṇ* and *sevā*. As a dharmic act, both gurus and devotees regard *sevā* as a form of *sādhanā*—a spiritual discipline—for destroying bad karma, cultivating good karma and merit (*puṇya*), and ultimately fostering *kalyāṇ*. In this view, *sevā* becomes a creative source of *kalyāṇ*, generating ever-increasing abundance in the world (including both self and others). Yet, gurus and devotees consistently emphasize that if *sevā* is performed with egoistic motives or a desire for personal gain, it ceases to be *sevā*. At the same time, as we will see next, being in a kalyāṇic state of being also means embodying dharma—that is, becoming someone for whom *sevā* is no longer a practice to be cultivated (*sādhanā*), but a natural and spontaneous mode of living.

4.3. Sevā as Byproduct of Kalyāṇ

When individuals first come to a hyperlocal guru-bhakti community, they are often in the midst of a profound existential crisis. Experiencing helplessness and believing they have no ability to help themselves, they often feel that giving to others is impossible, as Rājeśvarānand reflects in the above quote: "If you feel, 'I have nothing. I am nothing,' what can you give?" With time, they become part of the community. They receive different kinds of *sevā*, of support, such as financial aid, legal assistance when necessary, and emotional care, from the guru and fellow devotees. As they get more and more integrated, they

take initiation from the guru and officially become members of the community and the guru's family.

The culmination of devotees' integration process is the transformation from passive, needy individuals into active, self-reliant agents. When devotees progress on the path to *kalyāṇ*, the most immediate and tangible outcome is their engagement in *sevā*, that it, generating *kalyāṇ* for others. Engaging in *sevā* does not mark the end of receiving it; devotees often embody both roles—giver and receiver—simultaneously. However, all official community members are expected to provide some level of *sevā*. According to the theological system of these communities, anyone who has *kalyāṇ*—whether god, guru, devotee, or the community as a whole—is by default a source of *kalyāṇ* for others, in other words, *sevā* is a (wonderful) byproduct of being in a *kalyāṇic* state. The more *kalyāṇ* individuals possess, the more they provide *kalyāṇ* to others, in the form of *sevā*.

The perfect example to this state of being is gods and gurus:

> "What is god? She is the *kartār* (doer), the caretaker of the universe (*jag ke pālanhār*)—a power full of *kalyāṇ* that only cares for and serves (*sevā karte rahe hein*) everyone, provides *kalyāṇ* for everyone. What is a saint? The one who, like god, cares for and serves everyone, provides all *kalyāṇ*. If you dedicate your days and nights to doing this work, then, like me, you will become saints."[26]

The gods and gurus are understood to exist in a perfected state of *kalyāṇ* and are therefore free from personal desire or need. *Kalyāṇ*, in this context, is considered the defining attribute of both divine and enlightened beings, reflected in their capacity to generate well-being for others (Erlich 2024). Among gurus, this kalyāṇic quality is manifested through acts of *sevā* directed toward their devotees: listening, blessing, healing, organizing festivals and rituals, transmitting spiritual knowledge, singing bhajans, and managing the community and temple. It is also reflected in their lifestyle practices—material renunciation, immersion in a devotional-spiritual discipline, the exclusive wearing of saffron robes, and, at times, entering altered states described as divine possession or communion with the deity they serve.

4.4. Sevā as an Uncontrollable Urge

For those truly in a state of *kalyāṇ*, not doing *sevā* is not an option. The most prominent devotees in the hyperlocal communities—those closest to the gurus—are often individuals who have attained a degree of socioeconomic stability: they run businesses, own homes, and have children with college degrees. Having crossed the poverty line, their families now belong to, or are approaching, the urban middle class. These devotees, alongside the gurus, are the community's primary *sevā* provider and some dedicate their entire life to *sevā*.

Such devotees describe *sevā* as a spontaneous, irresistible compulsion—an affective overflow arising from inner transformation. Doing *sevā* becomes a part of their nature, much as it is for the gods and gurus:

> "[Gauri Rana] I didn't become a saint yet [laughing], but there is some change in everything, and the more I do *sevā*, the more change there is. My *man* (mind-heart) is not focused only on me but also on others. I do *sevā* so everyone will be happy like me and have *kalyāṇ* in their lives. [Lata Thakur starts talking]: When I work at home, I have so much pain. I think, "How will I clean? How will I do the dishes?" [Other women laugh.] Then I come here and nothing! There is no pain. I do all the work and happily ask Mā jī for more. Not only me—all of us. We don't take food and water; we don't feel tired. We only want to do *sevā*, *bas*! *Tan*, *dhan*, *man*. Today even our children do *sevā*. Such days have come."[27]

The gurus identify this kind of *sevā*—this need to serve, as described by Gauri and Lata, which arises from a kalyāṇic state of being—as *niṣkām sevā,* or desireless service. It is a true and pure *sevā,* a feeling, an urge, like the uncontrollable need to scratch a mosquito bite. This kind of *sevā* comes from the heart. It is emotional and impulsive; it originates from a sense of abundance and an urge to share this abundance with others.[28] For example, Rājeśvarānand explains that:

> "Being united with my guru and god, I am a transformer of power, like electricity goes through a bulb. The bulb shines whether it wants to or not and lights even the darkest room. It is the same with *sevā.* Those who are united with god and touched by god's grace (*kṛpā*), have *śakti* and *kalyāṇ,* are forced to do *sevā* and shine *kalyāṇ* on others. Do not serve anybody in life. If you do, it should come in the form of a feeling, like an uncontrollable urge to scratch."[29]

Thus, *sevā,* as an external and actual expression of *kalyāṇ,* is inner feeling of divine power and abundance that uncontrollably seeks to pour out and provide well-being for others.

4.5. Sevā as Performance of Kalyāṇ and Participating in the Divine

Unlike accumulate wealth, *sevā* engagement is a sign of spiritual attainment, dharmic behaviour, and divine presence. *Sevā,* here, is the *kalyāṇic* performative expression *par excellence*—if *sevā* is not there, *kalyāṇ* is absent:

> "There are millionaires (*karoṛpati*) who feel poor and want more and more for themselves. Such people have money but not *kalyāṇ.* Others have only ₹2000 but feel, 'It is too much for me. I will buy some lentils and rice (*dāl-cāval*) for the temple. We will all cook it together and enjoy good food'. Such devotees are possessors of *kalyāṇ*, *avatāras* of the gods. They are truly divine."

True kalyāṇic gurus are required to dedicate every moment of their lives to *sevā,* and by obsessively doing *sevā,* devotees declare to the world that, like their guru, they have *kalyāṇ* and are sources of *kalyāṇ* for others.

The more *kalyāṇ* devotees have, the more they do *sevā,* and the more *sevā* they do, the more they are considered kalyāṇic. When this process takes place in devotees' lives, i.e., when they entirely or nearly stop being the object of others' *sevā* and dedicate most of their time to doing *sevā,* they take on a position in the community that is extremely close to that of the guru. For example, this is how Kaem Singh, one such dominant community member, explained his *sevā*:

> "I do *jan kalyāṇ* (lit. the *kalyāṇ* of the people), which means to give deliverance to people... True *jan kalyāṇ* is to deliver to people their basic needs, to give *sevā* with every breath. For instance, if a small child needs food, provide him with food. If another man needs shoes, give him shoes. If a girl needs to study, provide her with an education. That is the meaning of having *kalyāṇ*... You know, it is said, you cannot see god, but when I am doing *sevā,* I see god in everyone."[30]

Kalyāṇ signifies both worldly and spiritual flourishing; thus, performing *sevā* publicly signals one's religious attainment and union with the divine. Spiritual transformation—becoming one (or nearly one) with the guru or deity—is actualized through acts of care and provision for others. In doing *sevā,* devotees participate in the divine, aligning themselves with the *kartāre*—the divine doer or agent—of *kalyāṇ.*

4.6. Sevā and the Reimagining of Personhood and Well-Being

This section explored the practice of *sevā* in Delhi's hyperlocal guru-bhakti communities as a site where capitalist ideals and religious values intersect and mutually reshape one another. The path to *kalyāṇ* reflects meritocratic ideals of self-making: it is, in principle,

open to all, regardless of caste or gender, and depends on individual commitment, discipline, and personal effort, primarily expressed through *sevā*, regarded as the highest form of dharma. Yet *kalyāṇ* and *sevā* simultaneously reconfigure this logic. *Sevā* is not only the means to attain *kalyāṇ*, but also its most visible and essential expression. Once individuals reach a certain level of well-being, they turn outward and become sources of *kalyāṇ* for others. The more *kalyāṇ* one embodies, the more one gives.

This cyclical dynamic redefines the human subject not as an independent, self-interested agent, but as a relational being whose highest motivation and fulfillment lie in intentional care for others. By reframing human flourishing as collective well-being rooted in shared responsibility, *sevā* challenges the neoliberal belief in the self-contained individual motivated by the maximization of self-interest. In this view, *kalyāṇ* is not a private achievement but a relational condition, measured by one's capacity to give, serve, and generate well-being for others. Through *sevā*, gods, gurus, and devotees alike embody and transmit abundance. This lived ethic constitutes an alternative moral economy and a relational model of personhood that challenges dominant capitalist and secular paradigms. It collapses binaries between the religious and the material, the inner and the social, offering an integrated vision of spiritual and socio-economic life. Far from being passive victims of marginalization, these communities actively reimagine what it means to live well—through *sevā*.

In the case of hyper-gurus, the *sevā* model can be imagined as a wishing fountain: the more a devotee receives (*kalyāṇ*) from the fountain—whether from the guru, the gods, or the community—the more she returns to clean it, maintain it, and offer her coins into it (*sevā*). This model enacts an ongoing, expansive dynamic that is not strictly reciprocal, but extensional: the more devotees receive, the more they return to give. Over time, this repeated reception becomes transformative. Once devotees are no longer in urgent need of the fountain's gifts—having attained *kalyāṇ*—they become extensions of its abundance, joining in the act of giving to newcomers and others. As more people participate in sustaining and serving the fountain, its power and impact grow. At its most abundant, the fountain even nourishes its surroundings, benefiting outsiders and the poor. In this way, kalyāṇic devotees become part of the generous, radiant source from which the entire community draws. Without them, the community would simply dry up.

5. Conclusions: Beyond Homo Economicus: Sevā as a Moral Framework

> "We should eat only after all others have had their food. So long as the embodied soul lives in this world, it has no choice but to have relations with others. To become disinterested in the body, therefore, means that one should devote oneself exclusively to the service of others so that one may attain the Brahman beyond time."

Gandhi's quote above, drawn from his interpretation of the Bhagavad Gītā (Mahatma Gandhi 2009, p. 70), illustrates the dynamic nature of *sevā* as a theo-ethical praxis that operates across intention, ontology, and concrete action. The motivation for *sevā* is religious—and even soteriological—anchored in the pursuit of liberation and the realization of the self as *Brahman*. A unified perception of reality gives rise to a relational and ethical ontology, in which the self is understood as fundamentally interconnected with all forms of life—human, animal, and nature. Serving oneself, god, and others thus becomes an integrated act.

In both cases, sevā initiates a process of moral becoming that blurs the boundaries between inner transformation and outward obligation. *Sevā* appears both as the appropriate *dharmic* and *ahiṃsic* path for those seeking liberation or well-being, and as the spontaneous expression of one who has realized the non-dual nature of existence or attained *kalyāṇ*. It

initiates an inward transformation that extends outward—toward others, toward suffering, and toward the imperative to uphold collective well-being. In this process, *sevā* reconfigures the human subject's orientation and ethical responsibilities. These two modes are best understood as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a sustained moral-spiritual discipline—*sādhana*—through which *sevā* becomes embodied and habitual. At this stage, action arises from a perception of reality in which the well-being of others is inseparable from one's own flourishing.

Across both cases, is framed not only as arising from surplus, but also as part of a cultivated moral orientation grounded in interdependence, care, and a non-accumulative understanding of abundance. In hyperlocal communities, *sevā* functions as a testimony to religious transformation and *kalyāṇic* fullness. It is practiced and experienced within the communal network, where the individual becomes part of a larger whole—a social-economic structure of care and giving. In Gandhi's thought, *sevā* embodies *ahiṁsā*: a commitment to nonviolence that extends toward all beings and forms the basis for a moral reconfiguration of economic life. His notion of environmental *sevā* reflects a non-anthropocentric perspective in which bonds between self and other—human or natural—are recognized as ontologically continuous. However, for *sevā* to enable self-realization, social and economic structures must align with ecological capacities and collective needs. This vision underpins Gandhi's model for a postcapitalist economy.

Heinz Kohut's concept of the "selfobject" offers a useful interpretive frame for understanding *sevā* through relational Self Psychology ([Kohut 1977]). Kohut emphasizes the self's interdependence with others, highlighting the formative role of care, empathy, and affirmation. From this perspective, acts of service can be seen as selfobject functions that sustain others while also reinforcing the practitioner's own relational orientation. In the guru-bhakti context, this is evident in the dharmic and kalyāṇic impulse to take care of others. In Gandhian environmental philosophy, the same relational ethic emerges through the practice of *sevā* as a lived form of *ahiṁśā* —a nonviolent commitment to interbeing with all life forms.

This paper has argued that *sevā*—understood as a holistic, relational configuration—integrates material and spiritual concerns and bridges the divide between individual and collective life. From this vantage point, *sevā* illuminates the particular links between post-secularism and postcapitalism from an Indian perspective. As a visible and participatory public practice, *sevā* affirms—and even expands—India's enduring postsecular condition. It challenges the binary between the religious and the secular by reconfiguring economic and social life through moral and relational principles. At the same time, by reimagining economic life beyond capitalist norms, it gestures toward an alternative moral economy. In both contexts, *sevā* operates as a religious mode of engagement that intervenes in and re-shapes socio-economic realities. It proposes a different economic intentionality—one rooted in ethical concern and oriented toward the common good. In Gandhi's vision, *sevā* reorganizes the economy along ethical and ecological lines; in the peripheries of Delhi, it sustains marginalized guru-bhakti communities through localized structures of mutual care.

The *sevā* model thus envisions a shift in the definition of success and well-being from the isolated individual to the "inter"—the relational space shaped by networks of human and non-human connections. This relational reorientation expands the very notion of the human beyond Homo Economicus, aligning with the paper's broader call to reimagine agency in postcapitalist and postsecular terms. Rather than positing the human as a hyper-rational, self-interested agent, the model proposed here understands the person as an ethical being embedded within webs of reciprocity, care, and ecological belonging. In an age increasingly marked by ecological collapse and moral fatigue, *sevā*—grounded

in Indian theo-ethical traditions—offers a countermodel: one that resists alienation and redefines human agency as relational, ethical, and ecologically embedded.

Notes

1. "Ideology," *Belur Math—Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (blog), https://belurmath.org/ideology/ (accessed on 21 March 2025).

2. "SEVA—Sustainable—Agriculture & Environmental Voluntary Action," http://sevango.in/ (accessed on 23 March 2025).

3. "PM's Address at the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav," https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-at-the-karyakar-suvarna-mahotsav/ (accessed on 21 March 2025).

4. On *sevā*, the making of the Indian nation, and Hindu nationalism, see (Beckerlegge 2003, 2006) and Bhattacharjee (2019).

5. *Sevā* is not the Indic equivalent of charity in Christianity, *tzedakah* in Judaism, and *zakat* in Islam. In Hindi, charity is *danā* (or *dan*), an unreciprocated gift or donation. For more on the *danā* in the Indic traditions and philosophy, see Parry (1986), Laidlaw (2000), Copeman (2011).

6. Moreover, in more extreme settings, *sevā* may even be imbued with violent meanings, supporting militant activism (Jaffrelot 2007).

7. This perspective has roots in the bhakti tradition and even earlier texts such as the *Manusmṛti* (Laws of Manu). There, the emphasis is not on *sevā* in the dark age (*Kali Yuga*), but rather on *dāna*—the act of giving or charity (Doniger and Smith 1991, Manu 1.86, p. 54).

8. Academic scholarship has long examined *sevā* in Hinduism, with particular attention to its adaptation and appropriation. One line of inquiry explores how Neo-Vedanta groups integrated Western models of social service into an Indian religious and national framework (Beckerlegge 2006). Another focuses on Hindu nationalist organizations, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which employ *sevā* to advance Hindutva ideology, exclusionary, often anti-Islamic, political agendas (Beckerlegge 2003; S. Patel 2010). A third line of inquiry highlights the philosophical and textual roots of sevā in Hindu devotion (bhakti), framing it as a longstanding religious practice rather than a modern development (V. R. Patel 2012).

9. These three forms of *sevā* were first formulated in the early sixteenth century by Vallabha Acharya (1479–1531), the founder of Puṣṭimārg, a Vaishnava bhakti school. In this context, the devotee's *sevā* is directed to god. It is the only way to express one's love for god and to unite one's soul with god. See Shah (1969, p. 178).

10. *Karma yoga*, is one of the core teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. It advocates performing one's duties without attachment to personal gain or the outcomes (fruits) of action.

11. In the political spheres *sevā* was used by Hindu leaders since Indian independent movement such Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda as a vehicle for moral and national strength, and also by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (founder of RSS) and Narendra Modi to as means of Hindu nationalist ideologies. See S. Patel (2010).

12. *Sevā* in the sense of service to humanity (*mānav*) has roots in the Swaminarayan movement of the nineteenth century (Williams 1984). But it was at the beginning of the twentieth century that *sevā* became strongly associated with philanthropy and public service, under the influence of the Ramakrishna Mission (Beckerlegge 2006; Jacobsen 2018).

13. Italics added.

14. An additional quotation reinforcing this argument is: "Once we began to compare the life of Jesus with that of Buddha. 'Look at Gautama's compassion!' said I. 'It was not confined to mankind; it extended to all living beings. Does not the heart overflow with love to think of the lamb joyously perched on his shoulders? One fails to notice this love for all living beings in the life of Jesus" (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a, p. 275).

15. Alongside other Asian philosophical and religious traditions such as Daoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism, as well as Indigenous cultures like Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, Māori, and many others (Kawall 2016; Nash 1989).

16. "underlying *ahiṃsā* is the unity of all life" (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a).

17. Importantly, Gandhi's definition of religion was extremely inclusive: "The term 'religion' I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of the self" (Mohandas Gandhi 1927a, p. 93). Hence, 'Gandhi's God' should by no means be perceived as confined to a single religious doctrine—whether Indian or otherwise.

18. Public talk of Rājeśvarānand. RMJM temple complex, Shahdara, Delhi. Fieldwork notes, 29 January 2017.

[19]   Interview with Rājeśvarī Devā. BBNM temple complex, Chhatarpur, Delhi. Fieldwork notes, 5 May 2017.

[20]   Śrī Rājeśvarānand heads the community of Śrī Rājmātā Jhaṇḍevālā Mandir in the neighborhood of Shahdara in East Delhi, which was founded by his mother, Śrī Rājmātā (1934–1999), a migrant form Pakistan. Śrī Rājeśvarī Devā is the guru and founder of Śrī Siddha Bābā Bālak Nāth Mandir in the neighborhood of Chhatarpur Extension in South Delhi. She is a sixty-year-old woman, originally born in Himachal Pradesh, who migrated to Delhi in the 1980s.

[21]   The members of these communities belong to all types of castes. Indeed, lower castes are more prone to poverty, yet being a member of the higher castes does not imply that they are also in the higher socio-economic classes in the urban space, governed mostly by the neoliberal economy.

[22]   Both high- and low-caste families (including a family from a Scheduled Caste working at Delhi's crematorium, Nigambodh Ghat) cook together in the kitchen and share meals. This practice reflects the belief that everything under the guru's household is sacred, that the food is *prasād*, and thus notions of impurity do not apply within this space.

[23]   *Yajñā*, originally a Vedic ritual, is performed before a sacred fire. While it is usually a complicated ritual performed by Brahmins, in RMJM, it is highly simplified (often referred to as *havan*). It is performed without a priest; instead, the guru or a senior devotee leads the ritual. The fire is lit in a large tin bowl; the community members sit around it and sing simple mantras. At the end of each mantra, they say the word *svāhā* and throw readymade *sāmgrī* (offerings) into the fire.

[24]   From a sociological perspective, *sevā* is also the most important way for devotees to create a long-term association with the community. Through *sevā*, they take an active part in building and sustaining the community. Even more than receiving, the giving generates this long-term association and a sense of belonging.

[25]   *Āj kā vicār*, Rājeśvarānand's daily WhatsApp message from Rājeśvarānand to his community. 3 March 2025.

[26]   Public talk of Rājeśvarānand. RMJM temple complex, Shahdara, Delhi. Fieldwork notes, 29 January 2017.

[27]   Interview with Lata Thakur, Sanjana Chauhan and Gauri Rana, at the BBNM in Chhatarpur, Delhi. Fieldwork notes, 10 February 2017.

[28]   The gurus distinguish between two types of *sevā*: service with desires (*sakām*) and service without desires (*niṣkām*). The *sakām sevā* is a fake (*naklī*) *sevā*, which is often identified with powerful people ("big men") such as politicians, businessmen, and greedy gurus. Rājeśvarānand calls those who conduct *sakām sevā* "traders" (Baniyā), because *sevā* with desires is based on the thought process of "I am doing *sevā,* so the god or the guru will fulfill my wishes".

[29]   Rājeśvarānand public talk, RMJM temple complex. Fieldwork notes, 6 December 2015.

[30]   Interview with Kaem Singh, at the BBNM in Chhatarpur, Delhi. Fieldwork notes, 23 April 2017.

References

Alexander, Samuel, Sangeetha Chandrashekeran, and Brendan Gleeson, eds. 2022. *Post-Capitalist Futures: Paradigms, Politics, and Prospects*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Almanova, Albena. 2020. *Capitalism on Edge: How Fighting Precarity Can Achieve Radical Change Without Crisis or Utopia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bakshi, Rajni. 2012. *Bazaars, Conversations and Freedom: For a Market Culture Beyond Greed and Fear*. Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing.

Beckerlegge, Gwilym. 2003. Saffron and Seva: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Appropriation of Swami Vivekananda. In *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender and Sampraday*. Edited by Antony Copley. New Delhi: OUP India.

Beckerlegge, Gwilym. 2006. *Swami Vivekananda'S Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Mutt and Mission*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bennett, Peter. 1993. *The Path of Grace: Social Organization and Temple Worship in a Vaisnava Sect*. Delhi: Hindustan Publishing.

Bhargava, Rajeev. 2015. We (In India) Have Always Been Post-Secular. In *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*. Edited by Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida and George Levine. Berlin: De Gruyter Brill, pp. 109–36.

Bhattacharjee, Malini. 2019. *Disaster Relief and The RSS: Resurrecting 'Religion' Through Humanitarianism*. California: SAGE.

Brown, Judith. 2011. *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Capra, Fritjof. 1995. Deep Ecology: A New Paradigm. In *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*. Edited by George Sessions. Boston and London: Shambhala, pp. 19–25.

Casanova, Jose. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cloke, Paul. 2011. Emerging geographies of evil? Theo-ethics and postsecular possibilities. *Cultural Geographies* 18: 475–93. [CrossRef]

Cloke, Paul, Callum Sutherland, and Andrew Williams. 2016. Postsecularity, political resistance, and protest in the occupy movement. *Antipode* 48: 497–23. [CrossRef]

Copeman, Jacob. 2011. The Gift and Its Forms of Life in Contemporary India. *Modern Asian Studies* 45: 1051–94. [CrossRef]

Danaher, John. 2022. Techno-optimism: An analysis, an evaluation and a modest defense. *Philosophy & Technology* 35: 54.

Di Somma, Emillio. 2022. Trust, Faith, and Social Imaginary: Prolegomena to an Anthropology of Personhood. In *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Edited by Jermo Van Nes, Nullens Patrick and Steven C. van ser Heuvel. Singapore: Springer Nature, pp. 153–71.

Doniger, Wendy, and Brian Smith, trans. 1991. *The Laws of Manu*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dwivedi, Onkar Prasad. 2000. Dharmic Ecology. In *Hinduism and Ecology—The intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*. Edited by Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Erlich, Michal. 2022. Tracing Well-Being: The Rise of Kalyāṇ in the Hindi-Hindu Public Sphere. *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 26: 1–35. [CrossRef]

Erlich, Michal. 2024. Biographies of Enhanced Agency and Self-Made Gurus: From Housewives into Founders of Guru-Bhakti Communities. In *Gendered Agency in Transcultural Hinduism and Buddhism*. Edited by Wittich Ute Hüsken and Nanette Spina. New York: Routledge, pp. 38–63.

Fisher, Michael. 2018. *An Environmental History of India—From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Framarin, Christopher. 2011. The value of nature in Indian (Hindu) traditions. *Religious Studies* 47: 285–300. [CrossRef]

Gandhi, Mahatma. 2009. *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1909. *Hind Swaraj*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1927a. *The Story of My Experiments with the Truth. A Critical Edition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1927b. Young India. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)* 33: 85.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1928. Young India. In *Village Swaraj*. Compiled by H. M. Vyas. December 1962. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, p. 29.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1936a. Harijan. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)* 63: 240–41.

Gandhi, Mohandas. 1936b. Young India. A Talk on Non-Violence. In *My Non-Violence*. Edited and Complied by S. K. Bandopadhaya. 1960. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, pp. 56–58.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. 2001. On Alternative Modernities. In *Alternative Modernities*. Edited by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1–23.

Gooptu, Nandini. 2016. New Spirituality, Politics of Self-Empowerment, Citizenship, and Democracy in Contemporary India. *Modern Asian Studies* 50: 934–74. [CrossRef]

Guha, Ramachandra. 1998. Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental movement in India. In *Environmental Movements in Asia*. Edited by Arne Kalland and Gerard Persoon. London and New York: Routledge.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2008. Religion in the Public Sphere. In *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. Translated by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hodkinson, James, and Silke Horstkotte. 2020. Introducing the Postsecular: From Conceptual Beginnings to Cultural Theory. *Poetics Today* 41: 317–26. [CrossRef]

Jacobsen, Knut A. 2018. Sevā. *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*. Available online: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism/seva-COM_2050280?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism&s.q=seva (accessed on 29 May 2018).

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2007. Introduction: The Invention of an Ethnic Nationalism. In *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Edited by Christophe Jaffrelot. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

James, George. 2004. The Environment and Environmental Movements in Hinduism. In *Contemporary Hinduism; Ritual, Culture, and Practice*. Edited by Robin Rinehart. Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

Kapoor, Vikram. 2025. (Re)Viewing Postsecularity Through the Pragmatic Pursuits of New Religious Movements in India. *Religions* 16: 157. [CrossRef]

Kawall, Jason. 2016. A History of Environmental Ethics. In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Khoshoo, Triloki, and John Moolakkattu. 2010. *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environment: Analysing Gandhian Environmental Thought*. New Delhi: Teri Press.

Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Change Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Knope: Penguin Random House.

Klein, Rebekka. 2022. What Is the Nature of Christian Love? Homo Amans and Revolutionary Altruism. In *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Edited by Jermo Van Nes, Nullens Patrick and Steven C. van ser Heuvel. Singapore: Springer Nature, pp. 99–121.

Kohut, Heinz. 1977. *The Restoration of the Self*. New York: International Universities Press.

Kyrlezhev, Aleksandr. 2008. The Postsecular Age: Religion and Culture Today. *Religion, State & Society* 36: 21–31.

Laidlaw, James. 2000. A Free Gift Makes No Friends. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6: 617–34. [CrossRef]

Lal, Vinay. 2009. Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi. *New Literary History* 40: 281–313. [CrossRef]

Levi, Ricki, and Daniel Mishori. 2015. Water, the Sacred and the Commons of Rajasthan: A Review of Anupam Mishra's Philosophy of Water. *Transcience: A Journal of Global Studies* 6: 1–25.

Lucia, Amanda J. 2014. 'Give Me Sevā Overtime': Selfless Service and Humanitarianism in Mata Amritanandamayi's Transnational Guru Movement. *History of Religions* 54: 188–207. [CrossRef]

Lucia, Amanda J. 2015. *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2015. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mason, Paul. 2015. *Postcapitalism—A Guide to Our Future*. London: Penguin Books.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCloskey, Deirdre. 2022. God's Work in the World: The Deep Compatibility of Real Liberalism with Any Abrahamic Religion. In *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Edited by Jermo Van Nes, Nullens Patrick and Steven C. van ser Heuvel. Singapore: Springer Nature, pp. 77–98.

Mckean, Lise. 1996. *Divine Enterprise—Gurus & the Hindu Nationalist Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mlecko, Joel D. 1982. The Guru in Hindu Tradition. *Numen* 29: 33–61. [CrossRef]

Nandy, Ashish. 2018. FORWORD—A Desanctified, Usable Gandhi. In Gandhi, Mohandas. In *The Story of My Experiments with the Truth. A Critical Edition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Nash, Roderick. 1989. *The Rights of Nature—A History of Environmental Ethics*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Pandya, Samta. 2015. New Strategies of New Religious Movements: The Case of Art of Living Foundation. *Sociological Bulletin* 64: 287–304. [CrossRef]

Parry, Jonathan. 1986. The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift'. *Man* 21: 453–73. [CrossRef]

Patel, Sujata. 2010. Seva, Sangathanas and Gurus: Service and the Making of the Hindu Nation. In *Religion, Community and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*. Edited by Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S. Jodhka. New Delhi: Routledge India.

Patel, Ved Ravi. 2012. Engaging in the World: Sevā in Hindu Bhakti Traditions. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA.

Raworth, Kate. 2018. *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Robinson, Matthew Ryan. 2023. What Are We Talking about When We Talk about the (Post)Secular? Recentering Mutual Participation and a Commitment to Communicability in Scholarly Discussions of Contemporary Religions. *Dialog* 62: 51–65. [CrossRef]

Sessions, George. 1995. *Deep Ecology for the Twenty—First Century*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Shah, Jathalal G. 1969. *Shri Vallabhacharya: His Philosophy and Religion*. Gujarat: Hon Secretaty Pushtimargiya Pustakalaya.

Singh, Rana. 2021. Environmental Ethics and Sustainability in Indian Thought: The vision of Mahatma Gandhi. *Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion* 26: 55–87. [CrossRef]

Srinivas, Smriti. 2008. *In the Presence of Sai Baba: Body, City, and Memory in a Global Religious Movement*. Leiden: Brill.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Vaddiraju, Anil Kumar. 2024. *Reason, Religion and Modernity: Gadamer-Habermas Debate*. Singapore: Springer.

Van Nes, Jermo, Nullens Patrick, and Steven C. van ser Heuvel. 2022. *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Varoufakis, Yanis. 2015. *The Global Minotaur—America, Europe, and the Future of Global Economy*. London: Zedbooks.

Verma, Vidhu. 2017. Secularism in India. In *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*. Edited by Phil Zuckerman and John R. Shook. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Virdee, Gurmit Singh. 2005. Labour of Love: Kar Seva at Darbar Sahib's Amrit Sarover. *Sikh Formations* 1: 13–28. [CrossRef]

Warrier, Maya. 2003. The Seva Ethic and the Spirit of Institution Building in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission. In *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender and Sampraday*. Edited by Antony Copley. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Weber, Thomas. 1999. Gandhi, Deep Ecology, Peach research and Buddhist Economics. *Journal of Peace Research* 36: 349–61. [CrossRef]

Weber, Thomas. 2011. Gandhi's moral economics: The sins of wealth without work and commerce without morality. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*. Edited by Judith Brown and Anthony Parel. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 135–54.

White, Lynn, Jr. 1967. The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science* 155: 1203–7. [CrossRef]

Williams, Raymond Brady. 1984. *A New Face of Hinduism: The Swaminarayan Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wink, Walter. 1998. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. New York: Doubleday.