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AN OVERVIEW OF GANDHI'S AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR, THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH

The Story of My Experiments with Truth is the autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi: covering his life from his birth in 1869 upto 1921. It was written in weekly installments and published in his journal 'Navjiban' from 1925 to 1929 in 166 installments. Its English translation also appeared in installments in another of Gandhiji's journal 'Young India'. Its original Gujrati title was "Satya na Prayogo athva Atmakatha" (literally meaning "Experiments with Truth or Autobiography").

Starting with his family genealogy, his own birth and parentage, Gandhiji has recorded memories of his childhood, child marriage, relation with his wife and parents, experiences at school, his study tour to London, efforts to be like an English gentleman, his going to South Africa, his experiences of colour prejudice, his quest for 'dharma', social work in Africa, his return to India, and his slow but steady work for political awakening and social activities. The book ends abruptly after a discussion of the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1915.

In the early 1920s Gandhiji led several civil disobedience campaigns. Despite his intention that these campaigns be peaceful: on several occasions, incidents of violence broke out. The Colonial authorities charged him in 1922 with incitement, and specifically stirring up hatred against the government: and, the result was a six years' term of imprisonment. He served only two years, being released on the ground of ill health. Soon after, in the winter of 1925, Gandhi began writing his autobiography: based on the example set by Swami Anand, a monk, a Gujrati writer from India and a Gandhian activist. The autobiography was completed in February 1929.

In the "Author's Introduction" (1925) part of his autobiography: Gandhi recalls that he had actually undertaken to write his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* at the behest of his followers '(f)our or five years ago'. But he had to set the work aside due to his political engagements. Initially he refused to adopt a book format as suggested by Swami Anand. But then again he decided to write it in a serialised form with individual chapters to be published weekly in his journal 'Navjiban'. The autobiography was written and serialised over the period from 25th November 1925 to 3rd February 1929. The corresponding English translations were reprinted in 'Indian Opinion' in South Africa, and in the American journal 'Unity'. The Hindi translation was published almost simultaneously in the Hindi edition of 'Navjiban'. In the "Author's Introduction" Gandhi writes; '... it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth'. The 'Introduction' part announces a pact Gandhi made with his readers; explaining both the circumstances behind, and the motivations for his writing the book. Then follows a chronologically structured sequence beginning with a genealogical account of his parental background. He then explores his childhood and youthful memories; his time in South Africa; followed by a narration of the activities he engaged in after his return to India. The story stops abruptly in 1921, four years before he began to compose the autobiography. The final chapter deals with the meeting of the Indian National Congress at Nagpur in 1915.

Gandhi's autobiography was translated from Gujarati into Hindi by Mahadev Desai in 1940. He appended a "Translator's Preface": where Desai notes that the autobiography was published in two volumes, Volume 1 in 1927, and Volume 2 in 1929. He also mentions that the original Gujarati edition was priced at 1 rupee and had a run of five editions by the time of Desai's writing of his 'Preface'. 50,000 copies had been sold in Gujarati: but since the English edition was expensive, it prevented Indians from purchasing it. Desai notes the need for a cheaper English version. Chapters 29-43 in Part V were translated by Desai's colleague and friend Pyarelal Nayyar. The 'Introduction' was officially written by Gandhi himself. Here he mentioned how he has resumed writing his autobiography at the insistence of Jeramdas; his fellow prisoner at Yervada Central Jail. He thinks over a question a friend asked him about writing an autobiography: deeming it a Western practice, something nobody has ever done in the East. Gandhi also says that through this book he wishes to narrate his moral and spiritual experiments with truth.

The first Part of the Autobiography narrates incidents from Gandhi's childhood: his experiments with drinking, eating meat, smoking, stealing and subsequent atonement. There are two texts which had a lasting influence on Gandhiji: both of which he read in childhood. He records the profound influence of the play Harishchandra and says; 'I must have acted Harishchandra to myself times without number.' (Cha. 'Childhood'). Another text he mentions reading in the same chapter as having deeply affected him was "Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka (a play about Shravana's devotion to his parents)." Gandhi got married at the age of 13. In his words; 'It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen.... I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.' Another important event documented in this part is the death of Gandhiji's father, Karamchand (or Kaba) Gandhi. Gandhiji wrote the book to deal with his search for truth: and the experiments he undertook for this purpose. His disdain for physical training at school, particularly gymnastics, has also been written about in this Part.