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# Unravelling the Myth of Gandhian Non-violence: Why Did Gandhi Connect His Principle of *Satyāgraha* with the “Hindu” Notion of *Ahiṃsā*?

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this article is to unearth the genealogy of M. K. Gandhi’s “non-violence,” the cardinal principle of satyāgraha. Previous works considered that Gandhi’s concept of non-violence was essentially derived from the “ancient” Hindu–Jain precept of ahiṃsā (non-killing) common in the subcontinent. On the contrary, I will, by examining Gandhi’s primary texts in Gujarati, Hindi, and English, demonstrate the following: (1) during Gandhi’s sojourn in South Africa (1893–1914) where he led his first satyāgraha campaign, he never associated the term ahiṃsā with satyāgraha; (2) his satyāgraha campaign was initially explained with the trans-religious and cosmopolitan concepts of Tolstoy and the nirguṇ bhaktas; (3) Gandhi first began to use the term ahiṃsā as a nationalist slogan linked with satyāgraha immediately after his return to India in 1915; (4) the English translation of ahiṃsā as “non-violence” was eventually coined by Gandhi after 1919 during his all-India satyāgraha campaign.*

## Introduction

It is well acknowledged that M. K. Gandhi (Mohandās Karamchand Gāndhī, 1869–1948), one of the most prominent political leaders in colonial India, promoted the Hindu–Jain traditional notion of *ahiṃsā* in his native tongues of Gujarati and Hindi/Hindustani, rendering it “non-violence” in English, throughout the nationalist struggle in the subcontinent.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi labelled his anticolonial campaign

<sup>1</sup>In this paper, I will use the abbreviations for the following materials by N. K. Gandhi. GA for *Gāndhījīno Akṣardeh: Mahātmā Gāndhīnām Lakhāṇo, Bhāṣaṇo, Patro Vagereno Saṅgrah*, 82 vols. (Amdāvād, 1967–92); SGV for *Sampūrṇ Gāndhī Vāṅmay*, 97 vols. (Nai Dillī, 1958–94); CWMG for *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 vols. (New Delhi, 1956–94); HS for *Hind Svarāj* (Amdāvād, 1979), a facsimile of the original handwritten manuscript; AK for *Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā* (Amdāvād, 1947); DASI for *Dakṣiṇ Āphrikānā Satyāgrahano Itihās* (Amdāvād, 1950); IO for *Indian Opinion* (Phoenix, 1904–14), YI for *Young India* (Ahmedabad, 1919–31); NJ for *Navjīvan* (Amdāvād, 1919–32); “IHR” for “Indian Home Rule” (1910), in *M. K. Gandhi’s Hind Svaraj: A Critical Edition*, ed. Suresh Sharma and Tridip Suhrud (Hyderabad, 2010), 1–102. In this article, English translations of all quotes from Gandhi’s Gujarati and Hindi original texts are mine, with the exceptions in notes 113, 116.

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*satyāgraha* (truth-force).<sup>2</sup> This term, originally invented by Gandhi during his twenty-one-year South African sojourn, denoted a philosophy as well as a method of mass agitation that prohibited use of violent means. After 1915, Gandhi consistently argued that the principle of *ahimsā* was the very foundation of “Indian” or “Hindu” culture and therefore his all-India *satyāgraha* campaign against the British Raj must be firmly rooted in it.

To the best of my knowledge, it has been almost accepted as a truism that Gandhi’s idea of *ahimsā*/non-violence, the cardinal principle of *satyāgraha*, essentially originated from his childhood experiences (1869–88) in the Princely States of Porbandar and Rajkot, the western and the central regions of the Kāthiyāvād peninsula respectively, both infused with the religio-cultural ethos of *ahimsā*.<sup>3</sup> Yet such genealogical understandings of Gandhi’s notion of *ahimsā*/non-violence credulously internalize his nationalist self-narrative, which was invented after he reached his late forties.<sup>4</sup> Although it is impossible to completely deny the psychological impressions of Gandhi’s childhood, which are substantially subjective matters,<sup>5</sup> it is crucial for us to acknowledge that he almost never underscored the positive value of the term *ahimsā* in both public and private spheres until around 1915.

Rather than dwell upon the influences of his early life obtained from the “ancient” culture common in his homeland, in this article I will emphasize that Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa (1893–1914) were vital. There, Gandhi led his *satyāgraha* campaign (1906–14) for the first time and peacefully combated racial discrimination against Asian immigrants by cooperating with people of diverse religio-cultural backgrounds, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. During these years, Gandhi was exposed to trans-religious as well as universalist ideas. His principle of *satyāgraha* was by no means articulated using the word *ahimsā* or “non-violence” (although he did claim to deny the use of “violence.”)<sup>6</sup> Instead, it was chiefly expressed using concepts that appeared in the works of Leo Tolstoy and the late medieval *nirguṇ bhakti* poets. Finding a deep conceptual commonality between the putative “West” and “East,” Gandhi cherished his cosmopolitan vision. It was only later that Gandhi, now a matured politician of forty-five, first began to explain, while emphasizing its Hindu religiosity, the central

<sup>2</sup>*Satyāgrah(a)* is Gandhi’s neologism which etymologically means *āgraha* (“holding firm”) onto *satya* (“truth”) in Gujarati, Hindi, and Sanskrit. From the 1920s onwards, Gandhi started to translate the concept into the English words “non-violent (civil) disobedience” and “non-violent resistance.”

<sup>3</sup>Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, 1958), 111. See also A. Basham, “Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,” in Ravindra Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics* (Oxford, 1971), 17–42; Robert Zydenbos, “Jainism as the Religion of Non-violence,” in Jan Houben and Karel van Kooij, eds., *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History* (Leiden, 1999), 185–210, at 186; Eric Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York, 1969), 111–12; Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1995), 33–6; Chandra Devanesen, *The Making of the Mahatma* (Madras, 1969), 44.

<sup>4</sup>AK, 5–10, 15–16, 29–30, 183, 202–3, 528–30; DASI, 11–12; CWMG, 15: 244.

<sup>5</sup>Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth*; Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (New Delhi, 1990), 85–128; Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma* (Chicago, 1983); Rowland Lorimer, “A Reconstruction of the Psychological Roots of Gandhi’s Truth,” *Psychoanalytic Review* 63/2 (1976), 191–207.

<sup>6</sup>See note 20 below.

virtue of *satyāgraha* by using *ahiṃsā* (and the term “non-violence” four years later). Although Gandhian-like ethico-humanist interpretations of *ahiṃsā* became prevalent among both scholars and civil rights activists after India’s independence, “Vedic” and “Brahmanical” conceptions of the term, featuring aspects such as a high-caste vegetarian diet and cow worship and entailing communal implications, were conspicuously common among Hindu nationalist reformers in the pre-Gandhian era.<sup>7</sup> Gandhi’s decision to utilize the word *ahiṃsā* immediately after his return to India in 1915 indicates his important intellectual evolution as a nationalist leader of the subcontinent. It also points to his tactical need to secure moral-financial support from primarily well-to-do *vāṇīyās*, the dominant Jain/Hindu mercantile caste in Ahmedabad, in order to establish and run his *satyāgraha āśram* in Kocrab.<sup>8</sup> Finally, from 1919 onwards, Gandhi began to translate the term *ahiṃsā* into the English and religiously neutral word “non-violence” during the beginning stage of his all-India nationalist campaign. This lesser-known genealogy behind Gandhi’s self-narrative of *ahiṃsā*/non-violence will eventually provide us with a crucial insight, allowing us to relocate Gandhian thought from the Indian-Hindu nationalist framework to a broader global cosmopolitan context.<sup>9</sup> The multifaceted process of how Gandhi, in an apparently almost ad hoc

<sup>7</sup>See notes 24, 25, 26, 58 below. The development of the ethical meaning of *ahiṃsā* as “abstention from killing/injuring animals/living beings” was generally considered to have originated in anti-Brahmanical movements such as Buddhism and Jainism and appeared around the fifth century BCE. These movements opposed the slaughter of animals in Vedic rituals. See Lambert Schmithausen, “Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War,” in Houben and van Kooij, *Violence Denied*, 45–68, at 33–8; Schmithausen, “A Note on the Origin of Ahiṃsā,” in Ryutaro Tsuchida and Albrecht Wezler, eds., *Harānandalaharī* (Reinbek, 2000), 253–82, at 253; and Hanns-Peter Schmidt, “The Origin of Ahiṃsā,” in Louis Renou, *Mélanges d’Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris, 1968), 625–55. There seems to be, however, a semantic transition as the principle and custom popularly infiltrated the subcontinent during the medieval period. As it became assimilated into mainstream Hinduism, the concept of *ahiṃsā*, though understood differently in various Hindu sects, seems to refer primarily to vegetarian diet as a higher-status attribute, as well as to “the protection of Mother Cow” (*gau-rakṣā*). See Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (London, 1988), 131; Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (California, 1994), 43–4; Madelaine Biardieu, “Ancient Brahmanism, or Impossible Non-violence,” in Denis Vidal, Gilles Tarabout, and Eric Meyer, eds, *Violence/Non-violence: Some Hindu Perspectives* (New Delhi, 2003), 85–104; D. F. Jatavallabhula, “Rāṇayājā: The Mahābhārata as a Sacrifice,” in Houben and van Kooij, *Violence Denied*, 69–103.

<sup>8</sup>It should be noted that although Jainism was initially developed as an anti-Brahmanical movement (see note 7 above), as time passed, the former was incorporated into the complex caste systems of orthodox Hinduism. Particularly in the western part of India where Jain cultural influences were strong in spite of the relatively small population, Jain *vāṇīyās* are regarded as being as high in status as *brāhmins* due to their socioeconomic prominence in the region. See Amit Thorat and Omkar Joshi, “The Continuing Practice of Untouchability in India: Patterns and Mitigating Influences,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 55/2 (2020), 36–45, at 40; John Cort, “Jains, Caste and Hierarchy in North Gujarat,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 38/1–2 (2004), 73–110.

<sup>9</sup>Many previous historiographies have discussed Gandhian thought within the “elitist” nationalist framework, often connecting it with Hindu religiosity. See Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1968); David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics* (Cambridge, 1976); Bipan Chandra, “Study of the Indian National Movement,” *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies* 1, 22–40; Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee, and Mridula Mukherjee, *India after Independence 1947–2000* (New Delhi, 1999); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London, 1993); Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography,” in Guha,

manner, began to use the English rendering “non-violence” for *ahimsā* during the all-India nationalist campaign will also explain how he struggled to gain popular support from Indian Muslims.

Before moving on to a genealogical analysis of Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsā*/non-violence, I should note one essential reason for the lack of scholarship on this subject. An almost insurmountable amount of historical materials pertinent to the topic exist and require multilingual analysis. There are voluminous documents written by Gandhi primarily in three languages (Gujarati, Hindi, and English),<sup>10</sup> amounting to more than 100,000 published pages, including editors’ translations, compiled in the three versions of Gandhi’s *Collected Works*. These are, namely, the eighty-two volumes of the Gujarati version of the *Collected Works* entitled *Gāndhījīno Akṣardeb: Mahātmā Gāndhīnām Lakhāṇo, Bhāṣāṇo, Patro Vagereno Saṅgrah* (1967–92, hereafter GA); the ninety-seven volumes of the Hindi version entitled *Sampūrṇ Gāndhī Vāṅmay* (1958–94, hereafter SGV); and the hundred volumes of the English version entitled *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (1956–94, hereafter CWMG).<sup>11</sup> Most previous works, barring a few exceptions,<sup>12</sup> have failed to examine when, where, or in what context the terms *ahimsā* and “non-violence” exactly appeared in Gandhi’s writings.<sup>13</sup> To earnestly confront this absence in past scholarly works, this article will chronologically examine all the

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ed., *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 1 (New Delhi, 1982), 1–8; and Gyan Pandey, “Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919–22,” in *ibid.*, 143–97.

<sup>10</sup>During his sojourn in South Africa, he published his weekly journal *Indian Opinion* in Gujarati, English, Tamil, and Urdu. Gandhi had a certain level of command of Sanskrit and Urdu as well. He further tried to learn Telugu and Bengali. See Tridip Suhrud, *Reading Gandhi in Two Tongues* (Shimla, 2012), 2.

<sup>11</sup>Tridip Suhrud has cautiously reported that in the revised and digitized version of CWMG and SGV published in 1999, there can be found hundreds of omissions, non-transparent reediting, and flaws. See Tridip Suhrud, “‘Re-editing’ Gandhi’s Collected Works,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39/46–47 (2004), 4967–9. Considering these, in this article I will solely rely upon the previous versions of CWMG and SGV published between 1956/1958 and 1994. I have also confirmed the authenticity of these older versions in my personal email correspondence with Suhrud on 20 Dec. 2015.

<sup>12</sup>As far as I am aware, there are three works which have explored the terminological origin of Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsā*. These are Eijiro Hazama, “The Origin of Political *Ahimsā*: A Study of Gandhi’s Thought and Experience from 1909 to 1915,” *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies* 23 (2011), 7–30; David Hardiman, “Ahimsa: Shifting Meanings in Indian History,” in Hardiman, *Nonviolence in Modern Indian History* (Telangana, 2017), 8–33; and Hardiman, *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom, 1905–19* (London, 2018), 159–70. The present article is owing to Hazama’s article which differs from Hardiman’s with respect to the following three points explained in the next, the third, and the fourth sections: (1) exactly when Gandhi began to employ the concepts of *ahimsā* and non-violence, (2) what were the central concepts other than *ahimsā* to explain Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* in South Africa, (3) why and how Gandhi started to use the word *ahimsā* in both private and public documents. See also notes 14, 58, 66 below.

<sup>13</sup>Although the importance of using Gandhi’s Gujarati materials has already been noted by Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth*, 60; and B. Parekh, “Gandhi and His Translators,” *Gandhi Marg* 8 (1986), 163–72; Parekh, *Gandhi’s Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (Notre Dame, 1989), 7, there are still only a few works which have utilized Gandhi’s Gujarati writings, such as Suhrud, *Gandhi in Two Tongues*; Skaria, *Unconditional Equality*; Anthony Parel, ed., “*Hind Swaraj*” (Cambridge, 1997); *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* (Cambridge, 2006); Hardiman, “Ahimsa”; Hardiman, *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom*.

materials available in GA, SGV, and CWMG in order to demonstrate the terminological as well as conceptual genealogy of Gandhi's idea of *ahimsā*/non-violence.

### Gandhi's initial uses of the terms of *ahimsā* and "non-violence"

This section shows when, where, and how the words *ahimsā* and "non-violence" appeared in Gandhi's writings in the three languages; that is to say, Gujarati, Hindi, and English. According to GA, SGV, and CWMG, except ten references in *Hind Svarāj* written in 1909, the word *ahimsā* (or its adjective form *ahimsak* which also means "practitioner(s) of *ahimsā*") appears only twice during Gandhi's South African period, both times written in Gujarati in his private letters (see Table 1 below, which lists the documents until 1919, the year when Gandhi first used the English word "non-violence"). As the table below shows, references to *ahimsā* in the Gujarati script (અહિંસા), the Hindi/Devanagari scripts (अहिंसा), and Roman letters ("ahimsa") rapidly increased from 1915 onwards.

Additionally, as can be seen in Table 1, the English term "non-violence" was first used by Gandhi on 18 April 1919, the day on which he announced the temporary suspension of the first all-India *satyāgraha* campaign, known as the Rowlatt Satyāgraha or *hadṭāl*, due to the outbreak of a series of riots in north and western India.<sup>14</sup> From this day onwards, he began to use the word "non-violence" as an English rendering of *ahimsā* during the anticolonial nationalist struggles. According to H. Bodewitz, Gandhi's use of the term *ahimsā* as "policy of rejecting violent means" is a purely modern interpretation. "Non-injury" or "non-killing" rather than "non-violence" is a more common translation for the term *ahimsā* from a philological perspective. It should be noted that the word "non-violence" cannot be found in English dictionaries published before the Gandhian era.<sup>15</sup> It is possible to say Gandhi was the most influential, perchance the first, person to consciously coin the English term "non-violence," and translated the Sanskrit word *ahimsā* into it.

Below, Gandhi's use of the word *ahimsā/ahimsak* in each document in his South African period will be explored, but first I would like to look at Gandhi's initial ten references to the term in *Hind Svarāj*. *Hind Svarāj* was Gandhi's first and only book to provide an exhaustive exposition of his understanding of the essence and philosophy of *satyāgraha*. Excluding the preface, the book contains twenty chapters. Along with the idea of *satyāgraha*, the book also deals with Gandhi's wide-ranging

<sup>14</sup>The word simultaneously appears in the "telegram to G. A. Natesan" and the "press statement on the suspension of civil disobedience" written in English on 18 April 1919. CWMG, 15: 243–4. In the latter material, Gandhi explained the meaning of the term "ahimsa" (in Roman letters) with the word "non-violence" in parentheses. This is the first occasion where Gandhi translated the word "ahimsa" into the English "non-violence." Yet Hardiman, "Ahimsa," 8, has pointed out that Gandhi's first instance of using the English term "non-violence" was considered to be Gandhi's article published in 1920. The article is likely to be Gandhi's "The Doctrine of the Sword" (11 Aug. 1920) in *Young India*. However, the English word "non-violence/non-violent" can be found forty-five times at least in CWMG from 18 April 1919 to 11 Aug. 1920. Hardiman nevertheless also provides a note about Gandhi's reference to the term on 18 April 1919 in a footnote of his newer book of 2018. Hardiman, *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom*, 159 n. 1.

<sup>15</sup>Henk Bodewitz, "Hindu Ahimsā and Its Roots," in Houben and van Kooij, *Violence Denied*, 17–44, at 17.

**Table 1.** References to *ahimsā* (अहिंसा, अहिंसा) in GA and SGV, and *ahimsa* and “non-violence” in CWMG (1884–1919)

Date	Language	Word	Document	Times
13–22.11.1909	Gujarati	<i>ahimsak</i>	<i>Hind Svarājya</i>	10
11.3.1914	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Chaganlāl Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
During 1914	Gujarati	<i>ahimsak</i>	<i>Maganlāl Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
7.2.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Mathurādās Trikāmjīne lakhelā Patrno Amś</i>	2
31.3.1915	English	(a)himsa	Speech at Students’ Hall, Calcutta	1*
13.4.1915	English	ahimsa	Speech at St Stephen’s College	1
20.4.1915	English	ahimsa	Speech at Gokhale Club, Madras	1
27.4.1915	English	ahimsa	Speech at YMCA, Madras	2
4.5.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Nāraṇdās Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
Before 20.5.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Āśramnā Bandhāraṇno Musaddo</i>	3
9.12.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Bhāvnaḡarnī Moḡh Jñātie Yojelā Satkār Samārambhām Bhāṣaṇ</i>	1
22.4.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Ḍāyṛī: 1915</i>	1
25.4.1915	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Maganlāl Gāndhīne Patr</i>	6
14.2.1916	English	ahimsa	Speech on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras	1
16.2.1916	English	ahimsa	Speech on “Ashram Vows” at YMCA, Madras	10
28.2.1916	English	ahimsa	Speech at Hyderabad on vaccination	1
20.3.1916	English	ahimsa	Speech at Gurukul anniversary	5
27.7.1916	Hindi	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Bhāṣaṇ: Dakṣiṇ Aphrikā ke Satyāgrah ke Rahasya par</i>	1
26.2.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Suratmām Girmīṭ Prathā viṣe Bhāṣaṇ</i>	2
2.9.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Satyāgrah viṣe Śankarlālne Patr</i>	1
About 2.9.1917	Hindi	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Pesiv Rījhiṣans Nahīm, Satyāgrah</i>	3
About 9.10.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Betiāmām Gorḡṣā viṣe Bhāṣaṇ</i>	1
15.10.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Bihār Chāṭrsammelanām Bhāṣaṇ</i>	1
21.10.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Jīvdāyā MaṇḌālṇi Parīṣadmām Bhāṣaṇ</i>	1
10.1916	English	ahimsa	“On Ahimsa: Reply to Lala Lajpat Rai”	22
22.11.1917	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Candulālne Patr</i>	2
31.12.1917	English	ahimsa	Address at All-India Social Service Conference	1
17.1.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Jamnādās Gāndhīne Patr</i>	3
20.1.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Maganlāl Gāndhīne Patr</i>	2
30.3.1918	Hindi	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Prācīn Samyatā</i>	8

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Date	Language	Word	Document	Times
12.4.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Baḷvantrāy Ṭhākorne Patr</i>	1
17.4.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Satyāgrahi Khedūtone Sandeśo</i>	1
17.4.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Svayaṃsevake Sūcnā</i>	1
17.4.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Cikhodarāmām Bhāṣaṇ</i>	2
18.4.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Rāsmām Bhāṣaṇ</i>	1
23.6.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Devdās Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
Before 23.6.1918	English	ahimsa/ahinsa	Letter to C. F. Andrews	3
26.6.1918	English	ahimsa	Speech at Ras	2
30.6.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to Esther Faering	3
4.7.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Laśkarbhartī upar Vivecan</i>	1
6.7.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to C. F. Andrews	4
17.7.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to Hanumantrao	7
22.7.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Pūñjābhāī Śāhne Patr</i>	2
25.7.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Maganlāl Gāndhīne Patr</i>	5
28.7.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Rāmdās Gāndhīne Patr</i>	3
29.7.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Kīsorlāl Maśrūvālāne Patr</i>	3
29.7.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to C. F. Andrews	5
29.7.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to S. K. Rudra	2
29.7.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri	1
2.8.1918	English	ahimsa	Letter to H. A. L. Polak	2
31.8.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Khuśālcand Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
2.10.1918	Gujarati	<i>ahimsā</i>	<i>Devdās Gāndhīne Patr</i>	1
26.2.1919	English	ahimsa	Instructions to volunteers	3
18.4.1919	English	non-violence	Telegram to G. A. Natesan	1
18.4.1919	English	ahimsa/non-violence	Press statement on suspension of civil disobedience	2

\*Note. More precisely, in this speech Gandhi used the expression “abstention from himsa” instead of using the word “ahimsa.”

critical views on modern civilizations, colonial political economy, communalism, and national education in order to show why he considered *satyāgraha* the only true means to achieve Indian *svarāj* (home rule, self-rule).

What is most striking in terms of our ongoing discussion is that Gandhi never used the word *ahimsā* in Chapter 17, entitled “Satyāgraha: Ātmabaḷ,”<sup>16</sup> which is considered to be “the most important chapter in the whole book.”<sup>17</sup> In it Gandhi

<sup>16</sup>HS, 182–209.

<sup>17</sup>Anthony Parel, “Gandhi’s Idea of Nation in Hind Swaraj,” *Gandhi Marg* 13 (1991), 261–81, at 274.



straightforwardly explains the core meaning and significance of *satyāgraha* and its contributing concepts (as further considered in the next section of this article). If the word *ahimsā* was not used in this chapter, where in *Hind Svarāj* did Gandhi deploy it? The word appears once towards the end of Chapter 9, “The Condition of India (Cont.): Train” (“Hindustānnī Daśā [Cālu]: Relveo”),<sup>18</sup> where he critically examines the modern scientific revolution (particularly the invention of the train) in England during the nineteenth century. After this, the word appears nine times in Chapter 10, “The Condition of India (Cont.): Hindus and Muslims (“Hindustānnī Daśā [Cālu]: Hindu-Muslmān”),<sup>19</sup> in the context of a discussion on Hindu–Muslim communal tension in India.<sup>20</sup>

Let us see how exactly the word is used in these two chapters. *Hind Svarāj* is written as a supposed dialogue between a “reader” (a radical Indian revolutionary) and an “editor” (Gandhi himself) of the weekly journal *Indian Opinion*, which was published by Gandhi in South Africa.<sup>21</sup> While the former aims to achieve Indian *svarāj* by radical military means, the latter tries to persuade the former that violent methods are improper for achieving the “true” Indian *svarāj*. In the ending section of Chapter 9, there is a discussion about the communal conflict in India and the reader questions the editor as follows: “It is said that Hindus and Muslims have bitter enmity (*hāḍver*) ... Hindus worship the cow, [and] Muslims kill (*māre*) her. [Therefore,] Hindus are *ahimsak*, [and] Muslims are *himsak* [the adjective form of the term *himsā* (killing, injury) which also means “practitioner(s) of *himsā*”]. Thus, in every step, there are differences [between them], and how are these [problems] resolved and how can India become one [nation]?”<sup>22</sup> The editor answers, saying, “Thinking fundamentally, no one is *ahimsak*, because we [all] harm living beings (*jīvnī hāni*) ... [If we] think ordinarily, many Hindus are meat-eaters (*māṃsāhārī*), therefore, they are not regarded as *ahimsak* ... If such, it is completely odd [to say] that the one is *himsak* and the other is *ahimsak*, therefore, they cannot be together.”<sup>23</sup> As can be seen here, Gandhi referred to the word *ahimsak* in relation to the Hindu customs of vegetarian diet and cow protection. He explained that these customs were generally acknowledged as the cause for the communal tension between Hindus and Muslims.

<sup>18</sup>HS, 91–8.

<sup>19</sup>HS, 99–118.

<sup>20</sup>It is striking to note that the words *ahimsak* in these two chapters were translated by Gandhi himself into the English “non-killing,” or he simply used “Ahinsa” in Roman letters in “Indian Home Rule” (1910) (he did not use the spelling “ahimsa” in the first edition). “IHR,” 43, 47. Moreover, throughout the whole book Gandhi never connects the English concept of “violence” with the Gujarati term *himsā*. When Gandhi explained the superiority of *satyāgraha* as the “soul-force” (*ātmabaḷ*) to any “violent” means such as armed force promoted by Indian revolutionaries, he used various Gujarati words such as *mārāmāri*, *māri*, *mārphād* (HS, 170–72, 180, 182, 188); *humlo* (HS, 186); *śarīr baḷ* (HS, 187, 193); *dārūgoḷo* (HS, 249); *hathiyār(baḷ)* (HS, 178, 180, 181, 185, 200); *hāni* (HS, 178); *dārūgoḷā(baḷ)* (HS, 179, 249); *topbaḷ* (HS, 195–6, 261); and *talvārnā baḷ* (HS, 201).

<sup>21</sup>As we will see in the next section, *Hind Svarāj* was written on the return journey to South Africa after Gandhi’s four months of lobbying activity in London in 1909. Gandhi met young Indian revolutionaries whom he called “anarchists” in London. When writing the perspective of the “reader” in *Hind Svarāj*, Gandhi was surely mindful of his encounter with them.

<sup>22</sup>HS, 97–8.

<sup>23</sup>HS, 112–13.



As a matter of fact, such communal debates revolving around the customs of Hindu vegetarianism and cow protection were prevalent particularly among the nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals associated with Arya Samaj. For instance, Dayānand Sarasvatī, a founder of Arya Samaj, wrote in his 1875 book *Gokaruṇānidhi* that cow protection was the essential tradition of Vedic Hinduism. Although Dayānand did not use the word *ahiṃsā*, he identified a Hindu as a *rakṣak* (protector) and a Muslim as a *hiṃsak* (killer) because of the latter's meat consumption when he elaborated upon Hindu–Muslim tensions.<sup>24</sup> A decade after the death of Dayānand, Arya Samaj split into two parties due to conflict between the members concerning the relevance of maintaining a vegetarian diet. Those members who held a secularist perspective in favor of meat-eating were acknowledged as the “cultured” or “college” party, whereas those against it were regarded as the *mahātmā* party, the special epithet given to revered saints or sages.<sup>25</sup> Gandhi's discussion of cow protection (*gāyṇī rakṣā*) in *Hind Svarāj* reflects the prevalence of this issue at the time.<sup>26</sup>

In the other documents covered, as mentioned above, there were only two which included the word *ahiṃsā* in Gandhi's South African period. Both of these were Gujarati private letters written in 1914. These letters were addressed to Gandhi's uncle's grandsons, named Chaganlāl Gāndhī (hereafter Chaganlal) and Maganlāl Gāndhī (hereafter Maganlal). Chaganlal and Maganlal were residents of the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and central members of Gandhi's *satyāgraha* campaign. The letter to Chaganlal written on 11 March 1914 reads, “Milk is believed to be a sacred thing [*pavitra vastu*], that should be taken; however, [it] should be regarded as unsacred [*apavitra*] ... at least knowing this, [we should] forsake [it]. Such an idea that it is a pure flesh [*śuddh māmś*] and against the duty of *ahiṃsā* [*ahiṃsādharma*] was never gone out of my mind.”<sup>27</sup> The letter to Maganlal written during 1914 reads, “From [my] experience, I came to know that as we have spent our life simply and have been firmly determined in our search for the awareness of the *ātmā* [*ātmānubhūti*], our desire [*icchā*] for eating many types of food will vanish away ... Twenty years ago in London, too, I must have done so and I could have lived on an *ahiṃsak* diet [*ahiṃsak khrāk*].”<sup>28</sup> In these letters, Gandhi used the word *ahiṃsā* in relation to his daily diet for reducing desires. What should be noted here is that Gandhi, as can be seen in the letter to Chaganlal, viewed the habit of drinking milk as being as harmful as meat-eating. Such an idea was contrary to the general Hindu perception of milk as a sacred

<sup>24</sup>Svāmīdayānandsarasvatīnirmith, *Ath Gokaruṇānidhi* (Dillī, 1875), 5–9.

<sup>25</sup>*The Imperial Gazette of India*, vol. 20 (Oxford, 1908), 290–91. See also Swami Shraddhanand, *The Arya Samaj and Its Distractors: A Vindication* (n.p., 1910).

<sup>26</sup>HS, 110. It should be noted that Vivekananda also referred to the doctrine of “non-killing” in his best-known work *Raja Yoga* (1896), which Gandhi read intensively both in South Africa and in India, but only in relation to the five *yamas* in the *Yogasūtras of Patañjali*, a cannon text of the *Yogadarśana*, one of the major schools of the orthodox Vedic philosophy. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (Calcutta, 1908), 14, 140, 142.

<sup>27</sup>GA, 12: 330.

<sup>28</sup>SGV, 97: 20. Since GA was suspended at vol. 82, the original Gujarati text here, which should have been included in its subsequent volumes, is presently inaccessible. I use the Hindi translation present in SGV, vol. 97.

drink.<sup>29</sup> The discussions in both letters are focused on Gandhi's personal concerns; he never raised topics such as *satyāgraha* or other political issues in these missives, although his dietary or personal interests were intrinsically connected to his ideas of the body politic.<sup>30</sup>

So far, we have seen how the term *ahimsā* was used in *Hind Svarāj* and two private letters. It is clear that a careful examination of Gandhi's South African writings reveals that he only used the word in relation to practicing vegetarianism or cow protection. It is highly significant that Gandhi never officially employed the term *ahimsā* to explain the virtues of *satyāgraha* in South Africa. Moreover, the letters cited above were both written during the last year of Gandhi's South African sojourn. This strongly indicates that throughout his twenty-one-year stay in South Africa, the concept of *ahimsā* did not occupy a central place in either his public or private experimentations (*prayogo*).

### How did Gandhi explain the central principle of *satyāgraha* in South Africa?

The previous section demonstrated that Gandhi never used *ahimsā/ahimsak* in relation to *satyāgraha* during his South African period. If this was the case, then what words or concepts did he employ to promote his *satyāgraha* campaign?

The most crucial source for addressing this question is again *Hind Svarāj*. As has already been pointed out, Gandhi explained the meaning and significance of *satyāgraha* in Chapter 17 of the work. It begins with a question from the reader: "Do you have any historical evidence for *satyāgraha* or *ātmabaḥ* [the force of *ātmā* (soul, spirit, self)] that you are talking about? ... It is still confirmed that without physical violence [*mārphād*] an evildoer does not live righteously." To answer this, the editor explains as follows:

A poet Tulsīdās jī sang as follows:

"*Dayā* [compassion, mercy, pity] is the root of *dharam* [the Avadhī equivalent of *dharm(a)*], *Body (deh)* is the root of pride (*abhimān*),

Tulsī [says], do not abandon *dayā*,

as long as [your] breath/life (*prān* [*prāṇ*]) is in [your] body/pot (*ghaṭ*)"

<sup>29</sup>Gandhi first learnt the idea that drinking milk would cause human sexual desire from Śrīmad Rājendra, a Jain ascetic and Gandhi's contemporary. For the details see Eijiro Hazama, "The Making of a Globalized Hindu: The Unknown Genealogy of Gandhi's Concept of *Brahmacarya*," *Global Intellectual History* 6/5 (2019), 712–31, at 713–17; Hazama, "The Paradox of Gandhian Secularism: The Metaphysical Implication behind Gandhi's 'Individualization of Religion,'" *Modern Asian Studies* 51/5 (2017), 1394–1438, at 1411.

<sup>30</sup>Eijiro Hazama, *Gandhi's Sexuality and Nationalism: The Independence Movement as "Experiments with Truth"* (Japanese) (Tokyo, 2019); Joseph Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2000); Vinay Lal, "Nakedness, Nonviolence, and Brahmacharya: Gandhi's Experiments in Celibate Sexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9/1–2 (2000), 105–36.

To me, this line seems to be a maxim (*śāstravacan*) ... *Dayābaḷ* [the force of compassion], it is *ātmabaḷ*, and it is [also] *satyāgraha*. And, the evidence of this *baḷ* [force] is visible in every step.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Gandhi quotes Tulsidās's popular poem and explains the fundamental principle of *satyāgraha* using the concept of *dayā*.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the word *dayā* was one of the central concepts employed to explain the ideological basis of Gandhi's *satyāgraha* in South Africa in both the Gujarati and Hindi languages.<sup>33</sup> Gandhi, more often than not, insisted that "*dayā* is the root of all religions" and emphasized the uttermost importance of the concept.<sup>34</sup> Other than *dayā*, Gandhi also used the word *prem* (love, affection, kindness) or *prembaḷ* (the force of *prem*) as an alternative concept for *dayā*, *dayābaḷ*, and *ātmabaḷ*.<sup>35</sup> An analogous idea of *dayā* expressed in the lines quoted above can also be found in *Mokṣamālā* (1887), a book written by Jain ascetic Śrīmad Rājcandra that Gandhi read extensively during his South African sojourn.<sup>36</sup> Yet Gandhi never mentions the influence of Rājcandra or Jainism in *Hind Svarāj*.

As argued in the introduction to this article, Gandhi possessed a good command of three languages: Gujarati, Hindi, and English. Gandhi himself translated and published the English translation of *Hind Svarāj* under the title *Indian Home Rule* (1910) just after the publication of the original. This English translation is essential to understanding how Gandhi translated the Gujarati concepts of *dayā* and *prem* into English. He consistently replaced the words *dayā* and *prem* with

<sup>31</sup>HS, 182.

<sup>32</sup>It should be noted that in Tulsidās's poems, the terms *dayā* and *prem* are far more frequently used than *ahimsā*. For instance, in *Rāmcaritmānas*, the word *ahimsā* appears in only one line in the "Uttar Kāṇḍ" as an ancient Vedic principle, as follows: "The highest religion in the *Vedas* is known as *ahimsā* [*Param dharm Śruti bidit ahimsā*]" (Uttar Kāṇḍ, 120: 11). Tulsidās's digitized texts of *Dohāvalī*, *Kavitāvalī*, *Gītāvalī*, *Vinay-Patrikā*, and *Rāmcaritmānas* are available on websites created by Professor Hiroko Nagasaki of Osaka University at <http://hin.minoh.osaka-u.ac.jp/etext.html>, and at GRETIL at <http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html#Kavya>. I am grateful to Professor Nagasaki and Professor Kiyokazu Okita for information about various available e-texts.

<sup>33</sup>IO, 23 Feb. 1907, 11 May 1907, 3 Aug. 1907, 26 Nov. 1910, 9 Aug. 1913; GA, 12: 105–6, 317–18.

<sup>34</sup>IO, 3 Aug. 1907, 26 Nov. 1910, 9 Aug. 1913; GA, 12: 105–6, 317–18. It is noticeable that such an expression seemed to be common among not only north Indian Vaiṣṇav saints, but also south Indian Liṅgāyat saints. The twelfth-century saint Basav, the founder of Liṅgāyatism, said in *Vacanas*: "What is that religion wherein there is no mercy? It is mercy that is wanted for all creatures. It is mercy that is the root of religion." P. G. Halkatti, trans., "Vachanas Attributed to Basava," *Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research* 51 (1922), 7–12, at 10. See also note 36 below.

<sup>35</sup>HS, 184–5.

<sup>36</sup>Hazama, "The Making of a Globalized Hindu," 713–17; Ajay Skaria, "No Politics without Religion' of Secularism and Gandhi," in Vinay Lal, ed., *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres* (New Delhi, 2009), 173–210, at 178. It is striking to note that Rājcandra, who is considered to have inspired Gandhi's life significantly, stressed *dayā* much more frequently than he did *ahimsā*. See Śrīmad Rājcandra, *Mokṣamālā* (Agās, 2010), 70–71, 81–3, 116–17. Most saliently, Rājcandra expressed the first Jain *mahāvrat* by using the word *dayā* instead of *ahimsā* (ibid., 81–3, 200). He only once referred to the word *ahimsā* (i.e. *ahimsādik*) in this book (ibid., 115). With regard to the five letters addressed to Gandhi from Rājcandra during the 1890s, the latter only used the words *ahimsā* (i.e. *ahimsādi dharm*) once in the first letter. M. Kalārthī, ed., *Śrīmad Rājcandra ane Gandhiji* (Amdāvād, 2000), 202.

the English word “love,”<sup>37</sup> and the terms *ātmabaḷ* and *prembaḷ* with “soul-force” and “love-force” respectively.<sup>38</sup>

In the appendices of both *Hind Svarāj*<sup>39</sup> and *Indian Home Rule*,<sup>40</sup> Gandhi listed twenty books and essays which fundamentally impacted him before he wrote *Hind Svarāj/Indian Home Rule*. The first six works are all by Leo Tolstoy. The concepts of “love-force” and “soul-force” are, as far as Gandhi acknowledged, core principles in Tolstoy’s writings.<sup>41</sup> En route to India in 1914, he explained the relationship between the essence of his South African *satyāgraha* campaign and Tolstoyan thought as follows:

[I] endeavoured to serve my countrymen and South Africa, a period covering the most critical stage that they will, perhaps, ever have to pass through. It marks the rise and growth of Passive Resistance,<sup>[42]</sup> which has attracted world-wide attention ... Its equivalent in the vernacular [i.e. *satyāgraha*], rendered into English, means Truth-Force. I think Tolstoy called it also Soul-Force or Love-Force, and so it is.<sup>43</sup>

Among all Tolstoy’s works, *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (1894) and “A Letter to a Hindu” (1908) had a particularly significant impact in Gandhi’s thought formation.<sup>44</sup> Gandhi later confessed that the former book became one of the three crucial sources that influenced his life most.<sup>45</sup>

The fact that Gandhi directly corresponded with Tolstoy just before writing *Hind Svarāj* should not be disregarded.<sup>46</sup> From July to November 1909, Gandhi was staying in London as a member of the Indian delegation and lobbied for South Asian resident rights. In the imperial capital, Gandhi met young Hindu revolutionaries associated with the India House established by Śyāmji Kṛṣṇa Varmā. Gandhi dismissively recognized those who resorted to revolutionary violence to fight against

<sup>37</sup>“IHR,” 69–70, 72–3, 98.

<sup>38</sup>“IHR,” 72, 74, 76–7, 92, 98.

<sup>39</sup>GA, 10: 66.

<sup>40</sup>“IHR,” 99.

<sup>41</sup>However, in the works of Tolstoy listed by Gandhi in *Hind Svarāj*, there cannot be found the terms “soul-force,” or “love-force” either. Tolstoy instead uses expressions such as “the spiritual force(s),” “the force of the consciousness,” “moral force,” “law of love,” and “a dim consciousness in his soul of the higher law of love towards God.” Leo Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” in Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London, 1960), 1–460. Tolstoy repeatedly contrasts these forces with “physical/animal force” and “armed force.” Gandhi’s exposition on the dichotomic understanding between *satyāgraha* as “soul-force”/“love-force” and “violent means” as “physical force”/“armed force” (see note 20 above) in *Hind Svarāj* is vastly analogous to Tolstoy’s.

<sup>42</sup>Gandhi initially used the English term “passive resistance,” but he later declared that the name was inappropriate (*IO*, 11 Jan. 1908). Gandhi emphasized that the participants in his campaign were by no means “passive” due to their strong reliance on the “active” force of inner most “soul/ātmā.” See *DASI*, 131.

<sup>43</sup>*IO*, Golden Number, 1914.

<sup>44</sup>Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God”; Leo Tolstoy, “Letter to a Hindu,” in Peter Mayer, ed., *The Pacifist Conscience* (Harmondsworth, 1966), 166–75. See Martin Green, *Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace* (New York, 1983), 85–97; Devanesen, *Making of the Mahatma*, 261–4.

<sup>45</sup>AK, 137; NJ, 16 Sept. 1928.

<sup>46</sup>Gandhi and Tolstoy corresponded from October 1909 to September 1910. The letters are compiled in B. S. Murthy, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy Letters* (Long Beach, 1987), 24–39.

British colonialism as “anarchists” and “modernists.”<sup>47</sup> It is historically momentous that among these Hindu fundamentalist revolutionaries, Gandhi met V. D. Savarkar, who is widely believed to have persuaded Madanlāl D̥hīngrā to murder Sir Curzon-Wyllie on 2 July 1909, just eight days prior to Gandhi’s arrival in London.<sup>48</sup> Numerous public discussions among these revolutionaries seeking to justify D̥hīngrā’s assassination followed.<sup>49</sup> Gandhi was “both shocked and profoundly stirred” as he talked with these young Indians in London.<sup>50</sup> Simultaneously, Gandhi also read Tolstoy’s “A Letter to a Hindoo,” which was printed in *Free Hindustan*, a political journal edited by Tāraknāth Dās, a prominent Indian intellectual residing in Canada. Gandhi was deeply impressed by Tolstoy’s ideas of “non-resistance” (Tolstoy never used the word “non-violence”) and the “law of love.” Gandhi was convinced that his *satyāgraha* campaign should solely depend upon such Tolstoyan principles. After reading the essay, he immediately wrote a letter to Tolstoy, introducing his campaign in South Africa and asking Tolstoy for permission to translate the essay into Gujarati and publish it in *Indian Opinion*.<sup>51</sup> Then, while returning to South Africa from London on board the steamship *RMS Kildonan Castle* between 13 and 30 November 1909, Gandhi dashed off *Hind Svarāj* within ten days and also completed the Gujarati translation of “A Letter to a Hindoo.”<sup>52</sup> This series of events clearly shows how present Tolstoy’s influence was in the writing of *Hind Svarāj*.<sup>53</sup>

What is striking here is that Gandhi’s understanding of both *dayā* and *prem* enjoys an intimate mutual translatability with the Tolstoyan idea of love, not only from a terminological view point, but also in terms of a deep conceptual affinity. During Gandhi’s South African residence, Gandhi discovered, along with Tulsīdās, the importance of premodern (*nirguṇ*) *bhaktism*, whose nature was universally ethical, non-communal, egalitarian, and non-elitist.<sup>54</sup> He became

<sup>47</sup>Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (New York, 2001), 83; Vikram Visana, “Savarkar before Hindutva: Sovereignty, Republicanism, and Populism in India, c.1900–1920,” *Modern Intellectual History* 18/4 (2020), 1106–29, at 24.

<sup>48</sup>Dhingra assassinated Sir Curzon Wyllie at the reception of the National Indian Association in Jehangir Hall, London.

<sup>49</sup>Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 83; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* (New York, 1996), 26.

<sup>50</sup>Devanesen, *Making of the Mahatma*, 367.

<sup>51</sup>Murthy, *Letters*, 24–7.

<sup>52</sup>After returning to South Africa, Gandhi consecutively published *Hind Svarāj* in the 11 and 18 Dec. 1909 issues of *Indian Opinion*. The Gujarati translation of Tolstoy’s “Letter to a Hindoo” entitled in Gujarati “Rūśiyānā Umarāv Tolstoīno Ek Hindu uparno Kākal” was published in *Indian Opinion* on 25 Dec. 1909, and on 1 and 8 Jan. 1910.

<sup>53</sup>*IO*, 5 June 1909; *NJ*, 16 Sept. 1928.

<sup>54</sup>The *bhakti* movement is essentially characterized by its “anti-scholastic” and egalitarian attitude. For example, in a famous couplet by Kabīr, it is said that “in Bhakti real Pundit is one who knows the ‘*dhai akshar*’ or two-and-half letter word *prema* and not the one who has spent his life pouring over ‘*pothis*’ or books.” This line is quoted from Sachin Ketkar, “Translation of Narsinh Mehta’s Poems into English with a Critical Introduction” (unpublished PhD thesis, South Gujarat University, Surat, 2001). I am grateful to Professor Sachin Ketkar for allowing me to use his unpublished work. Furthermore, the poem “Damodar Lake, near Girnar Hill” (“Giritḷeṭine Kuṇḍ Dāmodar”) by Narsimh Mahetā explicitly exemplifies his thoughts consisting of divine love (*prem*), compassion (*dayā*, *karūṇā*), and an egalitarian attitude towards untouchable castes (*dheḍ varāṇ*). “There is,” sings Narsimh, “no [caste] partisanship [*pakṣāpakṣi*] [in]

particularly acquainted with the ideas of Kabair,<sup>55</sup> Narsimh Mahetā,<sup>56</sup> and Mirābāi.<sup>57</sup> Various ideas associated with *dayā* or *prem* feature much more frequently in the writings of these poets than the principle of *ahimsā*.<sup>58</sup> Gandhi saw a conceptual commonality between the ideas of the premodern *nirgun bhaktas* and Tolstoy, in whose works anti-elitist, folkish/peasantry, and/or trans-religious dispositions were salient.<sup>59</sup>

Besides, it should also be noted that the concepts of *dayā* and *prem*, which were rendered by Gandhi into the English terms “compassion/mercy/pity” and “love” respectively, were equally common in Christian, Islamicate, and Jewish cultures.<sup>60</sup> Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* campaign in South Africa consisted of members of diverse religious backgrounds, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Most notably, wealthy Muslim merchants played a central role in Gandhi’s *satyāgraha*

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supreme reality [*parameśvar*], for all are equal [*sadr̥ṣṭine sarv samān*] ... You care not for caste [*nāt*], you care not for creed [*jāt*], you care nothing for discrimination [*vivek vicār*]!” Quoted from Ketkar, “Translation of Narsinh.” I have changed some words according to the original Gujarati text compiled in Sāvāliyā, *Narsimh Mahetāni Uttam Padāvli*, 83–4.

<sup>55</sup>*IO*, 18 March, 1, 15, April 1905; *GA*, 6: 354.

<sup>56</sup>*IO*, 13 July 1907; 20 Nov. 1909; *GA*, 11: 81–2, 163, 168–9; 12: 452.

<sup>57</sup>*IO*, 2 Oct. 1909; *GA*, 10: 169; 12: 452–3.

<sup>58</sup>It should be noted that in works by *bhakti* saints such as Tulsīdās (see my note 32 above), Kabir, Narsimh Mehatā, and Mirābāi, who influenced Gandhi significantly, there can hardly be found a reference to the word *ahimsā*. At least, there is no reference in the digitized texts of Kabir’s *Bijak* in Winand M. Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck, eds, *Devotional Hindī Literature*, 2 vols. (New Delhi, 1991); or in the other essential texts compiled by Charlotte Vaudeville in *The Millenium Kabir-Vāni* (Pondicherry, 1982), although the words *dayā* and *prem* are both present (I am grateful that Professor Hiroko Nagasaki has kindly sent me this electronic data). Instead, as J. S. Hawley has pointed out, Kabir’s concept of “the human capacity for love (*prem, prīti*)” is particularly important in understanding his *nirguna bhaktism*. J. S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (Delhi, 2005), 316; J. S. Hawley and G. S. Mann, “Mirabai in the Pothi Prem Ambodh,” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 15/1–2, (2014), 199–225, at 201. The same can be said of Narsimh Mahetā. I could not find a single reference to the word *ahimsā* in Narsimh’s Gujarati poems. I also consulted Professor Neelima Shukla-Bhatt about this. She informed me that the term *ahimsā* was not found in Narsimh’s poetry. Instead, there are more “active terms” such as *prem, vahāl*, and *upkār*, which are found in many places. Personal email correspondence with Professor Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, 12 Sept. 2021; I am very grateful for her generous imparting of her expertise. Furthermore, Mirābāi’s thought also, as illustrated in *Prema Aboadh*, contains the concepts of love/*prem* and “compassion.” See Hawley, “Mirabai,” 199–225; Parita Mukta, *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai* (New Delhi, 1994), 79, 167, 212.

<sup>59</sup>Tolstoy argued that “the law of love” is the foundation of all religions. See Tolstoy, “Letter to a Hindu,” 167–8. Such an idea correlates with Gandhi’s description of “the religion which resides in all religions [*e badhā dharmmām je dharm rahyo cheh*]” in *HS*, 81.

<sup>60</sup>Between 1908 and 1914, seventy-five poems written in Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi, and English were published in *Indian Opinion* in order to encourage participation in Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* campaign. From a literary perspective, many of these poems followed two poetic forms: one was the “*bhakti* (devotional) poetry of medieval saint-poets in regional Indian languages upholding love for the divine and fellow devotees as a supreme religious value. The other was *ghazal*, originally a form of Arabic love poetry ... that had travelled to South Asia via Persia.” S. Bhana and N. Shukla-Bhatt, eds., *A Fire That Blazed in the Ocean: Gandhi and the Poems of Satyagraha in South Africa, 1909–1911* (New Delhi, 2011), 37. Besides, an Urdu *ghazal* by Sheik Mehtab, a Muslim childhood friend of Gandhi, was published in the *Indian Opinion* of 6 May 1911, where the concept of “compassion” was used as an important quality of both Allah and Yahweh in Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. Gandhi later said in 1916, “In Islam’s [sacred] book, it has been said *dayā* should be stressed.” *GA*, 13: 183.



campaign in South Africa.<sup>61</sup> Considering the nature and the socio-economic-cultural context of Gandhi's campaign undertaken in South Africa, the ubiquitous concepts of *dayā*/compassion and *prem*/love were fairly appropriate for his political agenda.<sup>62</sup> Contrarily, the concept of *ahimsā*, commonly understood as the “non-killing” of cows and practice of vegetarianism by Gandhi's contemporaries, was too specific in Hindu culture and barely possible to translate literally into Islamicate, Jewish, or Christian phraseologies.<sup>63</sup> It is difficult to find any plausible reason for Gandhi to use the word *ahimsā* in South Africa.

### How did Gandhi invent his nationalist notion of “*ahimsā*” in India?

In this section, I will explore specifically how and why Gandhi added the “new” word of *ahimsā* to his previous cosmopolitan lexicon represented by *dayā* and *prem* after his return to India, and how and why the former eventually came to occupy a central place in his *satyāgraha* philosophy.

As shown in Table 1, Gandhi's first reference to the word *ahimsā* after his return to India in 1915 appears in a private Gujarati letter addressed to his relative Mathurādās Trikamjī, a son of Gandhi's sister. In this letter, written a month after his arrival, Gandhi wrote, “*satya*, *brahmacarya*, *ahimsā*, *asteya*, and *aparigrah*—observing [these] five *yamas* is mandatory for all spiritual aspirants [*mumukṣu*].”<sup>64</sup> Although his gradual interest in *yamaniyamas* in general was visible during his last few years in South Africa (including during his journey at sea),<sup>65</sup> this letter is the first document in which Gandhi refers to the specific content of each *yama*, including *ahimsā*.

The second reference to the idea of *ahimsā* after Gandhi's return can be found in his English speech at the Students' Hall, College Square, in Calcutta, under the

<sup>61</sup>Ebrahim Mahida, *History of Muslims in South Africa: A Chronology* (Durban, 1993), 39–42; Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed, *The Making of a Political Reformer: Gandhi in South Africa, 1893–1914* (New Delhi, 2006), 73–92; Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915–1922* (Cambridge, 1972), 9; Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, revised edn (New Delhi, 1999), 186; Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and His Jewish Friends* (London, 1992).

<sup>62</sup>See my note 60 above. Such a cosmopolitan perspective was shared by his Muslim supporters. AK, 113–16; Bhana and Shukla-Bhatt, *A Fire That Blazed*, 21–3, 30–34.

<sup>63</sup>See notes 24, 25, 26 above and 117 below. Recent scholarships on early modern South Asia have, however, revealed that during the reign of the Mughal dynasty, classical Sanskrit texts such as the *Mahābhārata* and various *Upaniṣads* were widely translated into Persian. Jainism was also generously patronized. See Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA, 2020); Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, 2016); Truschke, *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of a Muslim Past* (New York, 2021). Yet none of the works, as far as I am aware, have yet discussed whether there was any fixed Persian translation for *ahimsā*. I have personally consulted Professor Supriya Gandhi regarding this matter. She has told me that at the end of the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* in Dara Sukhoh's Persian translation, *ahimsā* is rendered as something like “not killing and not doing harm.” She has also taught me that in the modern context, the Urdu-speaking Muslims who engaged with Gandhi would have perhaps been more familiar with a concept such as *sulḥ-i kull* rather than any specific equivalent of *ahimsā*. I am very grateful that she has generously imparted her expertise to me. Our email correspondence was from 3 to 4th Nov. 2021.

<sup>64</sup>GA, 13: 17.

<sup>65</sup>GA, 11: 443; 12: 367, 453.

presidency of P. C. Lyons.<sup>66</sup> In this speech, Gandhi was reported to have spoken upon the principle of “abstention from *himsa*” as follows:

[H]e [Gandhi] must say that misguided zeal [among students] that resorted to dacoities and assassinations could not be productive of any good. These dacoities and assassinations were absolutely a foreign growth in India ... The religion of this country, the Hindu religion, was abstention from *himsa*, that was to say, taking animal life. That was he believed, the guiding principle of all religions.<sup>67</sup>

The context of the above speech was this. Shortly after his arrival in India, Gandhi was strictly keeping his promise to G. K. Gokhale; he promised to travel around the subcontinent for a year without engaging in any political action or speech, instead only acquiring firsthand knowledge of his homeland. During the initial phase of his travel, he encountered young enthusiastic students at College Square in Calcutta, whom he regarded as radical “anarchists” fired by the prevailing Hindu fundamentalist zeal. Gandhi was vastly apprehensive about this “misguided youth,” who believed that violent resistance to the Raj was a primal duty for them. Gandhi could not but deliver the above address, temporarily putting aside his promise to Gokhale in order to direct the students away from using such “nefarious means” incompatible with the essence of “Hindu religion.”

Promptly after this speech, Gandhi wrote a letter to Maganlal Gandhi in Gujarati, declaring that he “came to know in an extremely clear manner in Calcutta” that “the foundation of *satyāgraha* [*satyāgrahano pāyo*] is *ahimsā*.”<sup>68</sup> The letter demonstrates that the above speech in Calcutta was a transformative moment in Gandhi’s intellectual evolution where he first developed a firm conviction that *ahimsā* was the cardinal precept of his religious politics. From this juncture onwards, Gandhi began to increasingly promote the concept of *ahimsā*, which had previously only been used by his contemporaries to denote the cultural habit of vegetarianism or cow worship, explaining it as the core of Hinduism, professedly the national religion. By so doing, he attempted to replace the rampant Hindu fundamentalist belief in revolutionary violence with his new pacifist interpretation of *ahimsā*.<sup>69</sup>

Yet an additional point with regard to the above speech requires further consideration. As we have seen in the previous section, in one of his critical moments in

<sup>66</sup>This speech was originally given in English on 31 March 1915 and the report was published in *Amrita Bazar Patrik* of 1 April 1915. This material should be considered the first occasion when Gandhi used the concept *ahimsā* as the core nationalist principle. Hardiman, “Ahimsa,” 27–8, however, has written work that the first instance of Gandhi applying the term *ahimsā* after his return to India could be attributed to his speech at a reception hosted by his own caste, the Modh Baniyas, in Bhavnagar on 9 Dec. 1915. Yet in Hardiman’s newer *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom*, 164–5, without any reference to his earlier argument, he writes differently that Gandhi’s speech at St Stephens College in Delhi on 13 April 1915 was the first instance. Both dates are at any rate inaccurate, as shown in Table 1. Gandhi had already begun to employ the idea of *ahimsā*, as evidenced in his speech at the Students’ Hall, College Square, in Calcutta, which was at least two weeks prior to the speech in Delhi, as I will argue below.

<sup>67</sup>CWMG, 13: 45.

<sup>68</sup>GA, 13: 36.

<sup>69</sup>CWMG, 13: 50, 65–6, 224, 228–9, 231; GA, 13: 33–4, 69, 88.

London, Gandhi met young “anarchists” fueled by Hindu rebellious fervor. However, at that stage, in order to counter their arguments, Gandhi, while writing *Hind Svarāj*, promoted the universalist and egalitarian concepts of *dayā* and *prem* represented by Tolstoy or the late medieval *nirgunḥ bhaktas*, which were considered to be equally translatable into various religious traditions. In contrast, when Gandhi encountered the students in Calcutta in 1915, inspired by Hindu fundamentalism, he advocated the notion of *ahimsā*, whose “Hindu” disposition was underlined. Indeed, after 1915, Gandhi began to insist that “*ahimsā* is the root of all religions.” This sentence exactly echoes his previous expression using the word *dayā* in South Africa: “*dayā* is the root of all religions.”<sup>70</sup> He further insisted that *dayā* was in fact merely a “limb/part [aṅg]” of the cardinal principle of *ahimsā*, emphasizing the latter’s supreme position.<sup>71</sup> Why did Gandhi not continue to use the terms *dayā* and *prem* as the ultimate virtues of *satyāgraha*,<sup>72</sup> instead beginning to deploy the term *ahimsā*? In 1909, when he encountered analogous Hindu radicals, he still relied on the former terms to explain *satyāgraha*, not the word *ahimsā*.

In order to answer this question, it is essential to examine various entangled historical contexts. One reason for the terminological and conceptual shifts can be explained through Gandhi’s growing awareness of a national language and religion. In January 1915, Gandhi reached Bombay from South Africa. Swiftly after his arrival, Gandhi, who had already earned his name as an acclaimed patriot,<sup>73</sup> obtained a number of invitations to speak at welcome meetings convened by various intellectuals, politicians, entrepreneurs, and religious leaders in the subcontinent.<sup>74</sup> One of the most important receptions was a garden party presided over by M. A. Jinnah, then the president of the Gurjar Sabha, in Bombay on 14 January 1915.<sup>75</sup> Once present, Gandhi was displeased to find that all the participants, including Jinnah himself, were giving their speeches solely in English. When his turn came, Gandhi, dressed in a traditional Kāṭhiyāvādī garment, daringly gave his speech in Gujarati and Hindi, insisting that the *svarāj* movement must be undertaken using their mother tongue(s) and be rooted in “Indian” culture.<sup>76</sup> It is intriguing to note that during Gandhi’s South African years, he consistently wore the style of dress of an indentured laborer. Upon returning to India, he promptly amended this fashion, arraying himself instead in Kāṭhiyāvādī clothes that conveyed his willingness to represent the “beautiful manners and customs of India.”<sup>77</sup> Gandhi emphasized that it was essential to “proceed to our goal [of *svarāj*] in our own eastern ways and not by imitating the West, for we are of the East.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>70</sup>CWMG, 13: 45, 65–6, 228–9; GA, 13: 33–4, 69, 88.

<sup>71</sup>GA, 13: 36. See also Gandhi’s Gujarati article entitled “Ahimsā versus Dayā” in *Navjīvan* (NJ, 31 March 1929).

<sup>72</sup>Gandhi did continue to use *dayā* and *prem* throughout his life, but the emphasis changed.

<sup>73</sup>Gandhi’s civil rights struggle in South Africa had been enthusiastically reported on in a Gujarati local newspaper, *Prajābandhu*. Makrand Mehta, “Gandhi and Ahmedabad,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40/4 (2005), 291–9, at 294–5.

<sup>74</sup>CWMG, 13: 5–10, 13, 24, 35–6, 58, 62–3, 67–71, 81–3; GA, 13: 12–13, 15–6.

<sup>75</sup>CWMG, 13: 9–10; AK, 399–400. See also Riho Isaka, “Gandhi and the Problem of Language,” *Odyssey* 5 (2000), 132–45, at 132–3.

<sup>76</sup>AK, 400.

<sup>77</sup>CWMG, 13: 24.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

Furthermore, Gandhi became perceptively aware of the fermenting spirit of the contemporary “Hindu” nationalism whose nature had been gradually communalized around the time of the Government of India Act of 1909.<sup>79</sup> The fact that Gandhi, with Svāmī Śraddhānand, an Arya Samaji *sanyāsī*, participated in the first All-India Conference of Hindus, in conjunction with the Kumbh Parva held in Haridwar in April 1915,<sup>80</sup> should not be underestimated.<sup>81</sup> At the conference, the Sarvadeśak Hindū Sabhā was established as a “ground front” with a “flourish of trumpets” to represent the Hindu community.<sup>82</sup> Although the conference at this stage was not as radically right-leaning as the later Hindu Mahasabha of the 1920s, it is still important to remember that Gandhi was “strongly supportive” of the formation of the Hindu Sabha, where “Hindu solidarity” in aid of national reforms such as Nagari and cow protection were officially promoted. Gandhi’s recognition of the surging air of Hindu nationalism in India was arguably one of the key factors behind his promotion of the concept of *ahimsā* after 1915.<sup>83</sup> The purportedly “ancient” and ascetic precept of *ahimsā* presented the perfect vehicle for Gandhi to infuse his nationalist agenda with a stronger “Hindu” character, increasing the popularity of his project.

Finally, other than the growth of such nationalist sensitivities, Gandhi’s moral-financial considerations should not be disregarded either. As Makrand Mehta, a renowned social and business historian of Gujarat, has accurately pointed out, “saintly Gandhi was *also* a man of practical wisdom—a tactician.”<sup>84</sup> Mehta has highlighted Gandhi’s masterly synthesis of his personas as a “shrewd politician”<sup>85</sup> and a “*homo religiosus*.”<sup>86</sup> It is, in this respect, fairly inappropriate to apply the Weberian framework based upon the dichotomic hypothesis between “oriental spirituality” as “otherworldly” or “irrational” and modern economics as “this-worldly,” “practical,” or “secular” affairs.<sup>87</sup> Gandhi’s idea of moral economy which was encapsulated in his use of the term “trusteeship” in his later years was by no means “otherworldly” nor “non-spiritual.”<sup>88</sup> Below, I would like to examine how Gandhi’s financial concerns were intimately connected to his terminological/conceptual shift.

Before his return to India, Gandhi planned to establish a new communitarian settlement with approximately forty members, most of them previous inmates of

<sup>79</sup>Richard Gordon, “Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915–1926,” *Modern Asian Studies* 9/2 (1975), 145–203, at 148–50; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 18.

<sup>80</sup>Gordon, “Hindu Mahasabha,” 150.

<sup>81</sup>CWMG, 13: 46–7.

<sup>82</sup>Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915–1930* (London, 2013), 20.

<sup>83</sup>Later, in 1917, Gandhi gave a public speech on the necessity of cow protection in Bettiah, Bihar. While emphasizing not invoking anti-Muslim sentiment among Hindus, he uttered that cow protection was a “very sacred” (*bahu pavitra*) thing, and “doing cow protection is the primal work for every Hindu.” *GA*, 14: 1.

<sup>84</sup>Mehta, “Gandhi and Ahmedabad,” 297, emphasis added.

<sup>85</sup>Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston, 1979), 87, 184.

<sup>86</sup>Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth*, 118, 395–409.

<sup>87</sup>Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993), 140, 150; *Formation of the Secular* (Stanford, 2003), 62–3; Peter van der Veer, “Ritual and Anti-ritual,” unpublished paper presented at the Max Planck Institute conference on 28 Sept. 2020, at [www.mmg.mpg.de/events/26664/47565](http://www.mmg.mpg.de/events/26664/47565).

<sup>88</sup>Kazuya Ishii, “Gandhi’s Theory of Trusteeship,” *Gandhi Marg* 42/3 (2020), 135–55; A. K. Dasgupta, *Gandhi’s Economic Thought* (London, 1996).

the Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa.<sup>89</sup> Gandhi needed to carefully choose the most appropriate place to establish his settlement and secure financial backing to live together with his forty members. Having informed Gokhale of his plan around the time of his return to India, the latter had promised to provide Gandhi with all the necessary money from his India Servant Society.<sup>90</sup> Gandhi's feelings of joy and relief at this juncture were immense: "My heart swelled. I thought that I was released from the business [*dhandho*] of collecting money, so I became very happy [*rājī*], and now I would not have to live with those responsibilities."<sup>91</sup> However, an unexpected incident occurred. Gokhale abruptly passed away during a fainting fit on 15 February 1915, only a month after extending his generous offer.

Gandhi began to look for a new patron. In his search, he considered locations such as Haridwar, Calcutta, and Rajkot before eventually deciding to establish his communitarian settlement in Ahmedabad.<sup>92</sup> He justified his choice on the ground that in Gujarat he would, being a Gujarati himself, "be able to make a full-fledged service to the country through Gujarati language."<sup>93</sup> Yet, if this was his only reason, why did he not choose Rajkot or Porbandar, where he had actually grown up? Except for a short trip to take a matriculation examination during his boyhood, Gandhi had no experience of staying in Ahmedabad.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, as Riho Isaka has pointed out, these Princely States in Kāṭiyāvāḍ had a distinct linguo-cultural history apart from north Gujarat whose center was Ahmedabad.<sup>95</sup> Gandhi's core motive for choosing Ahmedabad was, as Gandhi wrote, that it was the "capital" of Gujarat and the center of commerce. He confessed that "there was a hope that wealthy people [*dhanādḥay loko*] here will be able to give more monetary help [*dhannī vadhāre madad*]."<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, Gandhi's first contact in his search for donations was Śeṭh Maṅgaḷdās Girdharlāl, a well-known Ahmedabad mill owner and a member of the Ambālāl family, the wealthiest and most successful Gujarati Jain plutocracy.<sup>97</sup> Gandhi sent him a detailed estimate of expenditure amounting to approximately six thousand rupees per year.<sup>98</sup> Other than Girdharlāl, Gandhi had also sought financial and moral support from businessmen and people like Govindrāo Āpājī Pāṭil and Jivaṅlal Varajlāl Desāi in Gujarāt Sabhā.<sup>99</sup>

When considering the meaning and implication of Gandhi's need for financial backers, it is essential to bear in mind that his potential patrons were *vāṇīyās* who

<sup>89</sup>SGV, 97: 11–12; GA, 13: 80–83; AK, 401–3.

<sup>90</sup>AK, 401–2.

<sup>91</sup>AK, 402.

<sup>92</sup>AK, 422.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>AK, 37; Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (New York, 2014), 30.

<sup>95</sup>Riho Isaka, "Gujarati Elites and the Construction of a Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Crispin Bates, ed., *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity* (New Delhi, 2006), 151–76, at 165.

<sup>96</sup>GA, 13: 80–83.

<sup>97</sup>AK, 422; GA, 13: 80–83.

<sup>98</sup>More specifically, Śeṭh Maṅgaḷdās Girdharlāl was the husband of Linā Maṅgaḷdās, daughter of Ambālāl Sārābhāi.

<sup>99</sup>Mehta, "Gandhi and Ahmedabad," 296.

held an economically as well as politically dominant position in Ahmedabad. Additionally, these *vāṇīyās*, in tandem with *brāhmaṇs* in the area, were intimately linked with Vaiṣṇav Hindu cultural traditions, particularly Svāminārāyaṇ and Jainism, in which the principle of *ahimsā* was a central doctrine.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, Makrand Mehta has pointed out that by embracing the slogan of *ahimsā*, “Gandhi had cultivated cordial relations with Ahmedabad millowners, particularly the banias [*vāṇīyās*] belonging to his caste and sect.”<sup>101</sup>

Yet Gandhi was not only keen to lean into the philosophical aspect of the Ahmedabadis’ religious doctrine; he was also highly flexible when it came to adapting religious ceremonies familiar to his supporters. For instance, according to Gandhi’s Gujarati diary entry for 20 May 1915, just five days prior to the establishment of the *āśram*, he performed *vāstu*, a common ritual performed among Gujarati Hindus when they move to a newly built house.<sup>102</sup> In the ritual, a pot is filled with water and carried to the house by either an unmarried girl or a woman whose husband is alive. During the house construction, which requires digging operations, people believe that numerous insects are killed. Therefore they perform the ritual so that the gods will forgive their sin. Gandhi was flexible in the face of his new environment and willing to undertake religious ceremonies which, as Mehta wrote, “must have delighted all the Ahmedabad Hindus.” Therefore “Gandhi’s strong commitment to Hinduism and ahimsa won for him the cooperation of the rich Hindu and Jain sections of Ahmedabad.”<sup>103</sup>

However, his successful acts of assimilation do not mean that Gandhi was immune to the difficulties inherent in dealing with these donors, since they were, in some respects, very conservative, orthodox, and even communalistic.<sup>104</sup> Their strong prejudice, for instance, towards members of untouchable castes was apparent and explicitly incompatible with Gandhi’s basic moral sensitivity. Gandhi thus had to defend the conceptual gap between his own humanist understanding of *ahimsā* and the prevalent cultural perceptions of it among Hindus and Jains in Gujarat.<sup>105</sup> There was a time of crisis just a few months after the establishment of the *āśram* when Gandhi completely lost his financial support due to his reception of untouchables into his *āśram*. Girdharlāl was inflamed by this incident, considering the *āśram* “polluted.” Since Gandhi did not want to change his attitude, he finally decided to leave the *āśram* and live in the untouchable colony in town. Yet, on the verge of shutting down the *āśram*, Gandhi was saved by an anonymous industrialist who was later revealed to be Ambālāl Sārābhāi.<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that

<sup>100</sup>See note 8 above. Williams, *Introduction*, 24, 159; Williams and Trivedi, *Swaminarayan Hinduism*, 43.

<sup>101</sup>Mehta, “Gandhi and Ahmedabad,” 296.

<sup>102</sup>GA, 13: 158; Mehta, “Gandhi and Ahmedabad,” 296.

<sup>103</sup>Mehta, “Gandhi and Ahmedabad,” 296.

<sup>104</sup>See also notes 7, 8 above. For the details of the somewhat exclusive historico-cultural perceptions among Gujarati elites see Riho Isaka, “Gujarati Intellectuals and History of Writing in the Colonial Period,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 37/48 (2002), 4867–72; Isaka, “Language and Dominance: The Debates over the Gujarati Language in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 25/1 (2002), 1–19; Isaka, “Gujarati Elites,” 151–76.

<sup>105</sup>Mahādev Desāi, *Mahādevbhāinī Dāyri*, vol. 4 (Amdāvād, 1950), 166–7; AK, 418, 472–7.

<sup>106</sup>AK, 422; Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat* (New Delhi, 2005), 169–70.



Gandhi's manifestation of *varnaśram*, one of his *āśramvrat* (vows of *āśram*), which indicates his incorporation of the four-*varṇa* system, was seen as the outcome of his compromising association with conservative Hindus/Jains,<sup>107</sup> Gandhi's firm belief in anti-untouchability never swayed throughout his life.<sup>108</sup>

What, then, about his attitude towards Muslims? I think the most controvertible aspect when considering Gandhi's terminological/conceptual shift was that there was, compared to the terms of "compassion" (*dayā*) and "love" (*prem*), no shared common or fixed phraseologies for *ahimsā* among Urdu Muslims, despite the fact that there had been a rich and long tradition of Muslim–Hindu–Jain synthesis during the early Mughal dynasty.<sup>109</sup> Gandhi was well aware of this *purported* untranslatability, as I will discuss below.

Indeed, Gandhi was invariably very careful when he needed to choose a new key term for his political struggle. For instance, during his South African years, Gandhi gave both of his communitarian settlements English names, i.e. the Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm respectively. While writing *Hind Svarāj* on the *Kildonan Castle*, Gandhi wrote a Gujarati letter to Maganlal on 24 November 1909, explaining the reason for utilizing English names as follows: "And even when giving a name, we will have to search for a common word [*madhyasth śabd*] in which a question of [the distinction between] Hindus [and] Muslims should not arise. *Maṭh* or *āśram* is perceived as particularly a Hindu word; therefore, they are not [to be] used, [but the name of] Phoenix is easily attainable, [and] a nice word. Since ... it is neutral [*taṭasth*]."<sup>110</sup>

Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth have aptly pointed out that when Gandhi named his new settlement in Ahmedabad *āśram*, he noticed a communal implication which potentially contradicted his view of religious neutrality.<sup>111</sup> The same deliberation can be applied to the term *ahimsā*, which also raised the communal issue. One of the feasible reasons for Gandhi to use the terms such as *ahimsā*, *āśram*, and *varṇāśram* in 1915 was the fundamental demographic situation in terms of religious population ratio in Gujarat, where Muslims played a much lesser role in Gandhi's *satyāgraha* campaign compared to that in South Africa.<sup>112</sup>

What, then, were the consequences of Gandhi's terminological/conceptual shift in India? Although Gandhi, at first sight, skillfully employed the term *ahimsā* as the ideological basis of *satyāgraha*, contemporaneously serving both his nationalist sensitivities and his tactical financial concerns, the decision became almost untenable shortly after his political presence expanded beyond the linguo-cultural boundary of Gujarat. As Gandhi was, almost too rapidly, transformed into a national leader representing the two largest religio-political forces of the subcontinent, he became

<sup>107</sup>GA, 13: 89–90; AK, 424–7.

<sup>108</sup>Yagnik and Sheth, *Shaping of Modern Gujarat*.

<sup>109</sup>See note 63 above.

<sup>110</sup>GA, 10: 70.

<sup>111</sup>Yagnik and Sheth, *Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 169–70.

<sup>112</sup>According to the Census of India (1921), Hindus constituted 68.56 percent and Muslims constituted 21.74 percent of the whole population. J. T. Marten, *Census of India, 1921*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1924), 110.

well aware that “it would be on the question of Hindu Muslim unity that my *ahimsa* would be put to its severest test.”<sup>113</sup>

On the first day of the Rowlatt Satyāgraha campaign in Bombay on 6 April 1919, Gandhi held a huge mass meeting in the Sonapur Masjid compound where no less than five thousand Muslims gathered. Gandhi urged the audience to take “the vow of Hindu–Muslim unity” by embracing “a feeling of pure love” and “eternal friendship.”<sup>114</sup> It is notable here that he did not refer to the word *ahimsā* at this meeting. Following the outbreak of a series of riots in northern and western India, Gandhi immediately suspended the campaign and in a makeshift manner began to translate the word *ahimsā* into the English word “non-violence” (instead of “non-killing,” which might have recalled the communal debate on cow slaughter, as discussed above).<sup>115</sup> He then, reportedly, struggled to find equivalent phraseologies for *ahimsā* in Urdu as well as introducing his new method of mass boycotting of foreign cloth in his native tongues. Gandhi wrote, “I found that I could not bring home my meaning to purely Moslem audiences with the help of the Sanskrit equivalent for non-violence.”<sup>116</sup> However, he did not succeed in finding an appropriate alternative in Urdu.<sup>117</sup>

During the Delhi Khilafat Conference in November 1919, the Gujarat Political Conference in August 1920, and the Calcutta Special Session of Congress in September 1920, Gandhi again never seemed to utter the word *ahimsā* (अहिंसा) (in Devanāgarī), *ahimsā* (અહિંસા) (in Gujarati), or *ahimsa* (in Roman italic letters) in either Hindi, Gujarati, or English speeches.<sup>118</sup> The editor of the *Bombay Chronicle* intriguingly recorded that at the Delhi Khilafat Conference, Gandhi spoke about his idea of “avoid[ing] injury of any kind” from “a secular point of view,”<sup>119</sup> seemingly evading the word *ahimsā/ahimsa*. At last, when Gandhi commenced the national boycott from August 1920, collaborating with the Kaliphath movement, he, though “being embarrassed of not obtaining an Urdu or Gujarati

<sup>113</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, vol. 2, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad, 1929), 446. Here I intentionally used Desai’s English translation. The Gujarati original sentence can be literally translated as: “my test of *ahimsā* and its grand experiment would take place in this [questions of communal] unity [*aikya*].” AK, 569. I believe that the intended meaning is clearer in the English version here. I also would like to highlight that there were many Muslim individuals who had supported Gandhi and stood against the Muslim League. There was, needless to say, no single fixed essentialized identity among Muslims. Ali Usman Qasmi, ed., *Muslims against the Muslim League* (Cambridge, 2017); David Gilmartin, ed., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, 2000); Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations* (New Delhi, 2004).

<sup>114</sup>YI, 5 July 1919; CWMG, 15: 189–9.

<sup>115</sup>See note 14 above.

<sup>116</sup>Gandhi, *Story of My Experiments*, 577–8. The Gujarati original sentence can be literally translated as: “Only at meetings of Muslim brothers, I could not explain what I [wanted to] explain by the word ‘peaceful’ [*sāntimay*].” AK, 524. In the original chapter where this sentence appears, Gandhi, except on one occasion in the second paragraph, never uses the word *ahimsā* or *ahimsak*, but he recurrently uses the word *sāntimay*. I assume that this reflects, as argued above, Gandhi’s deliberate consideration in Muslim meetings of paraphrasing his use of the term *ahimsā* with various other expressions.

<sup>117</sup>At this juncture, Gandhi asked Maulānā Śaukatalī for his help with new phraseologies. The latter suggested to Gandhi *bāaman* for *ahimsā* or *sānti* and *tark mavālāt* for “non-cooperation” (*asahkār*). AK, 524.

<sup>118</sup>CWMG, 16: 306–12; GA, 18: 186–8, 198–9, YI, 1 Sept. 1920; CWMG, 18: 224; YI, 15 Sept. 1920.

<sup>119</sup>CWMG, 16: 307.

word,”<sup>120</sup> created the new English term “non-violent non-co-operation” for his campaign.<sup>121</sup> The Congress Constitution adopted at the Nagpur Session in December 1920, then, declared that “[t]he object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of swaraj by the people of India *by all legitimate and peaceful means.*” Here, his religious terminology, that of *satya* and *ahimsā*, was obviously secularized.<sup>122</sup>

Despite consistently insisting upon the importance of national religion and language, Gandhi, when faced with the questions surrounding the communal alliance between Hindus and Muslims, could not entirely avoid depending upon the English framework of the colonial master. In the end, such English renderings hardly conveyed the ethico-spiritual connotation of *satyāgraha*, which should have been starkly distinguished from the mere materialistic method of “passive resistance.”<sup>123</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, I have chronologically examined Gandhi’s writings in three languages and explored the genealogy of Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsā*/non-violence, a cardinal precept of *satyāgraha*. By so doing, I have demonstrated four points. (1) The principle of Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* campaign in South Africa was never associated with the “Hindu” notion of *ahimsā*. The idea of *ahimsā* was then considered to entail communal questions. (2) Gandhi’s first *satyāgraha* campaign was chiefly promoted by the trans-religious, non-elitist, and egalitarian concepts of *dayā*/compassion and *prem*/love, as inherited from Tolstoy and the late medieval *nirguṇ bhaktas*. (3) The major reasons for Gandhi’s deployment of the term *ahimsā* to explain “the foundation of *satyāgraha*” and “the religion of this country” or “the Hindu religion” after his return to India were intimately related to his awareness of the rising spirit of the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement and his tactical concerns for securing moral–financial support from local well-to-do *vāṇīyās* in Ahmedabad. (4) Gandhi first coined the term “non-violence” as a religiously “neutral” English rendering of *ahimsā* immediately after the suspension of the first nationwide *satyāgraha* campaign in 1919, due to his hasty recognition of the difficulty of using *ahimsā* alone.

The processes and reasons behind Gandhi’s deployment of *ahimsā*/non-violence strongly indicate that Gandhi’s emphasis on his childhood influences in the Princely States located in the western and central regions of Kāṭiyāvāḍ peninsula was a later retrospective interpretation. The extant historical documents

<sup>120</sup>AK, 508. In Desai’s English translation, the original phrase “Urdu or Gujarati word” is translated into “Hindi or Urdu word.” Gandhi, *Story of My Experiments*, 538.

<sup>121</sup>AK, 505–9, 524.

<sup>122</sup>CWMG, 19: 159, 190, emphasis added. In the Gujarati version of his *Autobiography* (i.e. *Ātmakathā*), Gandhi translated the English words “all legitimate” into the Gujarati word *satya*. AK, 527. Moreover, Gandhi obviously intended to convey his idea of *ahimsā* when he wrote the English words “peaceful means” here.

<sup>123</sup>See note 42 above. Gandhi lamentably confessed in his last years that he had realized that what he had believed himself to have been doing was not *satyāgraha*, but the “passive resistance” of the “weak” and of “cowards.” The dramatic confessions regarding Gandhi’s last years are most clearly depicted in Sudir Candra, *Gāndhī: Ek Asambhav Sambhāvnā* (Nayī Dillī, 2014), Ch. 3.

demonstrate that he did not regard the positive value of the term *ahimsā* and by no means promoted it as a nationalist slogan before 1915. On the contrary, the cardinal principle of *satyāgraha* before India, which might be tentatively termed “proto-non-violence,” expressed with the terms *dayā* or *prem*, was invented while Gandhi was deftly cooperating with people from multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious, and multilinguistic backgrounds in order to fight against racial discrimination in South Africa. In this respect, Gandhi was, in Judith Brown’s terms, undeniably a “critical outsider” of the subcontinent who primarily cherished his ideas as quite distinct from his nationalist contemporaries.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, I believe that the historical findings in this article, which show the cosmopolitan genealogy behind Gandhi’s nationalist self-narrative, allow us to gain an essential insight into David Hardiman’s fundamental question proposed in his book *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (2003): “why [do] Gandhi’s ideas continue to resonate in the world today?”<sup>125</sup> Despite the lament that Gandhian thought has been largely obliterated in his home country,<sup>126</sup> it has left an indelible mark beyond the subcontinent, in Anglo-Saxon Protestant countries, South Africa, and Myanmar particularly.<sup>127</sup> Once the lesser-known global, though invariably peripheral or dissenting, genealogy of Gandhi’s *ahimsā*/non-violence is unfolded, it comes as no surprise that the deep moral reverberations of his thought have reached people all across the world.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>Judith Brown, “The Making of a Critical Outsider,” in Judith Brown and Martin Prozesky, eds., *Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics* (Pietermaritzburg, 1996), 21–33.

<sup>125</sup>Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time*, 5.

<sup>126</sup>Tridip Suhrud, “Modi and Gujarati ‘Asmita,’” *Economic and Political Weekly* 43/1 (2008), 11–13. “I suspect,” said Ashis Nandy, “that our inability to recognise this has led to the fact that Gandhism as a force, or Gandhian thought as a force in Indian politics has declined. Of the greatest Gandhians today—probably the three greatest that I consider the most important—none is, strictly speaking, Indian. None is Hindu, and none Gujarati. They are Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Aung-San Su Kyi.” See, Ashis Nandy, “Speaking of Gandhi’s Death,” in Tridip Suhrud and P. R. deSouza, eds., *Speaking of Gandhi’s Death* (Hyderabad, 2010), 1–10, at 7.

<sup>127</sup>See note 126 above. John Hick, “Foreword,” in Margret Chatterjee, *Gandhi’s Religious Thought* (London, 1983), ix–xii, at ix; Mark Juegensmeyer, “Saint Gandhi,” in John Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, 1987), 187–203; Richard Fox, “Passage from India: How Westerners Rewrote Gandhi’s Message,” *Humanities* 19/1 (1998), 24–7; Claude Markovits, *The UnGandhian Gandhi: The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma* (London, 2004), 15–23; John Haynes Holmes, *My Gandhi* (London, 1954); Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York, 2011), 116.

<sup>128</sup>Asish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi, 1983); Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home* (New Delhi, 2008), ix; Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, 2006); Akeel Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

Gujarat and verified subtle nuances in my Gujarati translations. If there is any error or inaccuracy in this article, all responsibility is solely my own.

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