

Predominance of Self Realisation in Mahatma Gandhi's Autobiography

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Abstract

While reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, which he purposefully called 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth', can be understood only if; what he wrote in the introduction to his autobiography is sincerely believed. His novelty lies in his experiments of testing every activity on the reliable test of spirituality, and which made him one of the most misunderstood leaders in India. Self realization is a goal of Mahatma Gandhi's life. This paper aims at pointing out predominance of self realisation in his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Keywords: Self Realisation, Truth, Renunciation, Sanyasi, Non-Violence, Divinity, Spirituality,

“What I want to achieve- what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years- is self realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end. (M. K. Gandhi – *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* introduction, p. X)

Mahatma Gandhi's political and social life was his journey to reach the goal of self realisation. He wanted to test the efficacy of religion on the ground reality of life. It was his indomitable trust in truth that gave him immense power and energy in his struggle for independence against the mighty Britishers. His immense thirst for self realisation gave a new dimension to everyday mundane activities of life.

His profundities as a teacher, his insight as a leader and his wisdom as a guide are the obvious manifestations of a man striving sincerely with all his might to realise the divinity within him. No other leader in Indian history was misunderstood as Mahatma Gandhi was. His life was a unique example of a physically frail man fighting with his self to overcome the limitations within him that restricts man from experiencing the divinity in him. He followed truth in letter and spirit. To be free from all desires, he believed, is indispensable for self realization. In his autobiography he candidly admits his shortcomings and makes no claim of his life being an ideal for anyone to follow.

His greatness lies in the fact that he would not compromise truth even to save his life. In his autobiography he narrated an incident in chapter XXVII titled 'Near Death's Door' (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* p.374). He had a slight attack of dysentery; he did not take it seriously and was against taking any medicine. As usual, he prolonged his fast. There was some festival that day, and

although he had told Kasturbai that he should have nothing for his midday meal, she tempted him and he succumbed. The result was that it aggravated his dysentery. Despite several advises from the doctors he refused to take medicine, and his body had then become a lump of clay. Medical advisors tried to persuade him to eat meal or at least eggs. But he emphatically declined their request. He writes, “For me the question of diet was not one to be determined on the authority of the Shastras. It was one interwoven with my course of life which is guided by principles no longer depending upon outside authority. I had no desire to live at the cost of them. How could I relinquish a principle in respect of myself, when I had enforced it relentlessly in respect of my wife, children and friends?” (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* p.376) He thought that, the protracted and first long illness in his life afforded him with a unique opportunity to examine his principles and to test them.

Only a man who is undisputable follower of truth, whose every action is directed to attainment of self realisation, can win the fear of death. He writes in the introduction of his autobiography, “Let us not reduce that standard of truth even by a hair’s breadth for judging erring mortals like myself.” His conviction in truth was authentic for he has no personal axe to grind; every word he wrote and spoke was for the good of humanity, which would help him in his ultimate search for self realisation. His unsubdued desires for self realisation made his life a laboratory where in, like a scientist, he tested his weaknesses on the ground of sacrifice, self control, renunciation, infinite love for truth and non-violence. He was a pragmatic idealist, who without renunciation of the world like Sadhus and Rishis, tried to attain the ultimate goal of self realisation with a purpose of demonstrating the world that even a common man can tread the path that he trode. His firm conviction that truth is God and Ahimsa helped him successfully come out of the severest tests that he applied to himself.

His truth was not the relative truth of our conception but the absolute truth, the eternal principle that is God. He worshipped god as truth only. He writes in the introduction of his autobiography “I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded me my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it.” (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* p.XI) In his simplicity is his awe inspiring sublimity.

The RT. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri in his appreciation of Mahatma Gandhi included in appreciation section of the book *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man and His Mission* writes, “The present writer stood by as he wiped the sores of leper with the ends of his own garments. In fact it is his complete mastery of the passion, his realisation of the ideal of a Sanyasi in all the rigour of its Eastern conception, which accounts for the great hold he has over the masses of India and has crowned him with the title of Mahatma the great soul.”(*Mahatma Gandhi: The Man and His Mission Appreciations* p.5)

There is no such example in the history of an ordinary man who lived the life of a Sanyasi in the midst of social, political and economical upheavals. It was his sincere effort to kindle the spirit of self realisation in man to make him non-violent and believe in truth, which for him were the only potent means to fight for freedom against the British Empire.

Mahatma Gandhi’s life is a unique example of a man who freed himself from all desires, of comforts of mundane life without renouncing the world. He gave up all work that has desire for its end. His

uniqueness lies in demonstrating the possibility of the ideals of a Sanyasi to be exercised in the daily affairs of life for making the world a paradise. His infinite patience and love, childlike simplicity, gentle and courteous manner even when dealing with adversaries and his immaculate sincerity can be attributed only to his irresistible thirst for self realisation. His contribution to the world is peaceful co existence of man if he tries to search the divinity within him.

Mr. S. L. Polak in his appreciation of Mahatma Gandhi included in appreciation section of the book *Mahatma Gandhi: the Man and His Mission* writes, “He forces us to understand clearly, what he but dimly perceived before, that Man is a spirit and that, in addressing the best in us, it is Spirit calling to Spirit. I doubt if any can make a higher practical contribution to life than this.” *Mahatma Gandhi :The Man and His Mission Appreciations* p.8)

In his autobiography he educates man in the whole art of manhood without being didactic. Purity, truth and non-violence, he believed, are the prerequisite for self realisation while performing daily routine of life. His social, economical and political activities were of a Sanyasi with a liberated soul.

Mahatma Gandhi’s life was his struggle with self to love man as God loves him. His Christ like willingness to sacrifice his life for others was his relentless efforts since his childhood to cultivate his mind by the experiments, spiritual in nature or rather moral; for he believed that religion means morality, purity, truth and non-violence. No man who craves for self realisation can hate even his enemy or rather he has no enemy. He sees himself in all and all in himself.

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