Gandhi’s Concept of Conscience/Antarātmā Revisited: Exploring His Cardinal Principle in Trilingual Texts

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Abstract This article explores the nature and genealogy of Mohandas K. Gandhi’s concept of conscience/antarātmā (inner soul/spirit), the cardinal principle of his religious politics. Much previous scholarship, solely relying upon English materials, has explained the nature of Gandhi’s concept of conscience in relation to Western and Christian Protestant traditions. By chronologically examining his lifelong discourse on conscience expressed in English and antarātmā in Gujarati and Hindi writings, this article shows that: (1) Gandhi developed a distinct variant of hybrid thought that was essentially different from the prevalent negative conception of “guilty conscience” in the modern West by integrating ideas of conscience and ātmā/ātmā; (2) since the notion of ātmā was intimately related to the ascetic bodily discipline (brahmacarya), Gandhi identified the essence of his satyāgraha campaign as ātmabal (the force of ātmā) and believed that taking the vow of brahmacarya could enhance one’s vital energy (vīrya); and (3) as Gandhi reached his last years, and the most controversial phase of his intellectual evolution, he developed a new understanding of an inner voice/antarano avāj whose nature was “mystical” (gūḍh), and thereby difficult even for him to articulate in any language.

Keywords Mohandas K. Gandhi · conscience · antarātmā · brahmacarya · satyāgraha · body · Gujarati
Introduction

This article aims to explore the nature and genealogy of Mohandas K. Gandhi’s concept of conscience. Much previous scholarship has argued that Gandhi’s concept of conscience was a bedrock principle of his religious politics.\(^1\) Gandhi considered that the “moral law” of conscience was higher than the state’s laws and the commandments of religious authorities.\(^2\) David Hardiman (2003: 57) has pointed out that “individual conscience” was for Gandhi the “root” of his concepts of *svarāj* (self-rule, home-rule) and *satyāgraha* (nonviolent civil disobedience). “Gandhi’s belief in the supremacy of the individual and of his role in society,” wrote Raghavan Iyer, “cannot be grasped without turning to his fundamental concept of conscience” (1983: 119).

Despite such prevalent perceptions, there has not yet been a study that thoroughly examines the nature of Gandhi’s concept of conscience, its conceptual relationship with his other central ideas such as *satyāgraha* and *brahmacarya*, and the constituent influences under which it was formed. One of the primary reasons for this gap in scholarship is the existence of an innumerable cache of multilingual documents written and published by Gandhi. Aside from being a prominent political leader, Gandhi was also a prolific writer in Gujarati, Hindi, and English.\(^3\) A vast trove of historical materials written in these three languages was chronologically compiled in the 100 volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (1956–94; hereafter *CWMG*) in English, the 82 volumes of *Gāndhiājīno Akṣardeh: Mahātmā Gāndhīnāṃ Lakhānō, Bhāṣāno, Patro Vagereno Saṅgrah* (“Gandhi’s Imperishable Corpus: The Collection of Mahātmā Gandhi’s Writings, Speeches, Letters, and so on,” 1967–92; hereafter *GA*) in Gujarati, and the 97 volumes of *Sampūrṇa Gāndhī Vāṅgmay* (“The Entire Gandhi Literature,” 1958–94; hereafter *SGV*) in Hindi.\(^4\) Gandhi elaborated upon his concept of conscience, which was closely associated with his own most intimate personal concerns, in both English and in Gujarati and Hindi. As C. N. Patel has argued, while Gandhi’s “English writings and speeches often reflect the stresses of the political conflict with the British Government,…his Gujarati writings Gandhiji….speaks to the reader with a relaxed intimacy reflecting the inner serenity which was the essence of his karmayoga” (1981: 1). Due to the difficulty of accessing the documents written in Gandhi’s

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1 See Chatterjee 1983: 94–112; Iyer 1983: 113–48; Hunt 1986; Valecha 2002; Hardiman 2003: 54–57; Sorabji 2012: 143–54; and Mukherji 2015.
2 See Brown 1989: 110; and Sorabji 2012: 12–13.
3 Gandhi also had a specific command of Sanskrit and Urdu. Moreover, he learned Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali and published his weekly journal *Indian Opinion* in Gujarati, English, Tamil, and Urdu in South Africa. In this respect, Suhrud pertinently points out that “[Gandhi’s] lifelong quest was to be able to communicate with the people of India in their own tongues and in their own idioms” (2012: 2).
4 It must be noted that hundreds of omissions, non-transparent re-editing, and flaws appeared in the revised and digitalized version of *CWMG* and *SGV* published in 1999 (see Suhrud 2004). In this article, I have used the original editions of *CWMG* and *SGV* published between 1956/1958 and 1994.
native languages, most scholars works thus far have analyzed Gandhi’s concept of conscience primarily in relation to Western and Christian Protestant traditions.⁵

However, understanding the importance of using Gandhi’s Gujarati materials has gradually grown in recent times.⁶ Those works that acknowledge the essential value of Gandhi’s multilingual writings have rightly highlighted that he employed the concept of *antarātmā* (inner self/soul/spirit) in Gujarati/Hindi texts as the equivalent of the English concept of conscience.⁷ Yet, these works have not offered any specific or coherent account of the linguo-conceptual connection between conscience and *antarātmā* and the associations that link these concepts with other related ideas such as inner voice/antarno avāj and inspiration/prernā.

In consideration of the above, this article will examine the *CWMG, GA,* and *SGV* alongside Gandhi’s weekly political journals, *Indian Opinion* (primarily in English, Gujarati, and Hindi; hereafter *IO*), *Young India* (English; hereafter *YI*), *Navijīvan* (Gujarati; hereafter *NJ*), *Harijan* (English; hereafter *HJ*), and *Harijanbandhu* (Gujarati; hereafter *HJB*).⁸ I will demonstrate how Gandhi carefully developed his distinct concept of conscience/*antarātmā* by combining ideas expressed in both English and in Gujarati/Hindi texts. I will argue Gandhi’s most significant contribution to posterity was that he created a “positive” or “active” meaning of conscience/*antarātmā* as the physico-spiritual basis of his *satyāgraha* to engender change in modern society. This entirely differs from the “negative” moralist connotations of the term prevalent in Western cultural traditions, such as “bad conscience,” “the pangs of conscience,” and “guilty conscience” that Friedrich Nietzsche (2006) once severely criticized.⁹ Gandhi also emphasized the importance of *brahmacarya*, the ascetic bodily discipline. This was a common practice and concept among Hindu and Jain communities. Yet, Gandhi formed his interpretation to enable people to properly acquire a “right” perception of conscience/*antarātmā*.

When looking into the various conceptual “influences” on Gandhi’s thought, we should avoid employing a dichotomic framework that places the “modern West” and the “indigenous non-West” in opposition. This division is often blurred in practice. For example, Svāmī Vivekānanda, whose work left a considerable impression on Gandhi, was a disciple of the indigenous Bengali *guru* Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahāṃsa and who received Western education. John Woodroffe, an apparent influence on Gandhi in his later life, was an eminent English Judge in colonial

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⁵ See Chatterjee 1983: 96; Iyer 1983: 132; Hunt 1986: xi; Hardiman 2003: 54; and Sorabji 2012: 12.

⁶ Although the importance of using Gandhi’s Gujarati materials has already been noted by Erikson (1969: 60) and Parekh (1986, 1989: 7), there are still only a few works that have used Gandhi’s Gujarati writings (see, for instance, Parel 1991, 2006; Suhrud 2010, 2012; and Skaria 2016).

⁷ See Bilgrami 2011: 99; and Skaria 2016: 245–47.

⁸ In this article, all translations from Gujarati and Hindi texts are mine.

⁹ See Levinas on “the European’s bad conscience” (1998: 191–92). Etymologically, the English word “conscience” is commonly derived from the Latin word “conscientia” and the Greek word “suneidenai” meaning “sharing [moral] ‘knowledge’ (scientia) ‘with’ (con-) [others, God, oneself, etc.]” (Giubilini 2022; see also Sorabji 2014: 15). The contemporary connotation of the word “as the arbiter and motive power in right and wrong” (Hyslop 1911: 30) developed during the (post-)secularization process in Europe; there was a gradual semantic transition from ancient Graeco-Roman culture, via medieval Europe, to the (post-)Enlightenment period (see Andrew 2001; Langston 2001). There is no equivalent term for “conscience” in the Indian philosophical traditions (see Hyslop, Pinches, Foucart, Jones, Gaster, and Margoliouth 1911; Despland 1995; and compare Chryssides 1999: 176).
Bengal but also a tāntrika who accepted dīkṣā from his guru Śvacandra Vidyārṇava Bhaṭṭācārya. Leo Tolstoy and Western esotericists such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Anna Kingsford, whose ideas became crucial sources for Gandhi’s early intellectual development of the concept of conscience, were radical critics of mainstream Christianity and have therefore often been seen to belong to “other Wests” (Nandy 1983: xiii) or as “western ‘nonplayers’” (L. Gandhi 2006: 1). As these examples show, the thinkers and ideas that influenced Gandhi were multilayered and hybrid. In what follows, while bearing this fundamental theoretical perspective in mind, I will explore the nature and genealogy of Gandhi’s concept of conscience/antarātmā.

The Initial Use of the Word “Conscience”

According to the existing materials compiled in CWMG, the word “conscience” first appears in Gandhi’s English diary written around the age of nineteen, in September 1888, during Gandhi’s first sea voyage from Bombay to London:

After three days we reached Brindisi at night….When you land at Brindisi, a man would come and ask you, in case you are a black man: “Sir, there is a beautiful girl of fourteen, follow me, Sir, and I will take you there, the charge is not high, Sir.” You are at once puzzled. But be calm and answer boldly that you don’t want her and tell the man to go away and thereby you will be safe…. If you are far away from the coast you are to find out a policeman and in case of failure, your conscience is the best dictator. We left Brindisi early in the morning (CWMG 1: 13; emphasis added).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, due to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the Fréjus Rail Tunnel in 1871, the port of Brindisi underwent rapid industrialization and commercialization. When Gandhi reached the port, sex work was allegedly rife there. While Gandhi’s steamship temporarily anchored at the port, a man offered a young girl to Gandhi. Gandhi told himself to follow his conscience’s dictatorship and to turn down the offer. Therefore, this first and only reference to the concept of conscience before Gandhi’s arrival in London is significant in terms of the following four points. First, the event occurred before he read the New Testament and the writings by Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, and William D. Salter and his acquaintance with modern spiritualism in London. Second, for all that he may have harked back to the (self-

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10 See also Rudolph and Rudolph 2006.
11 As of 1875, Russell recorded that Brindisi was expected for its “glorious future” and to “become the center of a considerable commerce” (1877: 3).
12 See Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā, “Experiments of Truth or An Autobiography” (Gāndhī 1947a; hereafter AK): 35–36.
prescribed) “pledge” (pratiyajñā) administered by a Jain monk in front of his pious Pranāmī mother before his departure, at this point of time Gandhi asserted that he almost had no interest in religious cultures of India. Third, since Gandhi seems to have acquired no legal training or knowledge before his departure, the ideas on conscience in British liberalism were intellectually alien to him, let alone the Bourgeois-Anglican notions of Adam Smith, James Mill, or John Stuart Mill. And fourth, because one of the most pressing concerns throughout Gandhi’s life was controlling his physical instincts, particularly his sexual desire, it is notable that the very beginning of his intellectual journey concerning conscience, as far as it is recorded, began with an encounter with a sexualized woman. Gandhi’s problematic view of women and sexuality, which was arguably defined by his polarized understanding of the contrast between “chaste womanhood” and sexualized women remains an important and controversial subject in Gandhian scholarship. At this juncture, the significance of conscience merely indicates Gandhi’s spontaneous moral prompting. Gandhi only used the word as a regular part of the vocabulary of English speakers during the colonial era in India.

The Intellectual Evolution: From 1888 to 1914

1888–91: Vegetarianism and Spiritualism in London
During his three-year student life in London, Gandhi actively associated with the London Vegetarian Society. He read books on vegetarianism in conjunction with his

13 Gandhi took the “pledge” to stay away from “meat, alcohol, and accompanying with women (strīsaṅga)” (AK: 41–42). It should be noted that although the level of the practice differs, both householders and monks in Jainism are commonly required to observe five fundamental vows, namely, ahimsā (non-killing), satya (truth, non-deceiving), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacarya (chastity), and aparigraha (non-possession). However, Gandhi’s vow before the monk only related to ahimsā and brahmacarya.

14 A Vaiṣnava tradition that was begun by bhakti saints Devcandrajī Mahārāj and his disciple Meharāj Thākur in the seventeenth century in Western India. The tradition mainly follows Kṛṣṇa bhakti, but since devotees believe that the essence of all religions is one, they accept teachings from various other faiths such as Islam and Christianity.

15 See AK: 41–42.

16 See AK: 33–34, 73–76; and Suhrud 2012: 1.

17 See DiSalvo 2013: 2–3.

18 See Andrew 2001: 79–113. Gandhi seems to have been acquainted with James Mill after his stay in England (CWMG 1: 35). He had read John Mill’s works during his South Africa years (Hind Svaraj [Gandhi 1979; hereafter HS]: 39) and referred to Adam Smith’s name in 1916 (CWMG 13: 311).

19 Tambe pertinently noted that while Gandhi showed much sympathy towards socially marginalized groups of people such as “untouchables” and widows during his nationalist struggle in India, he also, by labeling sexualized women as “thieves of virtue,” seldom took “a similar leap in reshaping their public image” and “extend[ed] the boundaries of social inclusiveness to accommodate them” (2009: 25, 33). In this respect, Gandhi endorsed the view that “prostitutes represented the antithesis of the chaste womanhood idolized by middle class nationalists” (23).

20 For an overview of various feminist critical assessments of Gandhi’s patriarchal view, see Hardiman (2003: 94–122) and Lal (2008: 59–61). Some essential works highlight the complexity of Gandhi’s views on women and the possibility for an alternative interpretation; most notably, see Kishwar 1986; Patel 1988; and Howard 2013.
legal training. Strikingly, the growth of the vegetarian movement during this era was concordant with the rise of modern spiritualism. The books that Gandhi read were on matters beyond bio-physical concerns. For instance, he read *The Perfect Way in Diet* (1881) by Anna Kingsford, an eminent writer of the Theosophical Society and a strong promoter of vegetarianism. Kingsford argued that there was an intimate connection between vegetarianism and the cultivation of one’s spiritual-moral sensibility: “For with all these the first essential step towards [spiritual] perfectionment…was so to regulate life that its sustenance should involve no shock to the moral conscience” (1881: 118).

Through his interaction with theosophical friends, Gandhi met Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a founder of the Theosophical Society, in 1889. Gandhi eventually became an associate member of the Society in 1891. He read her book, *The Key to Theosophy* (Blavatsky 1889), which elaborated on metaphysical and occultist connotations of the concept of conscience. Blavatsky wrote: “By the use of our higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense, and by following the dictates of what we call ‘the still small voice’ of our conscience, which is that of our EGO, and which speaks louder in us than the earthquakes and the thunders of Jehovah, wherein ‘the Lord is not’” (1889: 240).

Gandhi also recalled in *Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā*, his so-called *Autobiography*, that he had carefully read H. S. Salt’s *A Pea for Vegetarianism* (1886). The book played a fundamental role in establishing his early conviction concerning vegetarianism. It was crucial in arousing Gandhi’s interest in terms of the economic benefits of the practice and furnishing him with the idea to connect vegetarian issues with socio-moral reform. According to Salt, the flesh diet in Europe existed not primarily for nutritious reasons, but because of people’s zest for “good taste.” Being “fed on the loathsome carcases of slaughtered sheep and bullocks” was, said Salt, degrading for men and should unquestionably go against one’s “conscience” (1886: 28).

Gandhi only noted a self-conscious impression from the New Testament’s Sermon on the Mount in terms of biblical references. Yet, he may have come across several descriptions of conscience in the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul and Peter. In addition to the influences discussed here, we must add that Gandhi was also exposed to the “non-conformist conscientious objection” prevalent in British society. These books and the wind and tide of the late Victorian era contributed to the intellectual evolution of Gandhi’s concept of conscience.

### 1893–1914: Politico-Spiritual Maturation in South Africa

As earlier works have pointed out, the very basis of Gandhi’s political and religious identity was formed during his twenty-one-year sojourn in South Africa, where he

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21 See Green 1993: 94–112; and Bergunder 2014: 410, 413.
22 See also page 113 in Kingsford 1881.
23 See also pages 137, 189, 240–41, 251, and 256 in Blavatsky 1889.
24 See Salt 1886: 8, 71, and 106–8.
25 See Salt 1886: 10–12.
26 See Green 1993: 86–91; and Hunt 1993: 209–11.
developed his concept of conscience.27 The first reference to the idea of conscience during his South African years is in his unpublished handbook entitled Guide to London, written sometime in 1893–94.28 While recalling his student years in London, Gandhi recommended readers adopt simple living by avoiding “all the luxuries” such as “tea, coffee, tobacco and wines, last but not least, flesh foods” (CWMG 1: 88). As support, Gandhi cited Tolstoy (1903: 31) concerning “the warning voice of conscience” (CWMG 1: 89).

In his early years in South Africa, Gandhi passionately searched for cultural identity and read more than eighty books on various world religions.29 Among them, Tolstoy’s writings professedly had a profound influence on Gandhi. In particular, his The Kingdom of God Is Within You had a lasting impact on him throughout his life.30 In it, Tolstoy elaborated on the concept of the “[irrefutable voice of] conscience” as he insisted upon the ineluctable duty of “non-resistance” when confronting malevolent social systems:

Our whole life is in flagrant contradiction with all that we know and believe to be necessary and right….We seem to have forgotten what we know and to have put aside for the present what we believe in (and cannot but believe in for it is the sole basis of our life), and to do the very opposite of what our conscience and common sense require (1960: 136–37).31

Contemporaneously, Gandhi diligently read works by Henry David Thoreau, particularly his essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience.”32 From September 1907 onwards, Gandhi repeatedly introduced Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience in his weekly journal Indian Opinion because he believed the essence of his satyagraha was brilliantly conceptualized in Thoreau’s essay.33 Thoreau wrote that civil disobedience was chiefly a vehicle for privileging his “[higher law of] conscience” over unjust law: “It is truly enough said, that a corporation [with an unjust legislator] has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice” (2015: 191; emphasis in the original).34

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27 See CWMG 82: 240–41; Dakṣiṇ Āphrikānā Satyāgrahano Itihās, “The History of Satyāgraha in South Africa” (Gāndhī 1950; hereafter DASI): 376; Tidrick 2006: 53; and Iyer 1983: 2, 9–10.
28 See CWMG 1: 66–120.
29 See Doke 1909: 80.
30 See AK: 137; IO, June 5, 1909; and NJ, September 16, 1928. Gandhi also translated Tolstoy’s “A Letter to a Hindu” (written to Tarak Nāth Dās, a freedom fighter, on December 14, 1908) and published it in Indian Opinion with the title “Ek Hindu uparno Kaṅgal” (December 25, 1909, January 1, 1910, and January 8, 1910).
31 See also pages 10, 28, 75, 135, 143–44, 152–53, 157–58, 189, 196, 213, 220, 242, 251, 275–76, 351, 355–57, 360–62, 364–65, 374, 385–95, 432, 439, 445, and 450 in Tolstoy 1960.
32 See Thoreau 2015 (originally published in 1849).
33 See IO, September 7, 1907, September 14, 1907, October 5, 1907, October 12, 1907, October 26, 1907, November 9, 1907, February 22, 1908, April 18, 1908, January 23, 1909, January 30, 1909, February 6, 1909, April 2, 1910, August 12, 1911, April 12, 1913, and May 3, 1913.
34 See also pages 201 and 210 in Thoreau 2015.
Ethical Religion by William M. Salter, a prominent lecturer for the Ethical Culture Society in Chicago, also made a considerable impression on Gandhi.\textsuperscript{35} It was originally issued in 1889 by the Rationalist Press Association, whose president at the time was George Jacob Holyoke; the publisher was one of the major promoters of Charles Bradlaugh’s books. Ethical Religion underscored an essential requisite of following one’s internal “voice of conscience,” which was viewed as the basis of all human moral sensibility and was compatible with one’s rational intellect.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to his contact with “Western” thought, we should also examine non-Western influences upon Gandhi during his stay in South Africa, though many were hybrid. Throughout his life, Gandhi confessed several times that his most significant religious influence was Śrīmad Rājendra, an ingenuous Jain ascetic in Gandhi’s native land Gujarat.\textsuperscript{37} Through Gandhi’s reading of Rājendra’s Mokṣamāḷa (“The Garland of Liberation,” 2010) and his correspondence with him between 1894 and 1896, Gandhi reported having become well acquainted with the philosophy of ātmā/ātmān or ātmajñān (knowledge of ātmā).\textsuperscript{38} Gandhi wrote in Satyanā Prayogo that Rājendra was the first thinker to convince Gandhi that “there is no other religion than Hindu religion (hindūdharma) where there are subtle and deep/mystic ideas (sūkṣma gūḍh vicara), [teachings of] introspection of ātmā (ātmānirikṣaṇ), and compassion (dayā)” (AK: 146). When considering the development of Gandhi’s concept of conscience, Rājendra’s ideas on ātmajñān had a decisive effect in terms of two points. First, Rājendra reiterated that a spiritual seeker (mumukṣu) could attain the perfect knowledge (jñāna) and the realization/liberation of ātmā (mokṣa) during their lifetime by their conscious efforts.\textsuperscript{39} Such an idea of ātmajñān was entirely different from the justificatio sola fide, the prevalent Christian Protestant soteriology which Gandhi encountered while interacting with his Evangelical friends during his early years in South Africa.\textsuperscript{40} And second, Rājendra alleged that to attain ātmajñān, strict bodily discipline was indispensable. His idea was explained through the Jain/Hindu concept of brahmācaryā (asceticism, celibacy). From 1902 onwards, due to his interaction with Rājendra, Gandhi became gradually aware of the importance of practicing brahmācaryā to strictly control his sexual desire and change his dietary habits.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{35} Since Gandhi thought Salter’s book was highly beneficial to readers, he translated it into Gujarati and published it consecutively in Indian Opinion under the title “Nītidharm athvā Dharmṇī” (January 5, 1907, January 12, 1907, January 19, 1907, January 26, 1907, February 2, 1907, February 9, 1907, February 16, 1907, and February 23, 1907) during his first satyagraha campaign.

\textsuperscript{36} See Salter 1889: 65, see also 8, 33, 37, 67, 77, 85–86, 88, 92–94, 105, 114, 159, 164, 168, 178, 192, 201, 232, 237, 249–53, 255, 257, 277, 295, 297–98, 299–301, 306, 320, 322, and 327.

\textsuperscript{37} See AK: 93–96; and GA 3: 218, 9: 290–91, 13: 135, 271 274, 282, 283, 25: 340, 37: 246, 252, 43: 11.

\textsuperscript{38} See Kalārthī 2000: 93–118; and AK: 93–96.

\textsuperscript{39} See Kalārthī 2000: 95–99.

\textsuperscript{40} See AK: 144–47 and 131–34.

\textsuperscript{41} See AK: 329.
Gandhi’s Concept of Conscience/\textit{Antarātmā} Revisited

Primarily due to his contact with Rājcandra,\textsuperscript{42} Gandhi became progressively more mindful of the need to find Gujarati philosophical terms corresponding to the English concept of conscience.\textsuperscript{43} Although the word “\textit{antarātmā}” did not yet appear, various Gujarati expressions were employed in its place during Gandhi’s South African period, such as \(āpnum\ \textit{antar śum kahe che}\) (what our insides say),\textsuperscript{44} \(potāno rūh athvā \textit{ātmā}\) ([one’s] own spirit and soul/self),\textsuperscript{45} \(tenā dilmām khudā vasśe ne kaheśe\) (in his heart, God will inhabit and tell), \(khudā teonā dilmām āvśe\) (God will come in their heart),\textsuperscript{46} \(śuddh bhāv\) (pure sentiment/emotion),\textsuperscript{47} \(jñānpūrvvak\) (knowingly/consciously),\textsuperscript{48} \(man sākṣī purē che\) ([my] mind fully testifies),\textsuperscript{49} \(lāgni\) (emotion/feeling),\textsuperscript{50} \(man sākṣī che\) ([my] mind testifies),\textsuperscript{51} and \(tenā \textit{ātmā} udgāro\) (the utterances of his soul/self).\textsuperscript{52}

Gandhi’s understanding of the conceptual relationship between \textit{ātmā} and brahmacarya was also deepened by reading Svāmī Vivekānanda’s English translations of Sanskrit texts and his own analysis of them.\textsuperscript{53} Gandhi first read Vivekānanda’s \textit{Raja Yoga} (1908), a commentary on Patañjali’s \\textit{Yogasūtra}, in 1903.\textsuperscript{54} In \textit{Raja Yoga}, Vivekānanda explicitly wrote that “all the orthodox systems of Indian philosophy have one goal in view, the liberation of the soul \([\textit{ātman}]\) through perfection” (1908: ii). He emphasized that the vow of brahmacarya was inevitable when it came to the liberation of \textit{ātmā}. This was not only because the vow was, argued Vivekānanda, beneficial in terms of moral perfection, but also because it provided the practitioner with miraculous spiritual power. The essential significance of brahmacarya was, according to him, to transform one’s vital/sex energy/semen (\textit{vīrya}) into spiritual power (\textit{ojas}), which would then have a positive effect on the physical world.\textsuperscript{55} By observing the vow of brahmacarya, a man’s “chaste brain” would acquire “tremendous energy and gigantic will power” (Vivekānanda 1908: 142–43). “The gigantic will powers of the world, the world-movers, can bring their \textit{Prana} into a high state of vibration, and it is so great and

\textsuperscript{42} See \textit{AK}: 137 and 158. Other than Gandhi’s relationship with Rājcandra, Pestonji Pādsāh, a vegetarian Parsi, also persuaded Gandhi to work on the development of Gujarati literature. Particularly under the influence of these two people, Gandhi had become familiar with major Gujarati poets such as Narsimh Mahetā, Mīrābāī, and Narmadāśāṅkar Lālśāṅkar Dave during the period of his sojourn in South Africa (see \textit{AK}: 188–89; and Devanesen 1969: 264–65).

\textsuperscript{43} It is well known that Gandhi replaced his term for political struggle from “passive resistance” to “\textit{satyāgraha}” due to his recognition of the necessity to articulate his thought in his native language(s) (see \textit{IO}, January 11, 1908; and \textit{DASI}: 131).

\textsuperscript{44} See \textit{IO}, January 19, 1907.

\textsuperscript{45} See \textit{IO}, September 7, 1907.

\textsuperscript{46} See \textit{IO}, December 19, 1908.

\textsuperscript{47} See \textit{HS}: 51.

\textsuperscript{48} See \textit{HS}: 260.

\textsuperscript{49} See \textit{HS}: 271.

\textsuperscript{50} See \textit{IO}, January 1, 1910.

\textsuperscript{51} See \textit{GA} 12: 317.

\textsuperscript{52} See \textit{GA} 12: 367.

\textsuperscript{53} See \textit{CWMG} 19: 307–8; and Desāī 1948: 266.

\textsuperscript{54} See \textit{AK}: 280–81.

\textsuperscript{55} See Vivekānanda 1908: 47–48.
powerful that it catches others in a moment, and thousands are drawn towards them, and half the world think as they do” (Vivekānanda 1908: 32). We can see Vivekānanda’s influence on this subject in Gandhi’s Hind Svarāj and other writings on brahmacarya published during his first satyagraha campaign.56

Therefore, during his years in South Africa, Gandhi became deeply acquainted with ideas of conscience expressed in English by Thoreau and Salter, as well as those ideas of Tolstoy expressed in translation from Russian into English, while he was also learning about Rājendra’s and Vivekānanda’s ideas concerning ātmā and brahmacarya. By combining ideas from the (putative) “West” and the (putative) “non-West,” Gandhi eventually established his unique understanding of conscience/ātmā.

After absorbing these ideas, Gandhi reported in May 1906 that he experienced a “churning of the heart” (hrdayamanthan) while organizing the Indian volunteer ambulance corps in response to the Zulu Rebellion.57 Because of this, in late July 1906, Gandhi decided to take a lifelong vow of brahmacarya. Significantly, it was only about a month after taking this vow that Gandhi, while insisting upon the duty to be obedient to one’s law/voice of conscience, or ātmā, suddenly embarked upon his mass satyagraha campaign to combat the racial injustice imposed on Indian immigrants in South Africa.58 Gandhi referred to satyagraha as “ātmabāl” (the force of ātmā). He believed that his campaign could only be undertaken when his vital energy, an essential ingredient for ātmabāl, was boosted by observing brahmacarya.59 Gandhi’s concept of conscience/ātmā had entered a distinctly new phase by this juncture.

The Intellectual Evolution: From 1915 to 1948

In this section, I will divide Gandhi’s thirty-three-year stay in India into five parts: (1) 1915–19, (2) 1919–22, (3) 1922–30, (4) the 1930s, and (5) the 1940s. This will enable an exploration of the chronological evolution of Gandhi’s concept of conscience, or antarātmā, from his return to India until the period after Partition.

1915–19: The Indigenization of Terminology

The first two references to the concept of conscience in English after Gandhi’s return to India can be found in Gandhi’s speeches upon Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s death on February 19, 1915. The next day, on February 20, Gandhi said in a speech at Šāntiniketan: “He [Gokhale] had a great struggle during the latter days of his life, a struggle with his conscience” (CWMG 13: 27). Then, on March 3, at a condolence meeting in Poona, he said, as reported in The Amrita Bazar Patrika (March 5, 1915):

56 See Hazama 2021: 718–20; and IO, April 26, 1913.
57 See AK: 335–40.
58 See AK: 341–42; and DASI: 117–23.
59 Even though Rājendra and Vivekānanda profoundly influenced his understanding, some of Gandhi’s ideas on brahmacarya were unique. For example, his view of brahmacarya for married couples was entirely original. Gandhi explained that if people were already married before taking the vow of brahmacarya, they need not be divorced or forsake their marital status. Instead, the couple must never have any sexual relationship except a few times a year only for reproduction to maintain their vital energy. See IO, April 26, 1913; and also Gandhi 1947b.
“One thing he [Gandhi] would like to mention and that was the deep-seated religious feelings of the man [Gokhale] from which sprang a thoroughness which was one of his chief characteristics. He also possessed a conscience” (CWMG 13: 33).

It is important to note that Gandhi regarded Gokhale not only as his “political guru” (CWMG 13: 226), but also for “the deep-seated religious feelings of the man” (33), for Gokhale was generally acknowledged as a secularist politician. Indeed, the idea of “the spiritualization of politics” was addressed by Gokhale more than a decade before Gandhi’s return to India.\textsuperscript{60} Gandhi’s idea of conscience was thus to be defined beyond the ambit of the religious-secular dichotomy: “God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist” (YI, March 5, 1925).

Then, from April 1917 onwards, Gandhi began to investigate Campāran farmers who had allegedly been suffering under the foreign owners of indigo plantations. During his research, Gandhi was ordered to leave by the state government, but he refused to comply, resulting in his arrest and a court appearance. There, Gandhi gave one of his famous speeches explaining the reason for his disobedience of the law by referring to the concept of conscience: “I have ventured to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience of the higher law of our being—the voice of conscience” (CWMG 13: 375).\textsuperscript{61}

Following Gandhi’s return to India, the first possible Gujarati equivalent term for the concept of conscience appears in a private letter written by Gandhi to his second cousin, Jamnādas Gāndhī, on May 12, 1917. After 1911, Jamnādas lived with Gandhi for four years at his āśras in South Africa. Gandhi may have seen in Jamnādas the same as he saw in Jamnādas’ elder brother Maganlāl Gāndhī: the potential to become a future eminent satyagrahī. Gandhi, therefore, had an invariably keen interest in Jamnādas’ moral and intellectual development. Jamnādas was just twenty-one or twenty-two years old. Gandhi’s hopes for Jamnādas led to write to him that “if you would not prove to be [an ideal man] according to [my] expectation, [that means that] my ability of judging/assessing (parīkṣāsakti) [people] would be estimated to zero” (GA 13: 356). Yet, in order not to place Jamnādas under an excessive pressure of expectation, Gandhi also told him that “my ātmā also clearly testifies (māro ātmā paṇ em j sākṣī pure) that I am not a [good] man of judgement” and was careful to bless Jamnādas regardless of the lifepath he would take thereafter (GA 13: 356).

Several months after this letter, the word “antarātmā” was likely to have appeared in Gandhi’s Hindi speech at the Bihar Students’ Conference held in Bhagalpur on October 15, 1917.\textsuperscript{62} At this conference, Gandhi opined that while he admitted that English was practical as the “administrative language” (rājyanī bhāṣā)

\textsuperscript{60} See Shahani 1944: 16–17.

\textsuperscript{61} Later, recalling this incident, Gandhi wrote about his speech in Gujarati in Satyanā Prayogo where he translated “the voice of conscience” as “antarātmāno avāj” (voice of antarātmā) (AK: 442). However, he had not yet used the word “antarātmā” at this point.

\textsuperscript{62} See GA 14: 5–12.
(GA 14: 7) in India, Hindi should be the “national language” (rāṣṭrīya bhāṣā) so that Indian education could be carried out via their “mother tongue” (mātrbhāṣā) (GA 14: 5). Gandhi contended that we have been disrespecting [our] mother tongue. [Therefore,] we must suffer an arduous consequence of this sin (pāp)....It is indeed our own duty (kartavya) to shape and enhance [our own] language....If we cannot elevate (unnatī) [our] mother tongue and we hold such a principle that we can show and develop [our] higher thoughts (uṇcā vicāro) only by English, there is not the slightest doubt that we may forever remain to be slaves (gulām) [of foreign rule] (GA 14: 5–6).

He further emphasized that the purpose of education was to make a man “virtuous” (sadācārī) by cultivating his “character” (cāritr) so he may acquire his “ātmajñān” and observe the “religious vows” (vrato) such as satya (truth), ahimsā (non-killing), brahmacarya (chastity), aparigrah (non-possession), asteya (non-stealing), and nirbhaytā (fearlessness) (GA 14: 7). At the end of his speech, Gandhi questioned students on whether they were leading a “native” (deśī) way of life. He finally suggested that they find their answers by reflecting upon themselves and “satisfy [ing] your [their] antarātmā” (tamāra antarātmāne santoṣjo) (GA 14: 12).

Insofar as I can see, this is the first text where the word “antarātmā” appears in GA and SGV. However, the original Hindi report on this speech has been lost. The available Gujarāti article in GA is a reproduction of the report included in Mahātmā Gāndhīnī Vicārāsṛṣṭi (“Mahātmā Gandhi’s Thought”) published and translated by Mathurādās Trikamjī in 1919. Therefore, we cannot make a definitive claim that Gandhi himself referred to the term “antarātmā” in his original speech. Regardless, this speech is vital because Gandhi had disclosed his sincere regard for the political issues revolving around national/native languages. It is likely to assume that Gandhi began to use the term “antarātmā” sometime around this period.

Moreover, in a Gujarāti letter to Candulāl written on November 22, 1917, Gandhi again explained the equivalent Gujarāti idea of conscience in relation to Hindu religious vows. Gandhi elaborated on the metaphysical connotation of the vow of truth (satya) and the concepts of brahm/brahman, brahmacarya, and ahimsā by referring to a proverbial saying from the Manusmṛti. After explicating these, Gandhi said that an opponent of a truth follower would spontaneously recognize the truthfulness of the truth follower via the opponent’s ātmā: “His [opponent’s] ātmā testifies that (teno ātmā sāksī pure ke) what was said about him [by the truth follower] was purely motivated and true” (GA 14: 86).

From February 22 to March 18, 1918, Gandhi led a strike, or satyāgraha struggle, for textile millworkers in Ahmedabad to increase their low wages. During this period, Gandhi hit on the idea of using a public fast as critical leverage for his

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63 Gandhi was no less attentive to the complicated issues revolving around the strained relations between Hindi (or Hindustani) and the Dravidian languages of the south of India. Yet, he could not provide a feasible solution to this problem (Isaka 2009: 182–83).

64 See GA 15: 69.

65 “Speak truth, speak lovingly” (satyaṃ brūyāt priyam brūyāt) (transcribed in Gujarāti).
peaceful protest. Before taking up his fast that lasted three days, on March 1, 1918, Gandhi wrote a Gujarati letter to Ambālāl Sārabhāī, a millowner as well as a secret donor to Gandhi’s Sābarmatī Āśram, suggesting that he “listen to the tiny sound/voice [that] occurred in your [Ambālāl’s] heart (āpnā hṛdaymāṁ thatā jhīṇā nād)” to discern the right course of action (Desāi 1950: 48). Besides, on the first day of the fast, Gandhi remarked in Gujarati that his satyāgraḥa struggle was carried out under the perspective of “my ātmā (mārā ātmā)” (GA 14: 223).

Two months after the Khedā Satyāgraḥa in Kheda District, Gujarat, Gandhi suffered seriously from dysentery and reluctantly began drinking goat’s milk to aid his recovery. This incident marked his violation of the vow of milk renouncement (dūdhātyāg) taken with Herman Kallenbach in South Africa in 1912. Gandhi had first learned from Rājendra that drinking milk caused “sexual desire” (indriyavikār, kām), which posed the most significant obstacle to observing the vow of brahmacarya. Gandhi’s Gujarati letter to Maganlāl Gandhī on January 10, 1919, reported that drinking goat’s milk never ceased to prick his “antarātmā”: “Despite of this permission [to drink milk], not for a single moment, [my] antarātmā did not ask me, ‘Why [are you doing] this much of labor?’” (GA 15: 69). This, according to my research, is Gandhi’s first recorded reference to the concept of antarātmā in Gujarati. From then onwards, the word “antarātmā” became Gandhi’s most used equivalent term for the English idea of conscience in Gujarati and Hindi.

1919–22: Innovating Nationalist Discourse

Before the inauguration of the all-India hartāl (strike) against the Rowlatt Bills, Gandhi made a public speech on satyāgraḥa in English on March 18, 1919, stating that “there are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, i.e., the voice of conscience, even though such obedience may cost many a bitter tear, nay, even more, separation from friends, from family, from the State to which you may belong, from all that you have held as dear as life itself” (CWMG 15: 138). From then, Gandhi’s English concept of conscience became one of the key pillars in his nationalist speeches on satyāgraḥa.

Soon after launching the hartāl, several mass riots in Northern India broke out and Colonel Reginald Edward Harry Dyer ordered the British Indian army to fire on peaceful protesters during the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Gandhi realized that people were not yet ready for undertaking a peaceful satyāgraḥa, and thus he decided to suspend his campaign on April 18, 1919. Gandhi was faced with an urgent need to develop a “disciplined conscience” and to provide his countrymen

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66 The adjective “jhīṇī (jhīnī)” has various meanings including “very small, minutes; pointed, sharp; thin, fine; delicate; requiring care and close attention; slow, thin; careful and attentive” (Deśpānde 2002: 399).

67 Transcribed in Devanagari letters in the original.

68 See DASI: 294–95; AK: 329–33; and GA 12: 106.

69 See AK: 329; and Rājendra 2010: 185–87.

70 See CWMG 15: 148–50, 152–59, 166–69, 192–94, 255–56, 185–86, and 412–16.
with more specific techniques to control their physical instincts (that is, sexual
desire, appetite, anger, and hatred), or yamaniyama.\footnote{See CWMG 15: 227–31, 412–16; YI, April 28, 1920; and NJ, May 12, 1920.}

A few months before the first Non-Cooperation movement, Gandhi and his
colleagues published, on March 25, 1920, the Report of the Commissioners
Appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress. In it,
Gandhi, for the first time, referred to the concept of conscience while recounting
the stories of the Hindu saints Prahla¯d and Mı ¯ra¯ba¯ı.\footnote{See CW MG 17: 152–53.}
And during the movement, Gandhi began to use Gujarati expressions such as antarnād (inner sound/voice),\footnote{See NJ, November 18, 1920, October 23, 1921, November 15, 1921; and GA 21: 383.} antarno avāj (inner voice),\footnote{See NJ, November 18, 1920, December 8, 1920, December 10, 1921; and GA 21: 187.} and ātmānād (sound/voice of ātmā)\footnote{See NJ, December 24, 1921.} alongside those
he had used before the movement, such as antarātmā,\footnote{See NJ, August 8, 1920, December 5, 1920, January 23, 1921, October 2, 1921, and January 8, 1922.} māro ātmā to sākṣī pūre che
(my ātmā clearly testifies),\footnote{See NJ, May 5, 1921.} and māro ātmā (my ātmā).\footnote{See NJ, July 3, 1921.}

\section*{1922–30: The New Terminology of the “Inner Voice”}

Gandhi’s abrupt announcement of the cessation of the first Non-Cooperation
movement astonished Congress leaders and nationwide patriotic supporters. He
confessed to his “Himalayan miscalculation” and recognition of “the warning” of
“God” conveyed to him through the “Caurī Caura¯ incident,” where twenty-three
police officers were killed in a furious peasant revolt.\footnote{See YI, February 16, 1922.}
Gandhi believed that their failure to observe brahmacarya, and thus control their passions, was one of the root
causes of the violent incident.\footnote{See NJ, February 12, 1922.} Gandhi was imprisoned in the Yaravadā Jail in Pune
soon after the suspension of the movement. Yet, this two-year period in jail was not
without its benefits; Gandhi was permitted access to a stack of books, allowing him
to garner new knowledge and reconsider his nationalist agenda.

Following his release from jail, Gandhi, still insisting upon the necessity of “self-
control/discipline,” deliberately began to make frequent use of the English
expression “inner voice,” which corresponded with the Gujarati concepts of
antarātmā or antarno avāj, in his official publications.\footnote{The English phrase “inner voice” was first used by Gandhi in his private letter to Lālcand on January 29, 1921 (see CW MG 19: 291). He mentioned the term once again during his first Non-Cooperation
movement (see YI, February 23, 1922). After these, there was no mention of the term until 1926, when Gandhi began to use the term frequently in both private and official writings (see CW MG 30: 78, 356, 31: 227; and YI, September 16, 1926, September 23, 1926).} At the same time, references
to the English word “conscience” were gradually diminished in number though not
entirely displaced.

71 See CWMG 15: 227–31, 412–16; YI, April 28, 1920; and NJ, May 12, 1920.
72 See CW MG 17: 152–53.
73 See NJ, November 18, 1920, October 23, 1921, November 15, 1921; and GA 21: 383.
74 See NJ, November 18, 1920, December 8, 1920, December 10, 1921; and GA 21: 187.
75 See NJ, December 24, 1921.
76 See NJ, August 8, 1920, December 5, 1920, January 23, 1921, October 2, 1921, and January 8, 1922.
77 See NJ, May 5, 1921.
78 See NJ, July 3, 1921.
79 See YI, February 16, 1922.
80 See NJ, February 12, 1922.
During his incarceration, Gandhi read Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s Śrīmad Bhagavadgīthā-Rahasya or Karma-Yoga-Śāstra (1935) and learned that there was no equivalent word for “conscience” in Sanskrit literature. In the Navajīvan of September 16, 1928, Gandhi stated in Gujarati:

 Tilak Maharāj has said: among us, there is no word corresponding to “kōṇśyaṅs.” We do not believe that there is “kōṇśyaṅs” in everyone, [but] in the West [they] believe….Therefore, Tilak Maharāj turned down “kōṇśyaṅs.”

Our ṛṣi [and] munis have said that in order to listen to antarnāḍ, the antarkāṇ (inner ear) was indispensable, [and also] the antarcākṣu (inner eye) was indispensable. In order to acquire these [spiritual organs], samyam (self-control) was indispensable.

Furthermore, Gandhi also explored the etymology of the English word “conscience” in Young India of September 23, 1926:

Have all people a conscience? Has a cannibal a conscience? Must he be allowed to act according to the dictates of his conscience, which tells him that it is his duty to kill and eat his fellows? Now, the etymological meaning of conscience is “true knowledge.” The dictionary meaning is “faculty distinguishing between right and wrong and influencing conduct accordingly.” Possession of such a faculty is possible only for a trained person, that is, one who has undergone discipline and learned to listen to the inner voice.

From the mid-1920s onwards, although not rigorously, Gandhi started to differentiate between the English word “conscience” and the phrase “inner voice.” Gandhi explained that the latter signified the “Indian” concepts of antarnāḍ or antarno avāj which were linked with the Hindu ascetic tradition of samyamī/ (self-)discipline. On the contrary, the former concept of conscience was, strictly speaking, only believed to exist in the West universally. His growing awareness of the importance of brahmacarya made Gandhi prefer the concept of inner voice over conscience.

82 See Gāndhī 1948: 172–73; and NJ, September 16, 1928.
83 Transcribed in Gujarati letters in the original.
84 However, in Tilak’s Śrīmad Bhagavadgīthā-Rahasya, there is no mention of the argument that the English word “conscience” does not exist in Sanskrit literature. Tilak only indicates that the ideas of “The Western School of ‘Conscience’” are “similar” to the “references in Indian philosophical works to the Goddess of the Mind (manodevatā)” (1935: lxii–lxiii, see also lxxiii, 168–70, and 172–77). Yet, he elsewhere states that “My readers will now have realised why our [Indian] philosophers have not accepted Conscience as an independent deity, in addition to the ordinary functions of the Mind and the Reason” (191) and “the Western Intuitionist school, which worships and takes the decision on questions of Morality from the deity of Conscience…will…be seen to be one-sided and scientifically insufficient; because, Conscience is not some independent thing or deity, but is included in Pure Reason” (675–76).
85 In his book Tilak only used the Sanskrit words “manodevatā” (1935: lxii–lxiii, see also lxxiii and 168–70), “antahkarana” (191), “buddhi” (192), and “ātman” (196), but never used the terms “antarnāḍ,” “antarkāṇ,” “antarcākṣu,” or “antarātmā” to explain the English concept of conscience.
The 1930s: The Fasts and the “Mysterious” Experience

From the first Independence movement onwards, Gandhi consistently insisted that untouchability was against his “ātmā.” His conviction concerning this was most obvious during the early 1930s. He enthusiastically committed himself to several public fasts to abolish untouchability during this period. The best known of these was conducted in September 1932 against the Communal Pact, namely, “the fast-unto-death.” One month before undertaking this fast, Gandhi wrote a Gujarati letter to Premābehen Kanṭāk regarding the relationship between the fast and the nature of his “inner voice” (andarno avāj). “The inner voice,” he wrote:

is something ineffable (andarno avāj na varṇavī šakāvī evī vastu).

But sometimes it seems to us that some inspiration (prernā) has occurred from within. It can be said that the time I learned to recognize [the voice] was the time of my prayer. That is, around 1906. Because you are asking, I write this by recalling my memory. Else, I am not aware of any [experience] in my life [that felt like], “hey, now some new experience occurred [to me].” I believe that [just] as hair grows on us [=our body] without knowing, my spiritual life (ādhyātmik jīvan) has grown (GA 50: 326).

Here, Gandhi stated that his “inner voice” was “something ineffable” and expressed the concept equally as an “inner inspiration.” He further remarked that he had perceived this feeling of accessing his inner voice since 1906, the year of his embarkment upon his first satyagraha campaign in South Africa.

In May 1933, Gandhi suddenly set out on a twenty-one-day fast. He reported that he had undergone an unprecedented “mysterious” experience before launching his fast. In his Gujarati journal Harijanbandhu of July 9, 1933, he explained:

For me, God’s inspiration (īśvarprernā), mysterious voice (gebī avāj), inner inspiration (antahprernā), delivery of truth (satyano sandeś), etc., are the words which signify one meaning….During the night in which I had such an inspiration, there was an immense churning in my heart (hṛdayamāṇthan). [My] mind (citt) was in confusion. I could not take it anymore. The burden of responsibility was to crush me. Suddenly, I, then, heard a voice (avāj) [that ordered me to undertake a fast]. I felt it coming from afar, but also felt it very close to me. This experience was special (asādhāryn). The voice was as if a human being (manusya) was saying something to me and was certain.

86 See NJ, May 30, 1920, July 3, 1921, December 8, 1921, April 6, 1924, October 4, 1925; and GA 31: 81.

87 This can also be translated as “the inner voice [or voice inside] is not something describable.”

88 Gandhi also took twenty-one-day fasts from September 18 to October 8, 1924 and from February 12 to March 4, 1943.

89 The Gujarati adjective word “gebī” also has meanings such as “unseen” and “hidden” (Deśpande 2002: 302).
Gandhi expressed this overwhelming experience as “special” and referred to it recurrently in his later life. He further explained in the same article that to experience such an inspiration, *brahmacarya* or certain kind of *sādhānā* (spiritual ascetic practice) was indispensable: “If some efforts and some *sādhānā* are indispensable [in order] to achieve ordinary things in ordinary life, why is it surprising if [special] efforts and *sādhānā* to acquire the ability to get inspiration from God (*iśvarī prerṇā*) are indispensable?” (*HJB*, July 9, 1933).

From the early 1930s onwards, Gandhi’s idea of inner voice, though no less level-headed, came to be tinged with a “mysterious” (*gebī*) or “mystical” (*gūḍh*) aspect. This indicates a significant shift from his previous approach under the influence of Tolstoy and Salter, where the “mystical” or “irrational” nature of religion was disregarded.

**1940s: The Last Phase or “Mahāyajña”**

When considering Gandhi’s life-long intellectual development, rumination upon his last years during Partition’s turmoil is inevitable. It is now well acknowledged, particularly after Vinay Lal’s (2000) hermeneutic work, that from 1946 onwards, Gandhi entered the last phase of his experiment with *brahmacarya*. This was called *mahāyajña* (the great sacrifice) and entailed him sleeping naked next to his nineteen-year-old grandniece Manubahen Gandhi. In an “entirely private” conversation with Svāmī Ānand and Kedār Nāth held March 15/16, 1947, Gandhi revealed one of the key sources behind his experiments:

> Even today, so far as the people, in general, are concerned, I am putting before them for practice what you call my old ideas. At the same time, for myself, as I have said, I have been deeply influenced by modern thought. Even amongst us,

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90 See *GA* 67: 75, 68: 172.
91 See Desá 1949b: 49–50.
92 As indicated in the subtitle of Tolstoy’s book “Christianity Not as a Mystical Doctrine” (emphasis added), Tolstoy believed that his argument was not at all “mystical” but solely “rational” and recognizable by all humankind (1960: 434–44, 449–51). Gandhi became fully congruent with Tolstoy’s idea (*GA* 9: 261). Gandhi also believed that “Jainism was, perhaps, the most logical of all faiths, and its most remarkable characteristic was its scrupulous regard for all things that lived” (*CWMG* 4: 370). The most lucid attribute of Gandhi’s concept of conscience during his South African period was its universalist, rationalist disposition. In this respect, Skaria has felicitously pointed out that “even as he [Gandhi] [was] increasingly critical of British institutions, he still believe[d] in their essential rationality and justice” before his commencement of writing *Hind Svarāj* (2016: 33).
93 More precisely, she was his first cousin twice removed. Manu was the daughter of Jayasukhlāl Gandhī who was the grandson of the elder brother of Gandhi’s father, Karamcand Uttramcand Gandhī (*SGV* 86: 544). Since Gandhi often expressed with much affection that Manu *could* be regarded as “my granddaughter,” many scholars wrongly surmised that Manu was Gandhi’s granddaughter. The fact that the name of the daughter of Gandhi’s son Harilāl Gandhī was also “Manu” may have caused additional confusion.
94 See Pyarelal 1956: 569–605; Erikson 1969: 395–409; Bose 1974; Rudolph and Rudolph 1983: 38–62; van der Veer 1994: 97–99; Parekh 1999: 191–227; Alter 2000: 44–50; Kumar 2006; Gier 2007; Howard 2013; and Hazama 2017, 2021.
95 See Bose 1974: 149.
the Tantra school has influenced Western savants like Justice Sir John Woodroffe. I read his works in Yeravada prison. You have all been brought up in the orthodox tradition. According to my definition, you cannot be regarded as true brahmacharis (CWMG 87: 91). 96

Gandhi disclosed that during his incarceration period in Yaravada Jail, he had been “deeply influenced” by the modern Tantric thought described by John Woodroffe. Elsewhere Gandhi reported that he had read Woodroffe’s book, Shakti and Shâkta (1918), in the jail.97 Then, how did Tantric ideas, in which the power of śakti (spiritual-sexual energy) is symbolically revered as the Goddess consort of Śiva, affect Gandhi’s understanding of conscience? After Gandhi’s release from the Yaravada Jail in 1924, he was increasingly inclined to associate his concept of conscience or inner voice with cosmological śakti, which was deemed transcendental to his reason or intellect.98 For instance, in discussion with George Joseph, a freedom fighter, on January 13, 1933, Gandhi was asked, “What is the voice of antarātmā?” He answered.99

The voice of antarātmā is our external force (āpni bahārnum bal), but it is not an exterior force (bāhya bal) [which may have no relation to the secular world]. “Our external” means external force [only] from our ahaṅkār [ego, misconceiving self-recognition]. When ahaṅkār is sleeping [=ceases to be functioning], upon it, the two forces [may] function (kām kare che). Sat (being) or asat (non-being). When we are absorbed one with sat force (sat bāṇī sāthe tadākār thaïe chīe), it is said that God (īśvar) is speaking through us in a mystical language (gūḍh100 bhāśā).

We can find more proofs when [we look into] many instances which show only one thing [truth]. Among them, many great people (mahān puruṣo) such as Buddha, Kṛṣṇa, Mahammad are included, and they did not utter (uccāryaṃ) the truth (satya) by their own ability, but through them, some supernatural śakti (alaukik śakti) [functioned and] made them utter it. Some people are such authorities (adhikārī) through whom [such a] supernatural śakti functions (Desāì 1949b: 49–50).

In 1940, Gandhi further explained his concept of the inner voice concerning “an unseen power” in an English newspaper: “It [the fast] can only be taken in obedience to the promptings of an unseen power, call it the inner voice, God or whatever other name you like to give to that power” (CWMG 73: 156). In his miscellaneous writings in English on February 3, 1946, he again referred to the transcendental essence of his inner voice: “Man is endowed with intellect and with an inner voice which transcends the intellect” (CWMG 83: 408). In the Harijanbandhu of June 22, 1947, Gandhi in turn clarified his ideas in Gujarati

96 Recorded by Gandhi’s secretary Pyarelal in English.
97 See GA 23: 177.
98 See Desāì 1948: 137, 1949a: 60. Gandhi used the Sanskrit concept of buddhi not only to indicate an ordinary sense of “intellect,” but also for the Western scientific meaning of “reason” (AK: 7).
99 Gandhi spoke in English, but the talk was recorded in Gujarati by his secretary Mahādev Desāì.
100 The word “gūḍh” also has meanings such as “concealed, secret; incomprehensible; deep; mystic, beyond the senses” (Deśpānde 2002: 301).
concerning the nature of God as śakti: “As a matter of fact, God (īśvar) is śakti, is the essence (tattva); it is pure consciousness (śuddh caitanya), is all-pervading (sarvavyāpak).….There is a great śakti (mahā śakti) we call God (īśvar), which has its laws of usage; but it is quite clear that in order to find such laws, we have to work much harder. The name of such a law [expressed] in one word is brahmacarya.”

Although Gandhi did not outrightly reveal the name of Woodroffe until his last years, the abundance of references to the inner voice as the transcendental power of śakti, as well as his deliberate emphasis on the feminine principle of ahimsā, unlike his prior masculine nationalist discourse, reverberate with Tantric metaphysics. Throughout his life, whether Gandhi was following his conscience or true inner voice could be (logically) inferred by looking at the consequence of his deeds; he believed that there was an internal connection between the condition of his body (or mind) and the physical world. However, what he encountered during the closing years of his life was his unceasing efforts towards ātmaśuddhi (self-purification) and brahmacarya and the inevitable tragedy of communal massacres. Gandhi was urged to re-examine his most fundamental belief in “body and physical world” (śarīr-jagat) while desperately clinging to the miraculous and transcendental powers of śakti and rāmnām. Despite trenchant criticisms from his colleagues and associates, Gandhi at last determined to begin his mahāyajña in order only to follow the irresistible promptings of his “mystical” inner voice.

101 See also GA 31: 167.
102 Gandhi’s religio-political discourse during his South African years can be characterized by its masculine nature (Hazama 2021: 718–19, 722). Indeed, there was no space for women in Rājendra’s view of brahmacarya (2010: 125–26, 185–87). Vivekānanda, although he did not use the word “masculine,” explained the concept of ojas concerning “muscular energy” (1908: 48). Gandhi began to emphasize the importance of spiritual femininity from the 1920s onwards. It is intriguing to note that during his Salt Satyagraha in 1930, active female participation, although males dominated the members of his Salt March, unprecedentedly increased (Weber 2009: 417–18). The event can, perhaps, be hermeneutically explained in relation to the basic change in Gandhi’s view of brahmacarya (Hazama 2019: 240–50). Yet, it is still important to note that Gandhi’s emphasis on spiritual femininity fundamentally shared a patriarchal perspective prevalent among contemporary middle-class intellectuals. See footnotes 19 and 20 above.
103 See Hazama 2017: 1412–17 and 2021: 721–24.
104 See IO, January 19, 1907; II, January 3, 1929, February 7, 1929; and Desāi 1949b: 49–50.
105 See IO, August 9, 1913; and Manubhen Gandhī 1954: 49, 114, 157, 1956: 217.
106 See HJB, June 22, 1947 and June 29, 1947.
107 See SGV 86: 544; and Hazama 2017: 1422–29, 2019: 263–328. Nirmal Kumar Bose (1974), Gandhi’s secretary, recorded his psychological struggle serving Gandhi in 1946–47. Bose noticed that Gandhi’s experiments with Manu potentially subsumed Gandhi’s “new way of thinking.” Gandhi failed to give a full account of his experiments, leading Bose to note his discontent in a private letter to Kisorlal Maṣṭruvāla: “But because I thought Gandhiji was of the old conservative type of Brahmachari, which he is perhaps everywhere taken to be, therefore he should, out of respect for public opinion, not allow Manu to sleep in the same bed with him until he had tried enough to educate the public into his new way of thinking, or the public had got all the facts about him and clearly expressed disapproval” (Nirmal Kumar Bose Papers, Group 14: Correspondence; emphasis added).
Conclusion

In this article, by using documents written in Gujarati, Hindi, and English, I have explored the genealogy and lifelong evolution of Gandhi’s concept of conscience/\( \text{antar}\)ātmā. Thus, I have shown how the concept was formed, the changes in its meaning over time, and its translation into various languages. I have also analyzed how the notion of conscience/(antar)ātmā was related to other core Gandhian concepts such as satyāgraha and brahmacarya. Initially, Gandhi used conscience merely in a naïve moralist sense before he arrived in London, but he developed a deeper understanding after acquiring ideas from Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, William Salter, Śrīmad Rājendra, and Svāmī Vivekānanda. After absorbing these ideas, Gandhi took a lifelong vow of brahmacarya in 1906 to enhance his inner sensitivity towards ātmā, or the law/voice of conscience. He believed that this would allow him to vigorously lead his satyāgraha campaign, whose essence, Gandhi explained, was ātmabal.

After his return to India in 1915, Gandhi, due to his awareness of the need to indigenize his socio-political campaign, began to use the term “antarātmā” as the equivalent of the English “conscience.” From the first Independence movement onwards, Gandhi diligently used both terms in English and Gujarati/Hindi writings. After the failure of the first Non-Cooperation movement, Gandhi was urged to reconsider his previous ideas of brahmacarya. Gandhi’s reading of John Woodroffe’s Tantric works helped to develop his later ideas of ātmā and brahmacarya. Meanwhile, from the late 1920s onwards, Gandhi, while insisting upon the importance of samyam/self-discipline, began to publicly use the concept of inner voice/antarṇa avāj, whose essence was fundamentally “mystical” (gūḍh), and tentatively distinguished it from the English concept of conscience. Lastly, inspired by the irresistible prompting of his inner voice, Gandhi undertook his most delicate and intimate experiments with brahmacarya in the 1940s. He referred to these as “mahāyajña.” Their “real” intention remains almost unreachable.

Gandhi’s lifelong intellectual journey concerning the concept of conscience/antarātmā was by no means characterized by a mechanical “consistency,” but by an incessant and dynamic evolution. Gandhi ceaselessly tried to find the most suitable manner, term, and language to articulate what he believed to be a common moral sensitivity beyond lingua-cultural differences, a sensitivity that he once called “something ineffable” (na varṇāv śakāy evāv vastu).

What contemporary relevance, then, does studying Gandhi’s concept of conscience hold? The following two points should be considered Gandhi’s major contributions to posterity. First, Gandhi, an intellectual elite proficient in both the languages of the colonized and the colonizers, indiscriminately incorporated ideas

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108 It is curious to acknowledge that whenever Gandhi was criticized by people for his “inconsistency” in a political view, he responded to them, expressing Emersonian contradiction: “I must admit my many inconsistencies. But since I am called ‘Mahatma,’ I might well endorse [Ralph Waldo] Emerson’s saying that ‘foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.’ There is, I fancy, a method in my inconsistencies. In my opinion, there is a consistency running through my seeming inconsistencies, as in nature there is a unity running through seeming diversity” (VI, February 13, 1920). See also IO, June 4, 1903; VI, March 26, 1931; and Harijan, August 27, 1938.
from the putative West and the putative non-West, creatively developing a distinct “positive” meaning of conscience as a practical tool to redress legislative injustice and transform societies. As I argued in the introductory section of this article, such a positive idea of conscience fundamentally differed from the passive moralist meanings behind the phrases “guilty conscience” or “bad conscience” prevalent at the time. Second, Gandhi attempted to show the importance of bodily discipline in realizing the potentiality of the moral promptings of conscience. Although a few Western philosophers and intellectuals have elaborated on an “active” existentialist meaning of “the call of conscience,” they have usually ended up with only abstract intellectual discussion and have by no means prescribed any concrete physical techniques.109

Yet, I must also point out what can be seen as the decisive limitation of Gandhi’s “experiments/prayogo” with conscience/antarātmā. From his South African years onwards, Gandhi, who tried to assimilate various ideas of conscience, ātmā, and brahmacarya gleaned from his cross lingua-cultural readings, was never entirely obedient to a particular thinker, guru, or communitarian tradition. Contrary to his willingness to nationalize or interiorize his project in the Indian subcontinent, Gandhi’s idea was, perhaps, too original, or distinct for many of his countrymen and he exhibited a tendency to disregard the voices of “others” for the sake of the “self” in promoting it. Despite his uniqueness of thought, Gandhi rarely attempted to provide a thorough explanation of conscience/antarātmā in his Gujarati, Hindi, and English writings.110 This disjuncture has led some historians to argue for an ironic historical twist during the Indian nationalist movement, describing how several peasant uprisings and communal riots took place while those participating genuinely believed that they were following Gandhian principles.111 After Gandhi’s imprisonment in Yaravada Jail in 1922, his understanding of ātmā and brahmacarya was radically refashioned, but only in an increasingly personal and mystical direction. His writings during this later phase are entirely ambiguous. Needless to say, Gandhi was not a “philosopher” in a strict sense but a practitioner of moral exemplar. Gandhi himself seems to have recognized that there was an insurmountable difficulty in articulating his own ideas. The vagueness inherent in his explanation has prevented posterity from properly understanding the importance of brahmacarya in relation to the concept of conscience.112 In spite of this, Gandhi’s concept of conscience/antarātmā still includes many unique aspects which were absent in major Western philosophical discussions and are worth full consideration. I would

109 Although some prominent existentialist/phenomenologist philosophers during the twentieth century, such as Heidegger (1996), Jaspers (1953), and Levinas (1998), provide deep ontological, phenomenological, or metaphysical discussions on the concept of conscience, they never referred to any specific technique of “body” in relation to the concept. Ricoeur (1994: 318–19) exceptionally highlighted the essential relationship between conscience and body. Yet, his argument was also purely intellectual and abstract.

110 See footnote 100 above.

111 See Amin 1995, 2010; Pandey 2010; and Sarkar 2010.

112 Even though countless social reformers and politicians have professed to hold Gandhi as an inspiration, they almost never highlight the importance of Gandhi’s concept of brahmacarya. Most significantly, Martin Luther King Jr., as Parekh (1997: 76–77) has pointed out, by no means seriously paid heed to Gandhi’s ascetic disposition.
submit that more subtle and extensive cross-linguistic analysis in future Gandhian scholarship will open rich opportunities to re-evaluate the historical and contemporary relevance of Gandhi’s thought.

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Abbreviations

AK  Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā
CWMG  The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
DASI  Dakṣin Āphrikānā Satyāgraḥano Itihās
GA  Gāndhījīno Aṅkardeh: Mahātmā Gāṅdhīnāṃ Lakhāṇo, Bhāsāṇo, Patro Vāgereno Sangrah
HJ  Harijan
HJB  Harijanbandhu
HS  Hind Svarāj
IO  Indian Opinion
NJ  Navjīvan
SGV  Sampūrṇ Gāndhī Vāṃgmay
YI  Young India

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