



INDIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY LITERATURE: JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND MAHATMA GANDHI'S INFLUENCE

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru both the autobiography is noted for its lucid, simple and idiomatic language. It is transparently honest narration. The autobiography itself has become a key document for interpreting life and ideas. According to George Orwell 'essay 'Reflection on Gandhi' argued that the autobiography made clear Gandhi's "natural physical courage", He saw as later confirmed by the circumstances of his assassination; his lack of feelings of envy, inferiority, and suspiciousness. His thought was common to Indian people and his lack of racial prejudice. Noting the circumstances of the book's serialisation, Orwell argues it "is not a literary masterpiece. But it is the more impressive because of the commonplaceness of much of its material. His found the book to indicate that Gandhi was a very shrewd and able person. If Gandhi had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, an administrator and perhaps even a businessman. According to Mahatma Gandhi-

"The future depends on what we do in the present."

"It's easy to stand in the crowd but it takes courage to stand alone."

"Our greatest ability as humans is not to change the world, but to change ourselves."

"Service without humility is selfishness and egotism."

Keywords: Indian Literature, MK Gandhi, Nehru, Autobiography

Nehru, Jawaharlal (2004). An Autobiography.

My Experiments with Truth Starting with his birth and parentage, Gandhi has given 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 quest for

dharma, social work in Africa, return to India, his slow steady work for political awakening and social activities. In the early 1920s He led several civil disobedience campaigns. Despite his intention that they be peaceful, on several occasions and incidents of violence broke out. The colonial authorities charged him in 1922 with incitement, and specifically of stirring up hatred against the government and the result was a six-year term of imprisonment. He served only two years, being released early on the grounds of ill health. Soon after, in the winter of 1925 at 56, Gandhi began writing his autobiography, on the example set by Swami Anand. He serialized it in his own weekly Navjivan. The autobiography was completed in February 1929.

“It is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my experiments with truth, and as my life consist of nothing but 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.”

Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. P. 3869.

He wrote in his autobiography that the three most important modern influences in his life were Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, and the poet Shrimad Rajchandra. The Introduction is officially written by Gandhi himself mentioning how he has resumed writing his autobiography at the insistence of Jeramdas, a fellow prisoner in Yerwada Central Jail with him. He mulls over the question a friend asked him about writing an autobiography, deeming it a Western practice, something “nobody does in the east”. Gandhi himself agrees that his thoughts might change later in life but the purpose of his story is just to narrate his experiments with truth in life. He also says that through this book he wishes to narrate his spiritual and moral experiments rather than political. Gandhi's autobiography, which he had

titled 'My experiments with Truth' can be rated as one of the most popular and the most influential books in the recent history. It was written at the instance of Swami Anand. It appeared in the Weekly 'Navjivan' during 1925-28. It covers Gandhi's life up to 1920. He did not cover the period after that as it was well known to the people and most of the concerned persons were alive. Besides he felt that his experiments in that period were yet to yield definite conclusions.

Gandhi's autobiography is very different from other autobiographies. The autobiographies normally contain self-praise by the authors. They want to criticize their opponents and boost their own image in the people's eyes. Gandhi's autobiography is completely free from all this. It is marked with humility and truthfulness. He had not hidden anything. In fact, he is rather too harsh on himself. He did not want to show to the world how good he was. He only wanted to tell the people the story of his experiments with Truth, for Gandhi, was the supreme principle, which includes many other principles. Realization of the Truth is the purpose of human life. Gandhi always strove to realize the Truth. He continuously tried to remove impurities in himself. He always tried to stick to the Truth as he knew and to apply the knowledge of the Truth to everyday life. He tried to apply the spiritual principles to the practical situations. He did it in the scientific spirit. Sticking to the truth means Satyagraha. Gandhi therefore called his experiments as 'Experiments with Truth' or 'Experiments in the science of Satyagraha.' Gandhi also requested the readers to treat those experiments as illustrative and to carry out their own experiments in that light.

M.K. Gandhi was a man considered one of the great sages and prophets. He was held as another Buddha, another Jesus, and Indians called him the 'Father of the Nation'. They showered their love, respect and devotion on him in an unprecedented measure. They

thronged his way to have a glimpse of him, to hear one world from his lips. They applied on their foreheads the dust on the path he had trodden. For them, he was almost an incarnation of God, who had come to break the chains of their slavery. The whole world bowed to him in reverence. Even his opponents held him in great respect. Mohandas Gandhi was, however, not a great scholar, nor was he a great warrior. He was not born with exceptional faculties. Neither was he a good orator, nor a great writer. He did not claim anything exclusively divine in him. He did not claim being a prophet or having superhuman powers. He considered himself an average man with average abilities. Born in a middle class Bania family in an obscure princely State in a corner of India, he was a mediocre student, shy and nervous. He could not muster courage to speak in public. His first attempt at legal practice miserably failed.

But he was a humble seeker of Truth. He was a man with exceptional sincerity, honesty and truthfulness. For him, understanding meant action. Once any principle appealed to him, he immediately began to translate that in practice. He did not flinch from taking risks and did not mind confessing mistakes. No opposition, scorn or ridicule could affect him. Truth was his sole guiding star. He was ever-growing; hence he was often found inconsistent. He was not concerned with appearing to be consistent. He preferred to be consistent only with the light within. He sacrificed his all and identified himself with the poorest of the poor. He dressed like them, lived like them. In the oppressed and the depressed people, he saw God. For him, they too were sparks of the divine light. They might not have anything else, but they too had a soul. For Gandhi, soul-force was the source of the greatest power. He strove to awaken the soul-force within himself and within his fellowmen. He was convinced that the potentialities of the soul-force have no limit. He himself was a living example of this conviction. That is why this tiny and fragile man could mobilize the masses and defeat the mighty British Empire.

His eleven vows, his technique of Satyagraha, his constructive programme - all were meant to awaken and strengthen the soul-force. He awakened and aroused a nation from semi-consciousness. It was a Herculean task. For, India was not a united country, it was a sub-continent. It was a society divided in different classes, castes and races, in people with different languages, religions and cultures. It was a society where almost half of the population i.e., women, was behind purdah or confined to the four walls of houses, where one-fourth of the population - the depressed classes - was living marginalized life, where many did not have a single full meal every day. Gandhi made the oppressed sections wake up and break their chains. He mobilized the people and united them to work for the cause of Swaraj, which gave them a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose. Gandhi wanted to win Swaraj for the masses. For him, Swaraj did not mean replacement of White masters by brown masters. Swaraj meant self-rule by all. He said: "Real Swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of the authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." He worked to develop such a capacity. Development of such a capacity involved transformation of the individual.

Transformation of the individual and transformation of the society - they were not separate, unrelated things for Gandhi. Revolutionary social philosophies had concentrated on changing the society. On the other hand, spiritual seekers had concentrated on the inner change. Gandhi not only bridged the gap between these extremes, he fused them together. Gandhi was thus both a saint and a social revolutionary. For Gandhi, unity of life was great truth. His principle of non-violence stemmed from this conviction. Non-violence was not a matter of policy for him; it was a matter of faith. He applied the doctrine to all the departments of individual and social life and in so doing revolutionized the doctrine, made it dynamic and creative. He believed that a true

civilization could be built on the basis of such non-violence only.

He rejected the modern civilization. For him, it was a disease and a curse. This civilization leads to violence, conflicts, corruption, injustices, exploitation, oppression, mistrust and a process of dehumanization. It has led the world to a deep crisis. The earth's resources are being cornered by a handful of people without any concern for others and for the coming generations. The conventional energy sources are getting depleted. Forests are being destroyed. Air, water, soil-everything has been polluted. We are living under the shadow of nuclear war and environmental disasters. Thinking men the world over are looking to Gandhi to find a way out of this crisis and to build an alternative model of sustainable development. Gandhi knew that the earth has enough to satisfy everybody's need but not anybody's greed. He had called for the replacement of greed with love. Gandhi is, therefore, now a source of inspiration and a reference book for all those fighting against racial discrimination, oppression, domination, wars, nuclear energy, environmental degradation, lack of freedom and human rights-for all those who are fighting for a better world, a better quality of life. Gandhi is, therefore, no longer an individual. He is a symbol of all that is the best and the most enduring in the human tradition. And he is also a symbol of the alternative in all areas of life-agriculture, industry, technology, education, health, economy, political organizations, etc. He is a man of the future - a future that has to be shaped if the human race has to survive and progress on the path of evolution.

M.K. Gandhi was born at Porbandar, a coastal city in Kathiawad (now a part of the Gujarat State) on the 2nd October 1869. He was the youngest child of his parents, Karamchand and Putlibai. Gandhi belonged to the Modh Bania community. They were originally grocers. However, Uttamchand, Mohan's grandfather,

rose to become Dewan of the Porbandar State. Mohan's father, Karamchand, also served as the Dewan of Porbandar, Rajkot and Vankaner States. Kathiawar then had about 300 small States. Court intrigues were the order of the day. At times, Gandhi's became their victim. Uttamchand's house was once surrounded and shelled by the State troops. Karamchand was once arrested. However, their courage and wisdom earned them respect. Karamchand even became a member of the Rajashanik Court, a powerful agency to solve disputes among the States. Karamchand had little education, but had shrewdness of judgment and practical knowledge acquired through experience. He had little inclination to amass wealth and left little for his children. He used to say that "My children are my wealth". He married four times, had two daughters by the first two marriages and one daughter and three sons by his fourth marriage. Putlibai, his fourth wife, was younger to him by 25 years. She was not much educated but was well-informed about practical matters. Ladies at the palace used to value her advice. She was deeply religious and superstitious and had strong will-power. She used to visit the temple daily and regularly kept difficult vows. Mohan loved his mother. He used to accompany her to the Haveli (Vaishnav temple).

Mohan had a great devotion for his father and he often used to be present at the discussions about the State problems. Gandhi's had Parsi and Muslim friends and Jain monks used to make regular visit. Mohan thus had occasion to hear discussions about religious matters also. He and his co-workers were set free. Gandhi exhorted Indians to register voluntarily. He was criticized for this by some workers. A Pathan named Mir Alam was unconvinced by Gandhi's arguments and vowed to kill the first man who would register himself. Gandhi came forward to be the first man to register himself. When he was going to the registration office, Mir Alam and his friends assaulted him with lathes. Gandhi fainted with the words 'He Ram' on his lips. It was 10th

February 1908. His colleagues tried to save him otherwise it would have been the last day for him. Mir Alam and his friends were caught and handed over to the police. When Gandhi regained consciousness, he inquired about Mir Alam. When told that he had been arrested, Gandhi told that he should be released. Gandhi was taken by his friend Rev. Doke to his house and was nursed there. Rev. Doke later became his first biographer. Smuts however, betrayed Gandhi. The agitation was again resumed. The voluntary registration certificates were publicly burnt. Meanwhile, Transvaal passed Immigration Restriction Act. This too was opposed by the Indians. They crossed Transvaal border illegally and were jailed. Gandhi, too, was arrested and convicted. The fight continued in spite of the repression.

Gandhi realised that the fight would be a long one. He, therefore, desired to have a centre where the Satyagrah could lead a simple community life and get training for the struggle. Phoenix was at about 30 hours distance from Johannesburg. Gandhi's German friend Kallenbach therefore bought 1100 acres of land at a distance of about 20 miles from Johannesburg, where Tolstoy Farm was established. The community was named after Tolstoy to pay respect to the great Russian writer whose book 'The Kingdom of God is within You' had greatly influenced Gandhi and made him a firm believer in non-violence. The inmates numbered about 50-75. It was a heterogeneous group. It was a tribute to Gandhi's leadership that they remained together happily under hard conditions. The inmates erected sheds to accommodate themselves. They did all their work themselves. Drinking, smoking and meat-eating were prohibited. All ate in the community kitchen. Small Cottage Industries were started for self-sufficiency. Gandhi and his colleagues learnt shoe-making. A school was started. Gandhi himself undertook the responsibility of educating the children. The life was simple, hard, but joyful. Experiments at Tolstoy Farm proved to be a source of

purification and penance for Gandhi and his co-workers.

Nehru was born to a family of Kashmiri Brahmins, noted for their administrative aptitude and scholarship; he had migrated to Delhi early in the 18th century. Jawaharlal was the eldest of four children, two of whom were girls. Until the age of 16, Nehru was educated at home by a series of English governesses and tutors. Only one of those—a part-Irish, part-Belgian theosophist, Ferdinand Brooks—appears to have made any impression on him. Nehru's academic career was in no way outstanding. From Harrow he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he spent three years earning an honours degree in Natural Science. He passed his examinations "with neither glory nor ignominy." The seven years Nehru spent in England left him in a hazy half-world, at home neither in England nor in India. Some years later he wrote, "I have become a queer mixture of East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere." He went back to India to discover India. The conflict pulls and pressures that his experiences abroad were to exert on his personality were never completely resolved.

Nehru at first had tried to settle down as a lawyer. He had only a desultory interest in his profession. He did not relish either the practice of law or the company of lawyers. He might be described, like many of his generation, as an instinctive nationalist. He yearned for his country's freedom, but, like most of his contemporaries. He had not formulated any precise ideas. Nehru's autobiography discloses his lively interest in Indian politics during the time. He was studying abroad, his letters to his father over the same period reveal their common interest in India's freedom. Mahatma Gandhi were persuaded to follow in his political footsteps. He did either of them develop any definite ideas on how freedom was to be attained. The quality in Gandhi that impressed the two Nehrus was his insistence on action. A wrong, Gandhi argued, should not only be

condemned but be resisted. Nehru and his father had been contemptuous of the run of contemporary Indian politicians, whose nationalism, with a few notable exceptions, consisted of interminable speeches and long-winded resolutions. Jawaharlal was also attracted by Gandhi's insistence on fighting against British rule of India without fear or hate.

Nehru met Gandhi for the first time in 1916 at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress (Congress Party) in Lucknow. Gandhi was 20 years his senior. Neither seems to have made any initially strong impression on the other. Gandhi makes no mention of Nehru in an autobiography he dictated while imprisoned in the early 1920s. The omission is understandable, since Nehru's role in Indian politics was secondary until he was elected president of the Congress Party in 1929, when he presided over the historic session at Lahore (now in Pakistan) that proclaimed complete independence as India's political goal. Until then the party's objective had been dominion status. Nehru's close association with the Congress Party dates from 1919 in the immediate aftermath of World War I.

The prominent leaders and workers of the Congress Party were outlawed in some provinces, Nehru went to prison for the first time. Over the next 24 years he was to serve another eight periods of detention, the last and longest ending in June 1945, after an imprisonment of almost three years. In all, Nehru spent more than nine years in jail. Characteristically, he described his terms of incarceration as normal interludes in a life of abnormal political activity. His political apprenticeship with the Congress Party lasted from 1919 to 1929. In 1923 he became general secretary of the party for two years, and he did so again in 1927 for another two years. His interests and duties took him on journeys over wide areas of India. Where his first exposure to the overwhelming poverty and decadence of the peasantry had a profound influence on his basic

ideas for solving those vital problems. Though vaguely inclined toward socialism, Nehru's radicalism had set in no definite mold.

The watershed in his political and economic thinking was his tour of Europe and the Soviet Union during 1926-27. Nehru's real interest in Marxism and his socialist pattern of thought stemmed from that tour, even though it did not appreciably increase his knowledge of communist theory and practice. His subsequent sojourns in prison enabled him to study Marxism in more depth. Interested in its ideas but repelled by some of its methods—such as the regimentation and the heresy hunts of the communists—he could never bring himself to accept Karl Marx's writings as revealed scripture. After the Lahore session of 1929, Nehru emerged as the leader of the country's intellectuals and youth. Gandhi had shrewdly elevated him to the presidency of the Congress Party over the heads of some of his seniors, hoping that Nehru would draw India's youth—who at that time were gravitating toward extreme leftist causes—into the mainstream of the Congress movement. Gandhi also correctly calculated that, with added responsibility, Nehru himself would be inclined to keep to the middle way. After his father's death in 1931, Nehru moved into the inner councils of the Congress Party and became closer to Gandhi.

The Indian populace as early as the mid-1930s saw in Nehru the natural successor to Gandhi. It climaxed one of Gandhi's more-effective civil disobedience movements, launched the year before as the Salt March, in the course of which Nehru had been arrested. Hopes that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact would be the prelude to a more-relaxed period of Indo-British relations were not borne out; Lord Willington, jailed Gandhi in January 1932, shortly after Gandhi's return from the second Round Table Conference in London. He was charged with attempting to mount another civil disobedience movement; Nehru was also arrested and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The three Round Table Conferences in London, held to advance India's progress to self-government, eventually resulted in the Government of India Act of 1935, which gave the Indian provinces a system of popular autonomous government. Ultimately, it provided for a federal system composed of the autonomous provinces and princely states. During the mid-1930s Nehru was much concerned with developments in Europe, which seemed to be drifting toward another world war. He was in Europe early in 1936, visiting his ailing wife, shortly before she died in a sanitarium in Lausanne, Switzerland. Even at that time he emphasized that in the event of war India's place was alongside the democracies, though he insisted that India could fight in support of Great Britain and France only as a free country. When the elections following the introduction of provincial autonomy brought the Congress Party to power in a majority of the provinces. The subsequent clash between the Congress and the Muslim League hardened into a conflict between Hindus and Muslims that was ultimately to lead to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan.

The Congress Party's high command withdrew its provincial ministries as a protest, but Congress's action left the political field virtually open to Jinnah and the Muslim League. Nehru's views on the war differed from those of Gandhi. Initially, Gandhi believed that whatever support was given to the British should be given unconditionally and that it should be of a nonviolent character. Nehru held that nonviolence had no place in defense against aggression and that India should support Great Britain in a war against Nazism but only as a free country. If it could not help, it should not hinder. In October 1940, Gandhi, abandoning his original stand, decided to launch a limited civil disobedience campaign in which leading advocates of Indian independence were selected to participate one by one. Nehru, the second of those leaders, was arrested and sentenced to four years'

imprisonment. After spending a little more than a year in jail, he was released, along with other Congress prisoners, three days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

When the Japanese carried their attack through Burma to the borders of India in the spring of 1942, the British government, faced by that new military threat, decided to make some overtures to India. The initiative in the Congress Party then passed to Gandhi, who called on the British to leave India; Nehru, though reluctant to embarrass the war effort, had no alternative but to join Gandhi. Following the Quit India resolution passed by the Congress Party in Bombay on August 8, 1942, the entire Congress working committee, including Gandhi and Nehru, was arrested and imprisoned. Nehru emerged from that—his ninth and last detention—only on June 15, 1945. Within two years after his release, India was to be partitioned and free. A final attempt by the viceroy, Lord Wavell, to bring the Congress Party and the Muslim League together failed.

The Labour government that had meanwhile displaced Churchill's wartime administration dispatched, as one of its first acts, a Cabinet mission to India and later replaced Lord Wavell with Lord Mountbatten. The question was no longer whether India was to be independent but whether it was to consist of one or more independent states. Hindu-Muslim antagonism, culminating in late 1946 in clashes that killed some 7,000 people, made the partition of the subcontinent inevitable. While Gandhi refused to accept it, Nehru reluctantly but realistically acquiesced. On August 15, 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two separate independent countries. Nehru became independent India's first prime minister and M.K. Gandhi became Father of the Nation.

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