



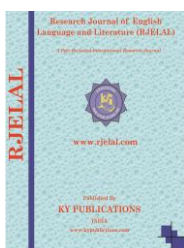
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THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENT WITH TRUTH: A SPIRITUAL QUEST

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ABSTRACT

Autobiography as a literary canon owes its origin to Western Culture and bears an arrogance of Western civilization. But for innocent Gandhi, an Indian out and out, it takes a new dimension. He has framed this book as a programme of study for himself. He ventured to take up this as voyage, an uncharted journey across sea of life to explore 'Jems and Jewells' to show its effulgence to the millions grouping in the darkness of ignorance and eluded by miasma. He has repeatedly confessed that the book is not to instruct or to educate future posterity, it is his incessant experiment with truth, a realization of reality and a quest for spirituality.

The present paper aims at a study of Gandhi an apostle of virtues, the Gospel ever lived and strided over untrodde ways of life. Much told about him still remains untold to sustain values one needs to develop spiritual powers. Spiritual and moral values have added beauty and power to his life. His confession and experience reflect in his writing not merely as examples but as 'Precepts' that touches every one, knowledge of the material world, has been transformed into wisdom. Therefore, 'The story of my experiment with Truth' is held as unique book of spiritualism so far.

Key words : spirituality, truth, moral values, precept, material world, wisdom, miasma

Gandhiji is no more a person, an 'idea', a thought for millions. He is much above the fear expressed by one of his friends, in Richmond that "Mohandas might fritter away his life in experiments, neglect his work and become a crank". Today, on reading his autobiography, one can feel and empathise with his disarming truthfulness because he himself was against his 'holier-than-thou' and 'larger than life image'. He seems enigmatic but not pedantic or didactic. He is down to the earth, simple but scientific. His manners and behaviour stand as a mirror that reflects his values in words and actions to inspire others. In order to experience and develop them he needs help of Truth, as he admits God is Truth. Further, strange are the ways of God as he plays sole role in the

world transformation - material to spiritual world. Decoding 'The Bhagabat Gita', he believes in divine acts of God. Thus, spiritual self confidence was visible in the eyes of Gandhi, who walked the path of truth.

"The story of my experiment with Truth" is an adventurous self-study and self-intropection. He is born to a family where religiosity presides. His mother's penence of starving for months and religiously tolerant father cast an indelible mark within his self to be self righteous. As he progresses he had had 'a faith a glimpse of Absulate Truth, God.(2) He proposes to be hard and fast on the principles of religion and moral ethics. To be humble, selfless to renounce every thing, what leads

one to be at ease to enjoy life. He internalised basic principles of all so-called religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islamism. This wholistic views on religion waved out the cab-web of parochiality, arrogance and egoism. He asserts on humility and knows that humility is endless and end-result of huminity is the sweetest for the most desired 'MOKSHYA', Liberation from bondage of life. He relates this with "the dialogue between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra makes this abundantly clear."⁽³⁾

Lets us now have a bird's eye-view of the autobiography, divided into five parts, for the quest of spirituality. The first part gives us Gandhi's birth, childhood, teens and time in England. As a kid, he is influenced by his devout mother and public benefactor. He is married to Kasturabai at the age of 13 in a child marriage, meaning she is a teenager too to fulfil parents wish as a child like surrender. After few years she bears four children. Death of his father and first child, baffled Gandhi for sometime. Social stigma not to go abroad and mother's tenacity forced Gandhi to take vow before leaving for England to study law. He withdraws himself from his cast and assured his mother not to touch alcohol, meat and other women. Before attending Bar he returned to India. The experience he gained and experimented with is undoubtedly prepared him to be fearless and determined for the quest of spirituality.

The second part tells us about the time, he spent in South Africa, where he faces with 'colour prejudices' is kicked off the court. But he fights back non-violently. Study of religion and founding of the Natal Indian Congress leads him back to India. While in India, he meets his mentor Gokhale and others. He is called back to South Africa to continue 'Public work' and becomes an activist - a mission to serve fellow man, to kindle their conscience through self suffering and listens to the call of voice within. Is not it a quest for spirituality to unite the mass for a greater cause?

The third part is a real test for spiritual quest. He puts himself to spiritual practice of self-restraint by talking of "Brahmacharya" cow of celibacy, Of cause, by now he had four sons. He takes lead of Indian Ambulance Corps in Boer war and strengthens his political power. He returns to

India to join 'Indian National Congress' to foreground his patriotic zeal. He practices law to save the deprived. At this juncture, he becomes serious on vegetarianism and denied doctor's prescription of meat broth for his ailing son. At present, one may take it as religiosity but for Gandhi this is the way for the purification of soul what he had practised long before. Realization on purity flashed on him as purity is the mother of all virtues. Thus, it is a step forward for spiritual quest.

Part four finds Gandhi the Transval giving legal advice to Johannesburg Indians in land acquisition cases and organising Indian volunteer corps for the great war. Dealing with other activities, he never forgets his inner activities - the self or the soul. Intensive religious reading and extensive experiments on matter and mind, an idea descended on him that sex is 'insipid and animal like' and stands as a barrier on the path of spirituality and seekers of truth.

Final part of the autobiography lands Gandhi atop politics. Activities abroad and inside India earned him, political power. He settles himself in India, and founds Satyagraha Ashram in Ahmadabad secures help for peasants in champaran, fights the Rowlatt legislation, suspends Satyagraha as people became violent, edits newspapers to ignite freedom, movement and initiates non-cooperation movement after the resolution passed in Nagpur Congress Session. Here in lives his spiritual quest on mobilizing people of different caste creed language and belief - the forces uncontrollable with unsurmountable energy. Gandhi stands stubborn. He relies on his indomitable will-power practicing austerities and fasting. Fasting unto death, suffering with silence, turning from vegetarianism to veganism, wearings less than the required clad elevate him to spirituality.

Above all, what has Gandhi tried to achieve in this saga of quest? He wonders at and fathoms the mysteries of creator(God) and his creation. He tries to unravel like dynamics of the physical and metaphysical forces that govern various natural phenomena and the interplay of humans with matter has graduated over the centuries from grosser to subtler level. He has begun to comprehend that essentially, all creation springs

from the same source and hence its entire processes are based upon a few basic principles. He searches to decipher the fundamentals all phenomena as a single defining equation and help to adopt the vast potentials what nature has bestowed upon humans.

The scientist, Albert Einstein has given us unified field Theory to reconcile the differences between quantum theory and the theory of Relativity. Other scientists of repute have experimented and proved that nothing is created or destroyed, ever thing is preserved, remains constant and eternal. In this scheme of things human beings are the only variable factor. Nature is well harmonized, but time is in flux. Hence man must know how to endure and exist. Certainly, this is a search, a quest to establish the truth. In the similar vein Gandhi has suggested equanimity as a unified field "Theory of spirituality".

To conclude, I would like to share with I.A. Richards view that autobiography of Gandhi is a clear-conscience conversation, conscience, dictates and directs one for the truth. Since, Gandhi has purity and clarity, he translated them to a vision. His vision of life is visualized candidly through repeated apology and humility.

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