



**MOHAN TO MAHATMA : TRANSFORMATION OF AN ORDINARY
BOY TOWARDS SELF ACTUALIZATION**



DR. RASHMI JAYBHAYE,

Director, MGM IIFLC &

Assistant Professor of Communication Skills in

MGM Jawaharlal Nehru Engineering College,

Aurangabad MS India

ABSTRACT

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, more commonly known as 'Mahatma' (meaning 'Great Soul') is a perpetual source of inspiration for almost all the citizens of India. Life is a journey from innocence to maturity where an individual passes through a series of experiences to learn and unlearn the lessons of life. Mahatma Gandhiji's life in particular can be witnessed as an

ordinary man to the man of virtues and a spiritual leader, Father of Nation, Bapu or Mahatma in general.

The present paper is an attempt to witness his journey from Mohan to Mahatma as narrated by himself in his Autobiography "My Experiments with Truth." which covers Gandhi's life up to 1920 and with the help of some other historical sources.

Gandhi was a charismatic person with ability to unarm resistance of people and win their love and respect with a charming simplicity and honesty. He valued basic human qualities like truthfulness and honesty much more than outward show and pomp.

Mahatma Gandhi is considered unique because of his insistence on nonviolent resistance to injustice, which, in his case included both his own personal trials and tribulations as a person of color in South Africa and, later, as a leader of India's independence movement.

Mahatma Gandhi's life can be described as the journey from an ordinary boy Mohan to a man of self realization or a man who

reached to the higher level of spiritual consciousness. His life phases in this journey can better be described with his experiments of life experiences and realizations of path enlightening principles like truth, non-violence, fearlessness, celibacy and non-possession. It's an ever inspiring and incredible journey of Mohan reaching to mahatma to all the generations of mankind in the whole world.

My effort is to explore these five principles of Gandhian ideology through his life experiences.

KEYWORDS

Mohan to Mahatma -Transformation - an ordinary boy- Journey -self actualization

RESEARCH PAPER

The first principle which he realized in his early days of life is Truthfulness. It's quite interesting to explore the journey of Mohan towards Truth. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar, a coastal city in Kathiawad (now a part of the Gujarat State) on the 2nd October 1869. He was the youngest child of his parents Karamchand and Putlibai. His mother was illiterate, but her common sense and religious devotion had a lasting impact on Gandhi's character.

Mohan attended Primary School at Porbandar. When he was seven, his family moved to Rajkot. He was a mediocre student, was shy and avoided any company. He read little besides the text books and had no love for outdoor games. However, he was truthful, honest, sensitive and was alert about his character. In his early years, Gandhi was deeply influenced by the stories of Shravana and Harishchandra that reflected the importance of truth. Through these stories and from his personal experiences, he realized that truth and love are among the supreme

values. Plays about Shraavan and Harishchandra made a deep impression on him. They taught him to be truthful at any cost and to serve his parents with devotion.

During the course of his childhood, Gandhi befriended Sheikh Mehtab, who was introduced to him by his older brother. Gandhi, who was raised by a vegetarian family, started eating meat. It is also said that a young Gandhi accompanied Sheikh to a brothel, but left the place after finding it uncomfortable. Gandhi, along with one of his relatives, also cultivated the habit of smoking after watching his uncle smoke. After smoking the leftover cigarettes, thrown away by his uncle, Gandhi started stealing copper coins from his servants in order to buy Indian cigarettes. When he could no longer steal, he even decided to commit suicide such was Gandhi's addiction to cigarettes. But all this became unbearable for Mohan. He confessed his guilt to his father, who did not rebuke him but wept silently. Those tears cleaned Mohan's heart and taught him the power of non violence.

Gandhi was a seeker of the truth.

“In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth.” -Gandhi

On several occasions, he used religious practices and fasting as part of his political approach. Gandhi felt that personal example could influence public opinion.

“When every hope is gone, ‘when helpers fail and comforts flee,’ I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.”- Gandhi

The Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha is a natural outcome of the supreme concept of truth. If truth is the ultimate reality, then it is imperative to safeguard the criteria and foundations of truth. A votary of God which is the highest Truth and the highest Reality must be utterly selfless and gentle. He should have an unconquerable determination to fight for the supremacy of spiritual and moral values. Thus alone can he vindicate his sense of ethical devotion.

For Gandhi Satyagraha means the exercise of the purest soul-force against all injustice, oppression and exploitation. Suffering and trust are attributes of soul force. The active nonviolent resistance of the ‘heroic meek’ makes an immediate appeal to the heart. It wants not to endanger the opponent but to overwhelm him by the over flooding power of innocence.

Satyagraha or stupendous effort at conversion can be applied against the Government, the social Czars and leaders of 'orthodoxy'.

Gandhi used to advocate - Satyagraha is an inherent birthright of a person. It is not merely a sacred right but it can also be a sacred duty. If the Government does not represent the will of the people, and if it begins to support dishonesty and terrorism, then it should be disobeyed. But one who wants to vindicate his rights should be prepared to bear all kinds of suffering.

After completion of schooling and college, Gandhi was advised by a family friend Mavji Dave Joshiji to pursue law in London. Excited by the idea, Gandhi managed to convince his mother and wife by vowing before them that he would abstain from eating meat and from having sex in London. Supported by his brother, Gandhi left to London and attended the Inner Temple and practiced law. During his stay in London, Gandhi joined a Vegetarian Society and was soon introduced to Bhagavad Gita by some of his vegetarian friends. The contents of Bhagavad Gita would later have a massive influence on his life.

After returning to India, Gandhi struggled to find work as a lawyer. In 1893, Dada Abdullah, a merchant who owned a shipping business in South Africa asked if he would be interested to serve as his cousin's lawyer in South Africa. Gandhi gladly accepted the offer and left to South Africa, which would serve as a turning point in his political career.

In South Africa, he faced racial discrimination directed towards blacks and Indians. He faced humiliation on many occasions but made up his mind to fight for his rights. This turned him into an activist and he took upon him many cases that would benefit the Indians and other minorities living in South Africa. Indians were not allowed to vote or walk on footpaths as those privileges were limited strictly to the Europeans. Gandhi questioned this unfair treatment and eventually managed to establish an organization named 'Natal Indian Congress' in 1894. After he came across an ancient Indian literature known as 'Tirukkural', which was originally written in Tamil and later translated into many languages, Gandhi was influenced by the idea of Satyagraha (devotion to the truth) and implemented non-violent protests around 1906. After spending 21 years in South Africa, where he fought for civil rights, he had transformed into a new person and he returned to India in 1915.

Gandhi's religious quest dated back to his childhood, the influence of his mother and of his home life in Porbandar and Rajkot, but it received a great impetus after his arrival in South Africa. His Quaker friends in Pretoria failed to convert him to Christianity, but they quickened his

appetite for religious studies. He was fascinated by the writings of Leo Tolstoy on Christianity, read the Qu'rān in translation, and delved into Hindu scriptures and philosophy. The study of comparative religion, talks with scholars, and his own reading of theological works brought him to the conclusion that all religions were true and yet every one of them was imperfect because they were “interpreted with poor intellects, sometimes with poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted.”

Shrimad Rajchandra, a brilliant young Jain philosopher who became Gandhi's spiritual mentor, convinced him of “the subtlety and profundity” of Hinduism, the religion of his birth. And it was the Bhagavadgita, which Gandhi had first read in London, that became his “spiritual dictionary” and exercised probably the greatest single influence on his life. Two Sanskrit words in the Gita particularly fascinated him. One was aparigraha (“nonpossession”), which implies that people have to jettison the material goods that cramp the life of the spirit and to shake off the bonds of money and property. The other was samabhava (“equability”), which enjoins people to remain unruffled by pain or pleasure, victory or defeat, and to work without hope of success or fear of failure.

Those were not merely counsels of perfection. In the civil case that had taken him to South Africa in 1893, he had persuaded the antagonists to settle their differences out of court. He soon regarded his clients not as purchasers of his services but as friends; they consulted him not only on legal issues but on such matters as the best way of weaning a baby or balancing the family budget. When an associate protested that clients came even on Sundays, Gandhi replied: “A man in distress cannot have Sunday rest.”

Gandhi's legal earnings reached a peak figure of £5,000 a year, but he had little interest in moneymaking, and his savings were often sunk in his public activities. In Durban and later in Johannesburg, he kept an open table; his house was a virtual hostel for younger colleagues and political coworkers. This was something of an ordeal for his wife, without whose extraordinary patience, endurance, and self-effacement Gandhi could hardly have devoted himself to public causes. As he broke through the conventional bonds of family and property, their life tended to shade into a community life.

Gandhi felt an irresistible attraction to a life of simplicity, manual labour, and austerity. In 1904—after reading John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, a critique of capitalism—he set up a farm at Phoenix near Durban where he and his friends could live by the sweat of their brow. Six years

later another colony grew up under Gandhi's fostering care near Johannesburg; it was named Tolstoy Farm for the Russian writer and moralist, whom Gandhi admired and corresponded with. Those two settlements were the precursors of the more-famous ashrams (religious retreats) in India, at Sabarmati near Ahmedabad (Ahmadabad) and at Sevagram near Wardha. South Africa had not only prompted Gandhi to evolve a novel technique for political action but also transformed him into a leader of men by freeing him from bonds that make cowards of most men.

Gandhi won the affection and loyalty of gifted men and women, old and young, with vastly dissimilar talents and temperaments; of Europeans of every religious persuasion; and of Indians of almost every political line. Few of his political colleagues went all the way with him and accepted nonviolence as a creed; fewer still shared his food fads, his interest in mudpacks and nature cure, or his prescription of brahmacharya, complete renunciation of the pleasures of the flesh.

Gandhi's ideas on sex may now sound quaint and unscientific. His marriage at the age of 13 seems to have complicated his attitude toward sex and charged it with feelings of guilt, but it is important to remember that total sublimation, according to the best tradition of Hindu thought, is indispensable for those who seek self-realization, and brahmacharya was for Gandhi part of a larger discipline in food, sleep, thought, prayer, and daily activity designed to equip himself for service of the causes to which he was totally committed. What he failed to see was that his own unique experience was no guide for the common man.

He believed sex existed only to procreate and never to enjoy, a view that his political ally Jawaharlal Nehru found "unnatural and shocking". Lust was the enemy; that lesson was learned when, as a married 16-year-old, he had left his sick father's bedside to be with his wife and, as they made love, his father had died. As to any unconscious motivation for bed-sharing, who knows? Gandhi had married at 13, and taken a vow of celibacy when he was 38 and the father of four children. In doing so, he had been inspired by a Jain seer named Raychandbhai and Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, who became celibate in his later life

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that when he was about 34 years old, he heard the Inner Voice saying that the observance of total celibacy was indispensable for further spiritual progress. Gandhiji was already doing selfless service, observing, mouna on Sundays, daily praying, reading Bhagavad Gita and sticking to yama and niyama: satyam, ahimsa,

brahmacharya etc. All that was already there. But now he was convinced: "further progress is not possible unless I have TOTAL brahmacharya." Gandhiji consulted his wife Kasturba, who agreed with his proposal. He was 34 or 35 years old and from that age until 79, for more than 40 years, he observed strict brahmacharya. This observance is the reason that his achievement is so great.

“From that day when I began brahmacharya, our freedom began. My wife became a free woman, free from my authority as her lord and master, and I became free from the slavery to my own appetite, which she had to satisfy. No other woman had any attraction for me in the same sense that my wife had. I was too loyal to her as husband and too loyal to the vow I had taken before my mother to be slave to any other woman. But the manner in which my brahmacharya came to me irresistibly drew me to woman as the mother of man. She became too sacred for sexual love. And so every woman at once became sister or daughter to me.”

Scholars have continued to judge Gandhi's place in history. He was the catalyst if not the initiator of three of the major revolutions of the 20th century: the movements against colonialism, racism, and violence Gandhi endured a great deal during his life, including racial discrimination, violence, and the devastating war that followed independence. Through it all, his philosophy of nonviolent civil disobedience in the face of power and repression remained firm, and survives as a symbol today.

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