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A Positive Mindset Brings Positive Things: A Critique on Mahatma Gandhi's My Experiments with Truth

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Abstract

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the most prominent leader of pre-independence and post-independence India, who changed the course of history during the Indian freedom struggle. He was a pioneer of 'satyagraha' and 'nonviolence'. He was a man of strong indomitable will power through which he resists a lot of hurdles and finally conquered a lot. He is steadfast in his thought, action and deed. Gandhi not only led India to independence but also inspired the movements of civil rights and freedom across the globe. He was the most idealist thinker as well as a unique personality for his simple living and high thinking. He was in search of a way that would provide a stable and sustainable life for all the Indians. The dawn of light, knowledge and wisdom occur when the inner voice of spiritualism and idealism invoked to him. He was greatly admired by the Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore and bestowed upon him the title '*Mahatma*' and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose addressed him as the '*Father of the Nation*'. In this article, I seek to explore how Gandhi aims to rejuvenate, resuscitate, reinvigorate, and renovate his ideology, morality and ethics through the path of satya and ahimsa.

I have also presented a brief account of his biography.

Keywords: Experiment, Freedom, God, Nonviolence, Truth

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2 October 1869 – 30 January 1948) was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and political ethicist who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British rule and in turn inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. The honorific Mahātmā (Sanskrit: "great-souled", "venerable"), first applied to him in 1914 in South Africa, is now used throughout the world. Having a positive attitude means being optimistic about situations, interactions and yourself. People with positive attitudes remain hopeful and see the best even in difficult situations. In fact, this thing is also proved and justified

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by Gandhi. It is generally known that he lived in an austere life, practised strict vegetarianism and abstained from alcoholic drinks, tobacco and even the milder stimulants like coffee and tea. His attachment with simple natural remedies against illness and disease and his radical ideas on education are so well known to the outside world and, even in India, they have made much impact. He expresses that a positive mindset brings positive things which is also proved in course of time.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth is the autobiography M. K. Gandhi covering his life from early childhood through to 1921. It was written in weekly installments and published in his journal *Navjivan* from 1925 to 1929. Its English translation also appeared in installments in his other journal *Young India*. Gandhi wrote various quotations in this journal that inspired many. He used *Young India* to spread his unique ideology and thoughts regarding the use of nonviolence in organising movements and to urge readers to consider, organise and plan for India's eventual independence from Britain. His autobiography starts with his birth and parentage, reminiscences of childhood, child marriage, relation with his wife and parents, experiences at the school, his study tour to London, efforts to be like the English gentleman, experiments in dietetics, his going to South Africa, his experiences of colour prejudice, his quests for dharma, social work in Africa, return to India, his slow and steady work for political

awakening and social activities. The book ends abruptly after a discussion of the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1915. In the blurb of the book he has noted that "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills." It was originally written in Gujarati language and in 1930 Mahadev Desai translated into English.

The English version, An Autobiography, bore the subtitle *My Experiments with Truth* Gandhi states the following lines in the preface:

... It is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simple want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments; it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. (An Autobiography pp. IX-X)

The word *experiment* in the title of his autobiography itself relates Mahatma Gandhi as a genuine scientist who always tried to do experiments in his personal and professional life. For instance, his ideology of vegetarianism, anti-alcoholism, humanism and social thinking and such other scientific and rational practices has become a centre of attraction. His experiments were without laboratory but very innovative and applicable in the long run for the betterment of the society.

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Gandhi uses the expressions of science to narrate the spirit of his quest:

"A scientist, who though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analyzed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final." (Gandhi, 1927: X-XI)

Analysis and Discussion

M. K. Gandhi attempted by B. R. Nanda may be considered a typical example of twentieth century biography. The author not only like an intimate biographer highlights the various aspects of Gandhi's personality, a secularity, a political leader and a humanist, but also like a generalised biographer records the events of his life. In fact like other modern biographers Mr. Nanda presents such series of events like a devoted chronicler which is the speciality of his art. The report made on Mahatma's life is honest, sincere and objective which makes the analysis of the great man true to life. Hence, Mr. Nanda may be claimed as an outstanding author of the times.

The depiction of Gandhi's childhood or school life is just like

'Morning shows the Day'. The shy sensitive and introvert Gujarati Hindu boy, himself a product of a conservative middle class family, appears to imitate others in childhood being guided by a few friends he takes muttons which he is not supposed to take being a member of a vegetarian lot or one occasion he does not attend the games class. But very soon he realises his mistakes and he is punished by the teacher after which he promises to become honest and truthful in life. This is in fact his experiments with truth which Gandhi records in one of his books named '*My Experiments with Truth*' that he writes in later times. If mistakes are human, Gandhi learns from his mistakes and eventually prepares himself not to move any such mistake.

On having completed his education he moves London and studies Bar-at-Law. There he learns French as well as instrumental music but he never forgets his doing his own work. His self dependence and punctuality in fact make him admirable among his English friends. The real activities of Gandhi; the secularist and political leader began where he returns from England. During his brief stay in India and his long stay in South Africa, where he goes to provide legal assistance to one Muslim friend he offers valuable advice in matters of religion and politics. As a great humanist, he comes to believe that all races, languages and religions are the same and therefore there must not exist any differences between man and man. In South

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Africa, the first great performance of Gandhi the political leader is displayed when he bravely protests against the white supremacy of the coloured population .He is offered, driven out of first class compartment meant for the white people imprisoned and even brutally beaten, yet he remains a great humanist and leader.

If his activities in South Africa are a kind of proposal, his subsequent activities of the same order on coming back to India may be taken as an achievement. In India, the first thing the leader does is he wears a dhoti or walk by holding a stick which means the first duty of the political leader to live a simple life which majority of poor people of India live. He goes from door to door, asks the people to become fearless and fight out the British and finally make India free where ever Gandhi goes he wins the heart of everybody not only by showing his love for them, but also by preaching the gospel of nonviolence. People take him as God; Tagore calls him "*The Mahatma*". He organises the congress party, attends the round-table conference, and arranges civil disobedience movement and Quit-India movement like a devoted leader of the people in which all people of India irrespective of differences in cast, creed and custom join him.

Along with political activities, the Mahatma supports the cause of communal harmony as well as the complete removal of untouchability. He makes himself an example visiting the huts of the lower cast Indians or advising the Hindus and the

Muslims to maintain parity. But it is a great man who suffers greatly and dies greatly. He has to pay heavily for trying to find out a solution to communal tension. He is a matter of tragic irony that being a Hindu, he is murdered by a Hindu at last.

Last Sleep of Life

In 30 January 1948, before three pistol shots put an end to his life, Gandhi had been on the political field for more than half a century. He had inspired two generations of India. The patriots trembled an empire and sparked off a revolution which changed the face of Africa and Asia. To millions of his own people, he was the '*Mahatma*'- the great soul- whose sacred glimpse was a reward in itself. By the end of 1947 he had lived down much of the suspicion, ridicule and opposition which he had to face, when he first raised the banner of revolt against racial exclusiveness and imperial domination. His ideas, once dismissed as quaint and utopian, had begun to strike answering chords in some of the finest minds in the world. "Generations to come, it may be", Einstein had said of Gandhi in July 1944, "will scarcely believe that such one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon earth." Though his life had been continual unfolding of an endless drama, Gandhi himself seemed the least dramatic of men. It would be difficult to imagine a man with fewer trappings of political eminence or with less of the popular image of a heroic figure. With his loin cloth, steel-rimmed glasses, rough sandals, a toothless smile and a voice which rarely rose above a

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whisper, he had a disarming humility. He used a stone instead of soap for his bath, wrote his letters on little bits of paper with little stumps of pencils which he could hardly hold between his fingers, shaved with a crude country razor and ate with a wooden spoon from a prisoner's bowl. He was, if one were to use the famous words of the Buddha, a man who had "by rousing himself, by earnestness, by restraint and control, made for him an island which no flood could overwhelm."

Man of Altruism

The autobiography is the share reflection of his idea of altruism which is parallel to nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi has been praised by many leaders, philosophers, Nobel laureates and scholars all over the world. Will Durant, the great American philosopher and historian, said about Mahatma Gandhi that,

"Not since Buddha has India so revered any man... Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity of soul, and forgiveness of enemies....We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint." (Internet)

His freedom movement echoed the American Declaration of Independence and French Revolution. Mahatma Gandhi preferred to follow democratic ideology of Abraham Lincoln with liberty, fraternity rather than following violent and aggressive

ideology of Chanakya. Plato's (c 427-348 BC) ideal republic state and its Utopia discussed the ideal state which was founded on perfect forms of goodness, truth, beauty and justice. Mahatma Gandhi echoed his ideals practically. He has clearly mentioned his policy and ideology in the following words in *Hind Swaraj*,

"The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indians their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swarajya* or complete independence." (Gandhi, 1909: 278)

The autobiography constantly follows his ideals about Satyagraha which he considered as the best weapon against violence. This literary work is an embodiment of his quest for truth which is a combination of his principles and its implementations. Gandhi held the view that nonviolence was the only way towards freedom. To convince his thoughts to those extremists Mahatma Gandhi proposed an autobiography that could be, "Put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of hate. It replaces violence with self sacrifice. It puts soul force against brute force." (Gandhi, 1909:16)

Satyagraha

The word *satyagraha* is a compound of two Sanskrit nouns, *Satya*

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which means “truth” and *Agraha* which means “grasp”. (Bondurant, p. 11) *Satya* is derived from *Sat* which means “being”. Gandhi believed that “Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth.” Therefore, Gandhi said “It is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth.” (Gandhi, 1931, p. 196) Gandhi used *satyagraha* for two goals – one was personal and the other was social or political. For Gandhi, the ultimate goal in life was the realization of the Truth – seeing God face to face. The second goal was social and political change for which he used *satyagraha* as a means to that end. *Satyagraha*, popularly known as a “Technique of non-violent public protest”, is one of the greatest contributions of Gandhi made to the modern world. His contribution was unique in that it offered a solution to conflicts without the use of physical force. Further, in contrast to the traditional means – physical force or violence, *Satyagraha* emphasized more on the means - non-violence - than on the end - attainment of truth. Gandhi’s uncompromising insistence on non-violence in the pursuit of *satyagraha* made it a distinctive as well as a controversial technique of social and political change.

Ahimsa

The Sanskrit word *ahimsa* is translated as non-violence. It is composed of a negative prefix “a” and a noun “*himsa*” which means “injury.” However, *ahimsa* has a negative connotation when translated as non-violence, its etymological meaning is “action based on the refusal to do harm.”

It turns to a positive connotation. Gandhi, when explaining the positive meaning of *ahimsa* equates it to “love”. He says “*ahimsa* is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-doer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899).” To Gandhi, *ahimsa* was not simply non-killing; it took him to a much higher realm of “being humane”. A true follower of *ahimsa*, Gandhi taught, we must refuse to offend anybody, not even harbour an uncharitable thought even against an enemy. For Gandhi violence had no place in a society that follows the tenets of *ahimsa* (non-violence). Further violence creates distance between the self and the pursuit of truth. “The more he took to violence, the more he receded from truth” (*Hind Swaraj* 67). For Gandhi, violence makes the possibility of knowing oneself even fainter. He therefore, stoutly opposes the argument that ends justify means. It was the relationship between the objects that one seeks and the attachment to them that attracted Gandhi to the *Bhagavad Gita*. The verses 62 and 63 of the second discourse made a deep impression on him:

If one
Ponders on objects of the
sense, there springs
Attraction; from attraction
grows desire,
Desire flames to fierce
passion, passion breeds
Recklessness; then the
memory – all betrayed –
Let noble purpose go, and
saps the mind,

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Till purpose, mind and man
are all undone (Desai 163).

Realisation of God

He endeavoured to see God through his service to humanity. Hence his mission was shaped by his commitment to the immemorial Indian tradition which has advocated self-realisation in and through society. As literature on Gandhi multiplies at an astonishing pace, the most significant interpretations of his career have appeared. One of these interpretations shows Gandhi's ability to inspire the nation from margins, that is, by reaffirming his identity as a Gujarati writer. And by asserting his position of equality, he attained political victory by applying his psychological insight and a moral persuasion. In his autobiography, Gandhi wrote thus: "What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pinning to achieve these thirty years – is self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit to this goal" (x). Gandhi asserted that all his utterances, writings, political work and experiments in the spiritual realm were directed towards the attainment of his desire. How does this then inform his work in general? It is here that Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* may be seen as an important constituent of the Gandhian vision. *Hind Swaraj* is a dialogue between Indian civilisation and modern Western civilisation, between civilisation and its reverse, between those whose ends as justification of means, and those who see means and ends as integrally related.

Gandhi chooses to call his method "experiments". He indicates why the term 'experiment' was chosen over 'sadhana' in the following way: "I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analyses every psychological situation...For me they appear to be absolutely correct and seem for the time being to be final" (*My Experiment with Truth* x-xi). This passage indicates that Gandhi's "experiments with truth" is persistent.

Ethics of Gandhi

Ethics and integrity can be defined as the realisation of the need to justify one's life and the decision to be entailed or encompassed with the choice of a particular value. Gandhi is considered as one of the greatest moral philosopher of India. The major principles of Gandhian ethics are:

- **Dignity of Labour:** Gandhi tried to establish equality among all. The dignity of labour is the philosophy that all types of jobs are respected equally, and no occupation is considered superior and none of the jobs should be discriminated on any basis. Regardless of whether one's occupation involves physical work or mental labour, it is held that the job deserves respect.

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- **Ends and Means:** The means are the methods you use. The ends are the goals or the final results. Gandhi always emphasised on pure means and ends. Improper means cannot be adopted to achieve proper ends. As a wrong path cannot take you to right destination.
- **Globalisation:** It has turned the world into a global village while he wanted to promote a Globe of villages.
- **Love for Humankind-** Gandhi had a firm faith in the love for mankind. To him, love is the essence of morality. No morality is possible without love. Truth can be attained through love. Love takes him towards God. It makes all duties pleasant. Hence, love should guide all life. The social and political revolution started by Gandhi was prompted by his inherent love of humanity.
- **Notion of Seven Sins:** i. Wealth without work, ii. Pleasure without conscience, iii. Knowledge without character, iv. Commerce without morality, v. Science without Humanity, vi. Religion without sacrifice, vii. Politics without principle are the seven sins in a society that should be redressed.
- **Satyagraha:** It is the continuous realisation for truth. It mainly includes self sacrifice, peace and non-violence. Only a person with willpower and determination can follow satyagraha.
- **Secularism:** Gandhi was deeply religious and compassionate to the religious sentiments of the followers of other faiths. He propagated a secular ideology, which he defined as sarvadharm sambhav that means equal respects for all religions.
- **Trusteeship:** Wealthy people should act trustees of trust that looked after the welfare of the people.
- **Sarvodaya:** It means 'Universal Uplift' or 'Progress for All'. By inclusiveness many evils of the society can be eradicated.
- **Value of Education:** He regarded education as the light of life and the very source of realisation of oneself. He viewed that universality of all religions can be realised through universalisation would lead to national integration.

Famous Quotations

Gandhi considered his life as a series of experiments with truth. Therefore, it is his conception of truth that is the central to his life and work. Not only the philosophers but also the social activists have encouraged millions to follow his example and balance the world in a genial and benign way. Today, the powers of Gandhi's words still inspire us to change the world by changing ourselves. Here are some of his most famous quotes:

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- a) “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”
- b) “The greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane.”
- c) “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”
- d) “We need not wait to see what others do.”
- e) “A ‘No’ uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a ‘Yes’ merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble.”
- f) “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
- g) “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.”
- h) "Love is the strongest force the world possesses.”
- i) “Non-violence is a weapon of the strong.”
- j) “A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.”

Impact of Gandhi

Everyone concerned in the better future of mankind must be deeply moved by the tragic death of Mahatma Gandhi. He died as the victim of his own principles, the principle of nonviolence. He died because in time of disorder and general irritation in his country, he refused armed protection for himself. It was his unshakable belief that the use of force is an evil in itself, that therefore it must be avoided by those who are striving for supreme justice to his belief. With his belief in his heart and mind, he has led a great nation on to its liberation. He has demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled not only through the cunning game of the usual political maneuvers and trickeries but through the cogent example of morally superior conduct of life.

The admiration for Mahatma Gandhi in all countries of the world rests on recognition, mostly sub-conscious, recognition of the fact that in our time of utter moral decadence, he was the only statesman to stand for a higher level of human relationship in political sphere. This level we must, with all our forces, attempt to reach. We must learn the difficult lesson that an endurable future of humanity will be possible only if, also in international relations, decisions are based on law and justice and not on self-righteous power, as they have been up to now. The great leaders pay the tributes through valuable words to Gandhi. Let's succinct:

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C. Rajagopalachari – Governor General opines that Gandhi is the “heir to a great tradition”. To him Bharatmata is writhing in anguish and pain over the loss. No man loved Bharatmata and Indians more than Mahatma Gandhi. Let the tragedy that was enacted in Delhi give the people of India the tune, reason, rhyme and melody for the history of their future. I pray that the history of India might be written with the rhythm and tune of the grief that Bharatmata had felt when Mahatma Gandhi fell. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru – Prime Minister remarks as “This man of God trod the Earth” and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel – Deputy Prime Minister establishes Gandhi as “His supreme sacrifice will quicken our conscience”.

Conclusion

M. K. Gandhi is acknowledged as ubiquitous as a political leader; he was also a renowned theorist, philosopher and practitioner of truth, non-violence, tolerance, and freedom. He was a spirit of profound wisdom with an iron will and an inflexible resolves that vibrated the British’s strength to the core with the simplicity and humility of his life. Though he was well-known as a decrepit and infirm naked man, his principles and ideologies are revered and honoured with heights in worldwide domain and hold significance till date. In fact, his principles are based on Indian contexts; his philosophy is considered universal and eternal by the world. To the human civilisation, his life is a continuous process of finding the truth. Mahatma Gandhi is a moral, ethical and

humanist icon in the world today and his impact is profoundly felt in the world. His teaching and philosophy has come from his own life behaviour which he displayed during his life time. Mahatma Gandhi has carried on his frail shoulders a great deal of burden of humanity and now it was for them to stand together and share it. If millions of Indians could divide that burden and carry it successfully, it would be nothing short of a miracle. So, the title “*A Positive Mindset Brings Positive Things*” is apt and justified.

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