

Book review

Gandhiji's autobiography is a must-read for every Indian. Every citizen must form their own unbiased opinion of the Father of the Nation, and reading his own words will help one do that. This is one of those rare books which the reader either loves or hates; there is no middle ground.

Mahatma Gandhi was not an ordinary man. This is a statement that begs to be investigated. His autobiography offers the perfect opportunity to gaze into the life of an iconic leader whose humility is married to a charismatic persona.

Every Indian knows about this great leader. Every school going kid is taught to unthinkingly sing his praises. School textbooks present him as faultless, almost divine. This book will revolutionize your thinking and present Gandhiji as a man.

Gandhiji was never perfect. He himself acknowledges this right from the first page. The book demonstrates his incredible humbleness. The writing style is discreet.

The biggest takeaway I got from this book was how common of an Indian Gandhiji was. He talks in detail about his family. He obsesses over food and vegetarianism. He is consumed both with very noble thoughts and very common, ordinary thoughts.

Practically, he suffered, and asked people to suffer along with him. To understand how he was able to do it, we need a glimpse of his early life. That's exactly what the great man himself offers us in his own words.

This book is more of a spiritual exploration where M K Gandhi tells us how he developed his life's principles and how he kept up with them successfully in spite of huge obstacles.

- M K Gandhi studied law in England and ate only vegetarian food even there.
- He went to South Africa to practice law but found himself drawn towards public work after looking at the hardships faced by Indians in South Africa. He fought for their rights, while there.
- M K Gandhi supported the British Govt. during the Boer War in South Africa and during the First World war while in India by becoming a volunteer and by recruiting volunteers for them.
- In South Africa, he tried to set up a farm and live a simple life outside the city, but was not able to continue as friends kept calling him into the city to address their grievances.
- In India, he traveled around with a third class railway ticket, although the conditions of third class compartments were very bad in those days.
- One of his initial Satyagraha campaigns in India was the Champaran movement where he fought the law against farmers that forced them to cultivate indigo on a significant portion of their lands. His fight took two years but he was successful.

An immortal book and a legacy for ages to come. This book is an autobiography of Gandhi. It is a detailed account of Gandhi's consisting of Gandhi's self penned essays (105 essays in all) on his experiments and covers all aspects of the Mahatma's spiritual life. This Autobiography is divided in five parts starting from his childhood days, his experience in South Africa where he experimented with the powerful weapon of Satyagraha and his transformation from Mohan to Mahatma, his various experiments on fundamental principles of Truth and God, till the year 1921, after which his life was so public that he felt there was hardly anything to write about. Gandhi's Non-violent struggle in South Africa and India had already brought him to such a level of notoriety, adulation and controversy that when asked to write an autobiography mid way through

his career, he took it as an opportunity to explain himself. Accepting his status as a great innovator in the struggle against racism, violence and colonialism, Gandhi felt that his ideas needed deeper understanding. Gandhi explains that he was after truth rooted in devotion to God and attributed the turning point, success and challenges in his life to the will of God. Gandhi says that his attempt to get closer to this divine power led him seek purity through simple living, dietary practices (he called himself a fruitarian), celibacy and ahimsa- a life without violence. It is in this sense that he calls his book "The Story of My Experiments with Truth", offering it also as a reference for those who would follow his footsteps. Gandhi's Autobiography is one of the best sellers and is translated in nearly all languages of the world. Perhaps never before on so grand scale has any man succeeded in shaping the course of history while using the weapon of Peace – Ahimsa (Non-violence). To many it will have the value of a new Bible or a new Gita; for here are words that have come out from the depth of truth, here is tireless striving that stretches its arms towards perfection

Description

Product Description

This is Gandhi's autobiography covering his life from early childhood to approximately 1921. In Gandhi's own words: "I simply 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 . . . I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field . . . If I had only to discuss academic principles. I should clearly not attempt an autobiography. But my purpose being to give an account of various practical applications of these principles, I have given the chapters I propose to write the title of The Story of My Experiments with Truth. These will of course include experiments with non-violence, celibacy and other principles of conduct believed to be distinct from truth."

About the Author

The man best known as Gandhi's longest running companion of 25 years, Mahadev Desai was a lawyer by education and a scholar by disposition. He was responsible for transcribing Gandhi's words and drafting his letters as well as serving as interpreter and interlocutor. So devoted was he to the Mahatma that he even followed Gandhi to jail. Desai was in many ways far more learned and scholarly than Gandhi, tutoring him on history, literature and politics besides other subjects. Desai wrote his most important works on Gandhi during the time that Gandhi was incarcerated in the Yeravda Jail near Pune, Maharashtra from 1931 to 1934. When arrested during the Quit India movement and sent to the Aga Khan Palace for imprisonment, Desai died on August 15th, 1942 at the young age of 50. Gandhi considered it a tragedy and loss to have lost someone Kasturba and he considered a son. Desai's death was mourned by Gandhi's supporters throughout the country.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth is the autobiography of Indian activist Mohandas K. "Mahatma" Gandhi. Published in a weekly journal, Navjivan, between 1925 and 1929, it covers the span of time between Gandhi's early childhood through roughly 1921. Gandhi was compelled to write the autobiography by his close friend, Swami Anand, who would become his literary manager. The autobiography seeks to explain the experiential roots of Gandhi's activist vocation. The book has been recognized as one of the most important spiritual works of the twentieth century.

In the book's introduction, Gandhi disclaims that the opinions and ideas expressed in his

autobiography are subject to change and that its purpose is not to relay a static picture of himself, but to show how personal truths evolve over time. He also claims that the book is moral and spiritual in nature, mostly straying from politics. Gandhi expresses ambivalence about the usefulness of the typical autobiography, a Western literary invention.

The beginning of the autobiography traces Gandhi's childhood and young adult life in Rajkot and Porbandar. Gandhi recalls eating meat, a practice he later renounced, and relates that he had a rather hedonistic lifestyle in general. He admits to stealing and drinking excessively – all actions from which he now aspires to redeem himself. He explores some of his first favorite books, including the plays *Harishchandra* and *Shravana Pitrabhakti Nataka*. The latter play, in which the central figure *Shravana* realizes a deep respect for his parents, moved Gandhi to do the same. Gandhi married when he was only thirteen, and expresses deep regret for it, calling it “preposterously early” and fully denouncing its moral basis. Another of Gandhi's most formative experiences was the early death of his father, *Karamchand Gandhi*. His later activist work was heavily informed by his early losses and mistakes.

After the death of his father, Gandhi decided to study at a local college in Bhavnagar, *Samaldas College*. He remained there only for a semester; then, he traveled to England, with the intention of doing three years of prerequisite coursework to become a barrister. Gandhi's mother disapproved of his plan, and he tried to placate her by renouncing wine, women, and meat while in England. He completed his studies, passed the barrister exams, and enrolled in the Indian courts.

Once he was back in India, Gandhi lost some confidence in his decision to practice law. His education and credentials ultimately failed to repair or prevent many of the mistakes he and others made. He tried to provide legal mediation between an acquaintance and his brother, but their relationship only worsened. The acquaintance then became England's Political Agent, which meant that he was in charge of deciding the outcome of the same legal appeal in which they were all involved. Gandhi decided to move to South Africa to take an offer to work for a law firm on a lengthy and complicated case. After a year there, he committed to remain and work on behalf of its struggling Indian population. He lived there up until 1914, just two weeks before the beginning of World War I.

At the beginning of the war, Gandhi became involved in the recruitment of soldiers for the British Army. His followers were confused about his sudden expressions of affinities for war, having fallen in love with him based on his speeches advocating pacifism, religious tolerance, and nonviolent revolution. Finding his work unconscionable, Gandhi returned to India. He continued his work as a public lawyer for vulnerable populations. This time, he was preceded by his good reputation in South Africa, and therefore had much more choice about the type of work he could take on. Up until the time of writing his autobiography, Gandhi worked on civil disobedience cases, becoming a prominent advocate for non-violent resistance.

Gandhi concludes that his life's good work, so far, has resulted from the gradual taming of his destructive passions. He states that the desire for power, which begets ignorance, greed, and violence, exists within every human being. In his view, even more pernicious than the impulse for outright physical war are these “subtler” products of the desire to control people. He argues that the only way to find salvation is to reject these impulses, embrace a virtuous and spiritual life, and actively work to create a more tolerant and just world.

In his final “Farewell” section, Gandhi writes that he never imagined these writings would transform into an autobiography. He hopes that his readers will look past the genre ascribed to

his work and utilize his experience to generate insights into their own pasts and conceptions of truth. This idea of truth as an ever-evolving process of developing a mindset about the world, rather than the study of a static object, is central to Gandhi's autobiography.

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