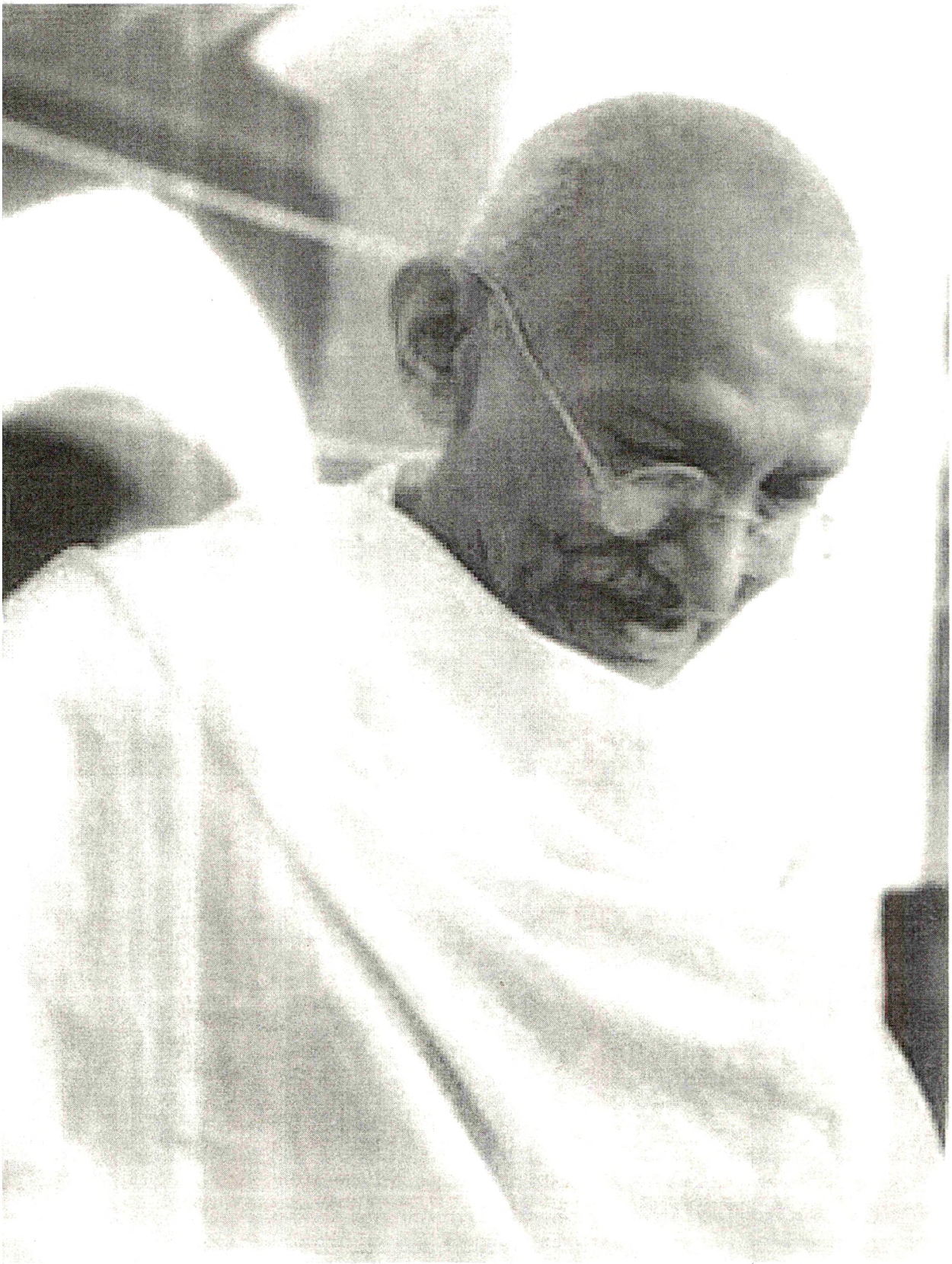


CHAPTER III

The Story of My Experiments With Truth

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
(1869-1948)

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH

Introduction :

This chapter critically analyses *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, the autobiography written by M. K. Gandhi on the accepted literary norms of the form of autobiography. It also contains his self revelation and the contemporary documentation.

• M. K. Gandhi : Life and Works

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi was born at Porbandar in Gujarat on 2nd Oct. 1869. He was the youngest of the three sons and had one sister. His father Karamchand Uttamchand was Prime Minister of Princely State Porbandar and of Rajkot. Gandhis belonged to the Bania caste. His mother Putaliabai was very religious.

Mohandas married Kasturbai, in 1881 the daughter of a merchant of Porbandar. He was in school from 1881 to 1887. He went to London in September, 1888 and returned to Bombay as Barrister in July 1891. In 1893 he went to South Africa for a year as a legal adviser to a Muslim firm. He stayed there and fought for the civil rights for the Indians settled there. The struggle in South Africa lasted from 1894 to 1914 in three stages viz. 1894-99, 1902-06 and 1907-14.

Gandhi established the *Phoenix Ashram* in 1904 and *Tolstoy Farm* in 1910. He established *Satyagraha Ashram* at Ahmedabad on May 20, 1915. He met Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time in 1916 at Lucknow Congress. He conducted the *Champaran Inquiry* in 1917 and led the *Kheda Satyagraha* in April-May 1918. He came on the National scene in March 1919 as a leader of the Nationwide agitation against *Rowlatt Act*. In August 1920, he launched the full fledged *Non-Co.operation Movement* through *The Indian National Congress*. He was arrested in March 1922 and charged with sedition and sentenced to six years simple imprisonment.

He spent his time during 1924-25 in organizing constructive work, particularly Khadi and removal of untouchability. After the pledge taken on 26 January, 1930 for the complete Independence, in March 1930 he led the *Dandi March*, and launched the *Quit India Movement* in August 1942.

Against his advice the country was partitioned into India and Pakistan. This led to the communal riots, which ended in his assassination on January 30, 1948.

Gandhi edited *Young India* in 1919, *Harijan* (English Journal) in 1933, *Harijan* (Hindi) 1933. His writings in all his journals have been, included in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*¹ in volumes published by Govt. of India. He translated *The Bhagvatgita* into Gujarati. It was published on March 12, 1930. During his imprisonment from 1932, he started writing chapters of a *History of the Satyagraha Ashram*. He

wrote a booklet on health which has translated into English and published under title **Key to Health** (1948).

His autobiography **The story of My Experiments with Truth** (1927) is discussed critically in this chapter.

- **The story of My Experiments with Truth : Background**

Gandhi started writing the autobiography in 1975. During this period he was imprisoned at Yervada, near Pune. His fellow prisoners asked him to write his autobiography. But it was Swami Anand who really proposed him to write it. Gandhi had to write everyweek something for **Navjivan** so he decided to write his autobiography for **Navjivan**. He had no spare time. He could only write a chapter serially. After its initiation, **The Story of My Experiments with Truth** remained in making for 4-5 years (including the time of imprisonment) and then it first appeared in series in the Gujarati weekly.

In 1927, Part I of the autobiography appeared in a book form and Part II in 1929. Subsequently they were bound in a single volume entitled **An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth**.

Gandhi wrote his autobiography in Gujarati, his mother tongue. It was translated into English by Mahadev Desai but Mahadev's friend translated chapters XXIX – XLLII of Part V.

The second edition of 1940 of the autobiography is used for the purpose of this study. The reference and quotations in this chapter are quoted from the second edition.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth has its sub-title also viz. *An Autobiography*. The sub-title only indicates the literary form of the book. It has no novelty. But the regular title i.e. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* fulfills all the norms of a good title. It refers to the protagonist by "*The story of My*" and rest of the title "*Experiments with Truth*" refers to the theme of the autobiography i.e. the content of the book i.e. the sum and the substance of the protagonist's experiments with truth. The regular title is adequately short, novel and suggestive. It is, therefore, the most suitable title to the book.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth has a conventional structure. It starts with ancestral history, birth of the author, his childhood and further it is followed by his youth and his Socio-Political career. There are added separately 'Introduction' and 'Farewell' to the book. There is also the 'Preface' written by the translator. The entire book is divided into five parts. Every part is of different number of chapters. Part I has 25 chapters. Part II has 29 chapters while part III has 23 chapters. Part IV has 47 chapters. Part V has 43 chapters. They are of unequal lengths as per the structural layout. The book has 616 pages in total. It is neither more lengthy nor shorter but has adequate length and compactness. Every chapter is indispensable and if absent the total narration becomes

disconnected. Every chapter contributes to the totality of the book.

- **Motive**

The Story of My Experiments with Truth begins with a very significant statement by Gandhiji about his intention behind writing it. Infact, Gandhiji ~~never himself~~ planned to write an autobiography. His motive was to tell his lifetime spiritual experiments with 'Truth' That is why Gandhiji remarks in the *Introduction*,

"It is not my purpose to attempt 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."²

This perfectly throws light on his motive. The subsidiary motive, according to Gandhi, was reader's benefit. He states,

"a connected account of all these experiments will not be without benefit to the reader."³

- **Standpoint**

He started to write the autobiography at his age of 59. It was the mature age. By that time, he was an acknowledged social worker and was known as 'Mahatma' i.e. the 'great soul' in and outside India. His socio-Political career was satisfactory. He gained the social position by his socio-political work. His position as a successful social worker or the Father of the Nation gave

him a 'proper standpoint' to write the autobiography. The principles of 'truth' and 'non-violence' made him succeed.

His faith in these accepted principles and ideals basically decide the contents of the book.

- **Selection of Events**

It might have contained so many events in his life. But all cannot be accommodated. He dropped out all the humdrum of events in his daily life. He records the significant selected event that might contribute to the purpose. The selected events are – religious nature, devotion to mother, fondness for Shravana and Harishchandra , experience of stealing and smoking, confession to father. Lustful nature at the time of father's death, attempt to become an English gentleman, first experience in a court as a lawyer, first train journey from Durban to Maritzburg, humiliating incidents in the train, phoenix settlement, establishment of Satyagraha Ashram, birth of the Khadi etc.

- **Truth**

The book relates the **truth** about the author himself and the socio-political context of his living. The truth about the author is concerned with the growth of his mind, his career as a socio-political worker. **Truth** was the sovereign principle for Gandhi. In the **Introduction** he states,

“I am not going either to conceal or understate any ugly things that must be told. I hope to acquaint the reader fully with all my faults and errors”⁴.

All the events are narrated truthfully. He narrates truthfully about his follies, also viz. smoking and stealing attempt to become an english gentleman and taking lessons in dancing, French and elocution, his visit to brothel as an adolescent, his sex experience while his father was on death bed etc. He confesses his passionate nature,

“Every night whilst my hands were busy
massaging my father’s legs my mind
was hovering about the bed-room and
that too at a time when religion, medical
science and commonsense alike forbade
sexual intercourse”⁵.

Gandhiji’s narration is full of candidness. He is honest in the narration viz. he could not spell the word ‘kettle’, unable to speak in public, neglects to improve his handwriting, imposes undue restrictions and quarrels on his wife etc.

He records truthfully the social context of his living. He narrates his child marriage and his relatives polygamy. He writes about the existing caste system e.g. his wife Kasturba refuses to clean the chamber pot used by a Panchama.

Gandhi does not justifies his experiences in England. He felt then ashamed to tell that he was married because child marriage was totally unknown in England. He states

“I did not hesistate to pass myself off as
a bachelor though I was married and the
father of a son”⁶.

He doesn't glorify himself. He states in the *Introduction*,
"My purpose is to describe experiments in the
science of satyagraha, not to say how good I am"⁷.

Gandhiji's autobiography is regarded as the most truthful account to the recent time. Gandhi's own grandson named Rajmohan Gandhi in his book *Mohandas : A True Story of a Man, his People and an Empire. (2007)* blamed Gandhiji for concealing his one sided sensual love affair with Sarladevi Chaudhury, the niece of Rabindranath Tagor. Rajmohan's revelation of this affair is very sensational exposing of Gandhiji's bad character. In Gandhi's autobiography there is only one reference to Sarladevi, regarding his visit to her place during his stay Punjab and nothing more. Louis Fisher Gandhi's biographer also reference to this visit and narrates nothing more. From Rajmohan's reference to this so called affair readers doubts whether Gandhi conceals this love affairs and autobiography suffers from concealing the truth. This is perhaps a sort of blasphemoi of Gandhiji.⁸

Gandhi has taken really impartial and detached view of his 'self and his development in the past. He narrates,

"the path of self-purification is hard and steep.
To attain to perfect purity one has to become
absolutely passion free in thought, speech
and action; to rise above the opposing currents
of love and hatred attachment and repulsion"⁹.

The narration of his failure as a lawyer is a fine example of the detached view of 'self'. In the Bombay Small Cause Court, in his first case he was unable to stand and argue. He narrates,

"I stood up, but my heart sank into my boots, my head was reeling and I felt as though the whole court was doing likewise. I could think of no question to ask. The judge must have laughed, and the vakils no doubt enjoyed the spectacle. But I was past seeing anything. I sat down and told the agent that I could not conduct the case..... I hastened from the court, not knowing whether my client won or lost her case, but I was ashamed of myself, and decided not to take up any more cases until I had courage enough to conduct them" ¹⁰.

He does not hesitate to tell anything of disparagement. He tells about his shy nature and his inability to speak in public. He was elected to the Executive Committee of the vegetarian society, but he was always tongue tied during the meeting. He states about his shyness,

"This shyness I retained throughout my stay in England. Even when I paid a social call the presence of half a dozen or more people would strike me dumb" ¹¹.

He narrates his success and achievements in the same detached manner. He narrates honestly his ridiculous efforts to

Speak in public meeting. Once he wrote down his speech. He stood up to read it, but he could not. He observes,

“My vision became blurred and I trembled, though the speech hardly covered a sheet of foolscap. Sjt. Mazmudar had to read it for me. His own speech was of course excellent and was received with applause. I was ashamed of myself and sad at heart for my incapacity.”¹²

Gandhi does not use a single word in self-praise. He describes impartially his ill-treatment to Kasturabai. He was always jealous of her.

“My relations with my wife were still not as I desired. Even my stay in England had not cured me of jealousy. I continued my squeamishness and suspiciousness in respect of every little thing, and hence all my cherished desires remained unfulfilled...”¹³

And he further states his one more folly to send Kasturba to her father's house.

“Once I went the length of sending her away to her father's house, and consented to receive her back only after I had made her thoroughly miserable. I saw later that all this was pure folly on my part”.¹⁴

- **Subjectivity and Objectivity**

The Story of My Experiments with Truth has a rare combination of the subjectivity and objectivity. Mainly it is the story of author's growth as a successful social worker from a common individual with all his faults. Naturally the details of his childhood, education, religious influences on him, his early marriage, his role as a son, husband and father, his socio-political career etc. are subjective part of the autobiography. The emotional reactions and psychological interactions are significant in the autobiography. This is also the subjectivity. In addition, autobiography gives the realistic view of the contemporary socio-political conditions. The author does narrate factual contemporary life. For example, Gandhi describes his marriage ceremony. He states,

"I can picture to myself, even today, how we sat on our wedding dais, how we performed the Saptapadi, how we newly wedded husband and wife, put the sweet kansar, into each other's mouth and how we began to live together, and oh ! that first night."¹⁵

He narrates the social, economical and political conditions of Indians in *Transval* and *Orange Free State*, Rowlat Bill and Indigo stain, satyagraha, birth a Khadi.... etc. They are fine examples of contemporary life. This is the objectivity of the book. We cannot separate the objective details from his life.

Gandhi is the central figure around whom the whole narration moves. The details recorded in the autobiography are

of his personal experiences and thoughts, decided by his own point of view. In the same way he reveals 'self' through selected events and thoughts. The other men and women that crowded the autobiography, the society and the conditions of contemporary life come as a background only to throw more light on the central person. Gandhi's sensibility as a social worker, his urge for Independence, and his roles as a son, husband and father reveals his nature. Though this autobiography is story of his numerous spiritual experiments and it is related to the documentation of the contemporary ethos, all these things go to contribute to the revelation of his personality because his 'self' is the centre of the book and other details directly or indirectly contribute to the development of his personality.

- **Self Revelation**

M.K. Gandhis self-revelation in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is about his early formative years, his married life, his role as a son, husband and as a father, as a lawyer, as a social reformer, and as leader of Indian Nationalist Movement etc.

Self-revelation in this autobiography shows a definite planning in its narration. Every part of the book deals with a certain role or aspect of the author's self-revelation. Part I is devoted to the author's self-revelation as a child, as notorious school going boy, an adolescent, a husband and a career minded youth going abroad. Part II deals with his experience as a lawyer,

his handling of the case, his inclination towards social reform and hardships caused by the discrimination.

Part III deals with the author's development as a social worker, his role as an ambulance corps in the **Boer war**, his experiments of simple living and 'brahmacharya' etc. Part V describes the author's experiments in diet, his self-restraint, his service to the coolie locations South Africa, and the beginning of the Satyagraha.

Part V narrates the establishment of the Ashram, Kheda Satyagraha, and the author's struggle against British Govt., Rowlatt Bills and the other taxes.

Gandhi spent his domestic life as a child in a well-to-do family in Porbandar. He started his school life in Porbandar. He was an ordinary student. He states,.....

“...there is hardly anything to
note about my studies”.¹⁶

and he further states that he was not a brilliant student at all. He was poor in mathematics. He observes,

“It was with same difficulty that I got through the multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt, in company with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names, would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish, and my memory raw.”¹⁷

He was very shy and avoided company of anyone in the class. Books and lessons were his sole companions. He was going to school at the stroke of the hour and ran back as soon as the school closed. He admits,

“I literally ran back, because I could not bear to talk to anybody. I was even afraid lest anyone should poke fun at me.”¹⁸

However he was honest and sincere by nature. He never told a lie, during that short period, either to his teachers or to his school-mates. Thus since childhood it seems that he has been developing, ‘Truth’. He always respected his teachers. He was blind to the faults of elders. For examples, in his first year at the Alfred High School, an educational inspector came to examine the students. He asked them to spell the word ‘Kettle’. Gandhi misspelt it. His teacher prompted him to copy it from his neighbour’s slate. But he refused to do so. The teacher chided him for this ‘stupidity’ which spoiled the record of the class. But it doesn’t end his respect for teacher.

It appears that as a child Gandhi was deeply impressed by the religious qualities of his parents, especially his mother. He inherited strong commonsense and saintliness from his mother and love and truth, bravery and generosity from his father. It seems that his principles of truth and non-violence had the foundation from his early childhood. Its seeds were sown in Gandhi’s mind by his parents.

The religious and mythological books in the house had great impact on Gandhi’s mind. The book called *Shravan*

Pitribhakti Natak left an indelible impression on his mind. His devotion to his father and eagerness to serve him had its origin in the story of Shravan. Another play ***Harishchandra*** also captured his heart. Harishchandra become a symbol of truth for him and he accepted it as his ideal to follow truth like Harishchandra. He always asked himself 'why should not all men be truthful like Harishchandra?

Gandhi did not have any high regard for his own ability. In the high school he won prizes and scholarships, but he was surprised whether he deserved them. He had dislikes for gymnastics and cricket, but formed the habit of taking long walks. He admits,

"I never took part in any exercise, cricket or football, before they were made compulsory.....
I then had a false notion that gymnastics has nothing to do with education. Today I know that physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training." ¹⁹

But reason behind his dislike for gymnastics was his keen desire to serve as nurse to his father. As soon as school closed he was engaged in serving father. One Saturday, he had school in the morning. He had no wrist watch, and clouds deceived him. Before he reached the school the boys had all left. Next day his teacher fined him, he told the truth but teacher refused to believe him. Gandhi narrates,

"I was convicted of lying ! That deeply
pained me. How was I to prove my innocence.

I cried in deep anguish..... I saw that
a man of truth must also be a man of care.
This was first and last instance of my
carelessness in school.”²⁰

Gandhi had bad handwriting. Like exercise, he had false notion that good handwriting was not a necessary part of education. But in later life, he saw that bad hand writing should be regarded as a sign of imperfect education. He narrates,

“I saw the beautiful handwritings of lawyer,
and young men born and educated in South
Africa, I was ashamed of myself and repented of
my neglect.”²¹

He had lost one year at highschool because of his marriage. He therefore, had only six months in third standard and was promoted to the fourth standard. Geometry was a new subject for fourth, he was not particularly strong in Geometry. However perseverance conveyed him simplicity of the subject. Sanskrit proved him a harder task. Further the Sanskrit teacher was hard task master. So he preferred to sit in a Persian class. But Sanskrit teacher advised Gandhi to learn the language of his own religion. This kindness of teacher ashamed Gandhi. He admires the teacher,

“The kindness put me to shame. I could not
disregard my teacher’s affection..... For if
I had not acquired the little Sanskrit that I learnt then,
I should have found it difficult to take any interest
in our sacred books.”²²

Gandhi remarks that his second friendship was a tragedy in his life. He expected true friendship. But he became victim of false friendship. This friend flamed a wave of reform in Gandhi's mind.

He was a coward. He used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts and serpents. He couldnot sleep in the dark. He states that Kasturba had more courage than he and he was ashmed of himself. This friend knew all this and he advised Gandhi to eat meat. Gandhi easily agreed to do so. But reason behind eating meat was not to please the palate. He thought meat-eating would make him stronger and he could fight against the British for the Independence. It shows that, he had urge for national freedom from his childhood. He states,

"I wished to be strong and daring and wanted my countrymen also to be such. So that we might defeat the English and make India free. the word 'Swaraj' I had not yet heard. But I knew what freedom meant." ²³

However, when Gandhi realized that lying to one's parents was worse than not eating meat, he resolved to give up meat-eating. As a lover of truth he felt guilty for laying parents. He confesses,

"The frenzy of the 'reform' blinded me. And having ensured secrely, I persuaded myself that more hiding the deed from parents was no departure from truth." ²⁴

And later on he never touched the meat. It shows his determination he never thought of eating meat even in England.

He confesses his of smoking and stealing. In the adolescence, he became fond of smoking without knowing its pleasure. He writes,

“We simply imagined a sort of pleasure in imitting clouds of smoke from our mouths.”²⁵

He and his relating began to pilfering stumps of cigarettes thrown away by his uncle. Further they started stealing coppers from servants pocket money in order to purchase. Indian cigarettes. They could not smoke in front of elders. So they wanted freedom and tried to commit suicide. And it resulted in giving up a habit of smoking and stealing. Grown up Gandhi never smoke. It also shows his strong determination. He narrates,

“Ever since I have been grown up, I have never desired to smoke and have always regarded the habit of smoking as barbarous, dirty and harmful.”²⁶

Gandhi took object-lessons in Ahimsa from his father. At that time he was fifteen he stole a bit of gold to clear his brother's debt. But he felt guilty and decided to never steal again. He wrote a confession to his father and asked his forgiveness. His father read it, and cried over it but punish Gandhi. This overwhelmed Gandhi when he states,

“I could see my father's agony. If I were a painter I could draw a picture of the whole

scene today. It is still so vivid in my mind.
Those pearl drops of love cleaned
my heart, and washed my sin away.”²⁷

It has lasting impression on Gandhi's mind. His repentance turned into clean confession with determination of never committing in future. This occasion planted the principle of Ahimsa in his future life.

However, Gandhi was an ordinary child. He had more follies and weaknesses. But later on the shy natured Gandhi was completely changed into a daring man who stood against thousands of people.

Mohandas K. Gandhi married at 13 when he was a high school student. He had been engaged three times, betrothal of course without his knowledge.

‘I have faint recollection’, he reports “that the third betrothal took place in my seventh year²⁸” But he was not informed. He was told six years later, a short time before the wedding. The bride was Kasturbai, the daughter of a Porbandar merchant named Gokuldas Makanji.

Later, Gandhi remembered all the details of the marriage ceremony, as well as the trip to Porbandar after 40 years at the time of writing Gandhi narrates,

“And oh ! that first night..., two innocent
children all unwittingly hurled themselves
into the ocean of life.”²⁹

Gandhi was a jealous husband. He dominated his wife. Gandhi confesses,

“...therefore she could not go anywhere without my permission”... I took no time in assuming the authority of a husband”³⁰.

So when the thirteen-year-old wife wanted to go out to play she had to ask the thirteen-year-old Mohandas. He would often say no. But though jealous, he was faithful to his wife. He states

“Lifelong faithfulness to the wife remained permanently imprinted on my heart”³¹.

And he wanted the same faithfulness from Kasturba so he became jealous towards her. He said, the thought made me jealous husband,

“..... I had absolutely no reason to suspect my wife's fidelity, but jealousy does not wait for reasons”³².

He narrates that he was very passionate by nature. His passion was entirely centered on one woman

He writes,

“I must say I was passionately fond of her..... I used to keep her awake till late in the night with my idle talk”³³.

Further he tells candidly about his carnal desire during his father's death. He was with his wife at the father's last moment. He confesses,

"if animal passion had not blinded me,
I should have been spared the torture of
separation from my father during his last
moments. I should have been massaging him,
and he would have died in my arms."³⁴

He felt guilty for the above incident. He carried the burden
of guilt throughout the life. At the age of near sixty he observes,

"It is a blot I have never been able to efface
or forget, and I have always thought that,
although my devotion to my parents knew
no bounds and I would have given up
anything for it... my mind was at the same
moment in the grip of lust."³⁵

Louis Fisher also writes about the passionate nature of
Gandhi and his penance afterwards. He states,

"The shackles of lust tormented Gandhi.
They give him a feeling of guilt."³⁶

Moreover, Kasturbai's baby died three days after birth and
Mohandas blamed the death was due to the intercourse late in
pregnancy. This doubled his sense of guilt³⁷.

Under the spell of his false friendship, he suspected
Kasturba. His friend fanned a flame of suspicions in his mind.
He says 'I was both a devoted and a jealous husband'³⁸, but as
days passed and when he understood Ahimsa in all its bearings,
he realized that the wife is not the husband's bondslave, but his
companion and his helpmate, and an equal partner in all his joys

and sorrows. Gandhi felt ashamed for his doubtful nature, he says at the time of writing the book,

“Whenever I think of those dark days of doubts and suspicions, I filled with loathing of my folly and my lustful cruelty.”³⁹

As a good autobiographer, Gandhi reveals himself with all his weaknesses and mistakes. He told about his fickle mindedness, i.e. he agrees immediately with his friend and eats meat and smokes cigarettes. He tells about his mistakes and wrong behaviour. e.g. He says frankly about his visit to the brothel.

Gandhi describes another incident of his misbehavior towards Kasturba. When he was practicing in Durban, his office clerks often stayed with him. At that time Kasturba, managed the pots of the chamber other clerks, but she refused to clean the pot that was used by Panchanama. Gandhi was angry upon that and lost his temper, he said,

“I will not stand this nonsense in my house’.....
I forgot myself and the spring of compassion
dried up in me. I caught her by the hand,
dragged the helpless woman to the gate....⁴⁰”

Gandhi has presence of mind. During the birth of his fourth son, he worked as a midwife for Kasturbai. He had studied a popular book on the childbirth, that knowledge helped him in the absence of the medical service. In the critical condition of Kasturbai's labour, he himself delivered his son Devadas on 22 May 1900. He states,

"I was not nervous, I did myself ⁴¹".

However, Gandhi was unable to educate his sons. As a father, he expresses his inability to give sufficient education to his children. He writes,

..... it has been their, as also my, regret that I failed to ensure them enough literary training⁴².

Gandhi's sons blamed him for his failure to educate them and upon this he states,

"But I hold that I sacrificed their literary training to what I genuinely, though may be wrongly believed to be service to the community." ⁴³

Gandhi devoted himself to the service of the community. He returned the costly gifts given by the people in return of his service. His wife and sons wanted gifts, but Gandhi returned them. It shows his unselfishness and broadness of mind.

Many critics criticized Gandhi for his less concern for his family. John Chancellor wrote,

".....He seemed to have little concern for his wife or his children". ⁴⁴

Gandhi did not sent his sons to school. He wanted to teach at home. But he was not successful.

He contemplates,

"What harm had there been, If I had given my boys an academical education? What right had I thus to clip their wings? why should I have

come in the ways of their taking degrees and choosing their own careers"? ⁴⁵

Gandhi accepts that he was not an ideal father. He failed to understand his children. Louis fisher supports this statement and writes,

"Married at thirteen, Gandhi never had a boyhood and therefore never understood his own boys." ⁴⁶

Gandhi had strong faith in religion. He read *Gita* and *Ramayana*. He always remain firm on religion. He never touched eggs or meat in his adult life, though it was necessary to use it in London. He remains firm, when doctor advised to use meat as a life medicine for Kasturbai. During such a critical condition, he refused to use meat and eggs, though there was possibility of her death. The same thing happened at the time of Manilal, his last child's illness. At that time Gandhi replied to the doctor,

"Even for life itself we may not do certain things. Rightly or wrongly it is part of my religious conviction." ⁴⁷

It means that, for the sake of religion, Gandhi was ready to do anything, even to sacrifice the life, wife and children.

Gandhi's public life was full of social and political activities. In fact, his quarrel with the English officer proved a blessing and he got a chance. To go to South Africa, from where Gandhi's life as a social worker has started. Gandhi was a great fighter against injustice. During his train and stage-coach journey in

South Africa he was not allowed to travel in a first class compartment. His experiences in the South Africa made him decide to root out this disease and suffer hardships in the process. In Pretoria he made a deep study of the social, economic and political conditions of the Indians in South Africa.

During his second visit to South Africa, he had to face very strong agitation of the whites. He avoided to enter the city like a thief in the night. His actions always increased the prestige of the Indians Community in South Africa.

Gandhi's Politics really stem from his experiments in truth. He was greatly influenced by Ruskin's book *Un To This Last*. It changed his life. He narrates,

"The book was impossible to lay aside...
It gripped me... I determined to change my
Life in accordance with the ideals of the book."⁴⁸

His writing for *Harijan*, *Young India*, *Indian Opinion* helped him to circulate his thoughts in the society. It makes him easy to contact with public and so it was not without these journals, Gandhi could play his experiments of *Satyagraha* and *Hartal*.

He took part in the Boer war and nursed the wounded soldiers. He even worked as a ambulance for the corpse. He fought against the taxes, that were imposed by the British government on the salt and Indigo. He had similar successful experiments in politics viz. Fasting, Hartal, and Satyagraha. He fought against the Rowlatt Bills and observes Hartal as a last

remedy. Government had banished his two books i.e. ***Hind Swaraj*** and ***Sarvodaya*** but Gandhi, printed and sold these banished copies. He had all the traits of an intellectual politician, without any governmental authority, he got fame as a greatest politician and spiritual leader.

His service to the society made him national leader and a leading figure. He is praised in the following words.

“Mahatma Gandhi became a legend of his own time : a tireless fighter for human rights and for Indian Independence, his strategy of Satyagraha, or passive resistance, earned him the admiration of millions throughout the world.”⁴⁹

- **The Documentation**

The Story of My Experiments With Truth like any other autobiography, records many details of the contemporary social, political and cultural life. These interesting details throw light on the existing milieu'. The gradual social changes are also recorded. The author narrates the traditions, caste system, superstitions and marriage system, polygamy, status of women, and the political turmoil during 1869 to 1920 in India. At the same time it gives information about the England and South Africa with its racial discrimination.

Child marriage was a common practice in the 19th century India. Gandhi's marriage was its fine example. He married Kasturba at his thirteen⁴⁹. Betrothal was a preliminary promise on the part of the parents of the boy and girl to join them in marriage,

and it was not inviolable. The death of the boy entails no widowhood to the girl. It was the agreement purely between the parents, and the children have no concern with it. Often they were not even informed of it. Gandhi states,

“I was betrothed thrice, though without my knowledge. I was told that two girls chosen for me had died in turn, and therefore I inter that I was betrothed three times”.⁵⁰

Polygamy was a common practice in the previous generation. After the death of first wife there was second marriage viz. Ota Gandhi married a second time, having lost his first wife. Kaba Gandhi, married four times in succession, having lost his wife each time by death.⁵¹

The society had no idea and practice of family planning. In the family there were so many children from two or more than two wives. Gandhi's family was its fine example. Ota Gandhi had four sons by his first wife and two by his second wife. Gandhi states,

“I do not think that in my childhood I ever felt or knew that these sons of Ota Gandhi were not all of the same mother.”⁵²

Gandhi's father Kaba Gandhi had five brothers. He had two daughters by his first and second marriages. His last wife, Putlibai, bore him a daughter and three sons.

Further there was not age limit for the second or third marriage. Gandhi's father married for the fourth time when he

was over forty. The death ratio for women was more than men. It shows ignorance towards the health of the women.

The caste barriers were strong during those days. There was distinction between the Hindus and other faiths i.e. Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Jews. The Christians or Panchamas were treated as lower caste. The Panchama was treated as an untouchable. Kasturba refuses to clean chamber-pot used by Panchama only because Panchama was from a low caste.

The houses of the lower caste people were located outside the village. Gandhi states,

“...untouchables are related to remote quarter of a town or a village, called in Gujarati ‘dhedvado’, and the name has acquired a bad odour.”⁵³

In South Africa Indians were treated as “untouchables” Gandhi states about this,

“In South Africa we have acquired the odious name of ‘Coolies’. The word has a contemptuous connotation. It means what a Pariah or an untouchable means to us, and the quarters assigned to the ‘Coolies’ are known as ‘Coolie locations’.”⁵⁴

This Coolie locations were totally neglected by the Municipality. Beyond arranging to clean the latrines in the location

in a laphazard way, the Municipality did nothing to provide any sanitary facilities, much less good roads or lights.

The people were very religious in those days. They had faith in God and religion. Gandhi's parents were religious. Gandhi states about his mother,

"She was deeply religious she would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. going to Haveli the Vaishnava temple – was one of her daily duties I do not remember her having ever missed the 'Chaturmas.'"⁵⁵

She would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. She vowed not to have food without seeing the sun, during the 'Chaturmas' and once there was not appearance of the fugitive sun, and she refused to take meal. She says,

"That does not matter", "God did not want to eat today."⁵⁶ They had blind faith in God and religion. There were religious books in the house such as *Ramayana*, *Bhagvatgita*, *Manusmriti* etc.

The people were too religious minded. They did not dare to step against their religion. For example Gandhi wanted to be a doctor, but his father refused for medical profession because Vaishnavas had nothing to do with dissection of the dead bodies.

The people were cling to superstitions. Gandhi's mother opposed him to go to England, a so 'distant land' and she allowed him, only after taking three oaths i.e. not to touch wine, woman and meat.

There were social superstitions. The act of crossing the sea or going abroad was against religion. When Gandhi went to England, his caste people treated him as an outcaste. The Sheth of the community states,

“Our religion forbids voyage abroad we have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising our religion.”⁵⁷

and when Gandhi remained firm on his decision to go to England, the Sheth pronounced his order,

“This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas.”⁵⁸

Women were confined only to the domestic life, they were not allowed to go outside the house without husband's permission. Kasturba couldnot go anywhere without Gandhi's permission. The wives had so many restrictions. The wife must adjust herself in the husbands house. Husband and his family were her only world. She must engage herself in the service of the husband. She had not right to express her opinion. Husbands always dominated over the wives. At one incident Gandhi states about Kasturba, that she is blessed with a quality which most Hindu wives posses.

“And it is this, willingly or unwillingly consciously or unconsciously, she has following in my footsteps, and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint.”⁵⁹

There was no legal remedy like divorce for women. Gandhi remarks,

“A Hindu wife may not seek divorce in a law court. Law has no remedy for her.”⁶⁰

There was no compulsory education for women. Gandhi's wife Kasturbai was illiterate. Gandhi wanted her to be an ideal wife but it is surprising that she had not any such ambition. However Gandhi's mother could read the books such as *The Gita* and *The Ramayana*.

The autobiography provides information about the racial discrimination in South Africa and in England. All Indians were 'Sammies' or 'Kulies' to the whites.⁶¹ In South Africa Indians were treated as Coolies i.e. equal to untouchables Gandhi states about this,

“I was hence known as a 'Coolie barrister'.

The merchants were known as 'Coolie Merchants'.

The original meaning of the word 'Coolie'

was thus forgotten, and it became a

common appellation for all Indians.”⁶²

Indians were not served at the hair dresser in England. So Gandhi himself cut his own hair. Indians were not allowed to enjoy the same rights of white people. The discrimination against Indians was massive especially in public transport. They were not allowed to travel in a first class compartment. Gandhi himself faced a humiliating incident in this matter. On his way to South Africa, a constable came and asked Gandhi to leave first class

compartment. He refused to leave and constable pushed Gandhi out. His luggage was also thrown out. In England, Indians were not allowed in the hotels and to take food with whites. One of the Hotel owner states Gandhi,

“that I have no colour prejudice.

But I have only European Custom and if I
allowed you to eat in the dining-room,

my guests might be attended and even go away.”⁶³

It also provides us information about the educational systems in Pre-Independence India. The schools were under British rule. Teachers wanted only good record of the class in any way.

Many high school students were married. Gandhi and his two brothers were learning in the high-school, after their marriage Gandhi states,

“Only in our present Hindu Society do
studies and marriage go thus hand in hand.”⁶⁴

The schools sent to the parents every year the certificates of the progress and character of students. The scholarships were not open to all but reserved for the best boys amongst those coming from the Sorath Division of Kathiawad.

It also shows about the evil in the society like prostitution. Gandhi's friends always visited to the brothels. Once Gandhi's servant brought a prostitute at home for him.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth is full of many political allusions and as such it is a political documentation of the Pre-Independent India.

Gandhi's stay in Pretoria enabled him to make a deep study of the social, economical and political conditions of the Indians in the Transvaal and the Orange Free state. The amended law had made it compulsory for all Indians to pay a poll tax of 3 as fee for entry into the Transvaal. They could not own land except in places set apart for them and in practice that was not to be ownership. They had no vote.

"It was with reference to the Bill then before the house of Legislature, which sought to deprive the Indians of their right to elect members of the Natal Legislative Assembly."⁶⁵

One day Gandhi happened to read about the above new bill under the title 'Indian Franchise' in a newspaper. It was a new bill which deprived Indians of their right to elect members of the Natal Legislative Assembly. People in Pretoria asked Gandhi to stay there and guide them. Gandhi agreed and on the 22nd May, the Natal Indian Congress came into being.

It is a truthful documentation about the Boer War. Gandhi served as an ambulance corps. His loyalty to the British rule drove him to participation with the British in that war. There were people in the corps with ten leader.

In South Africa Gandhi was running a weekly paper '*India Opeinion*' Gandhi proposed that *Indian Opinion* should be

removed to a farm on which everyone should labour. Thus, the **Phoenix Settlement** was started in 1904.

Gandhi mentions the beginning of **Satyagraha**. The **Satyagraha Ashram** was founded on the 25th of May 1915 at Kochrab in Ahmedabad. He was deeply shocked to read the draft ordinance, published in the Transvaal Government Gazette Extraordinary of August 22, 1906. Under it, every Indian, must register his/her name with the Registrar of Asiatics and the person must have registration certificate with him 24 hours of the day. Gandhi conducted a small meeting of the leading Indians. The movement is called **Sadagraha** which was corrected to **Satyagraha**.

Gandhi studied with greater awareness the problems of the Champaran agriculturalists. The Champaran tenant was bound by law to plant three out of every twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlord. The many agriculturalists suffered under that system. Gandhi decided to remove the stain and stepped forward.

He writes about the Rowlatt Bills and his entrance into politics. He organizes a Satyagraha Sabha.

"If even a handful of men can be found to sign the pledge of resistance, and the proposed measure is passed into law in defiance of it, we ought to offer Satyagraha at once."⁶⁶

Gandhi opposed for the imported things. He insisted on use of handmade cloths. From this effort there was birth of Khadi. He describes,

“The object that we set before ourselves was to be able to clothe ourselves entirely in cloth manufactured by our own hands. We therefore forthwith discarded the use of mull-woven cloth.”⁶⁷

After all, this autobiography is Gandhi's overall thinking on Political and Social situation. It reveals his personality through experiences and events recorded in this autobiography.

CHAPTER III

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