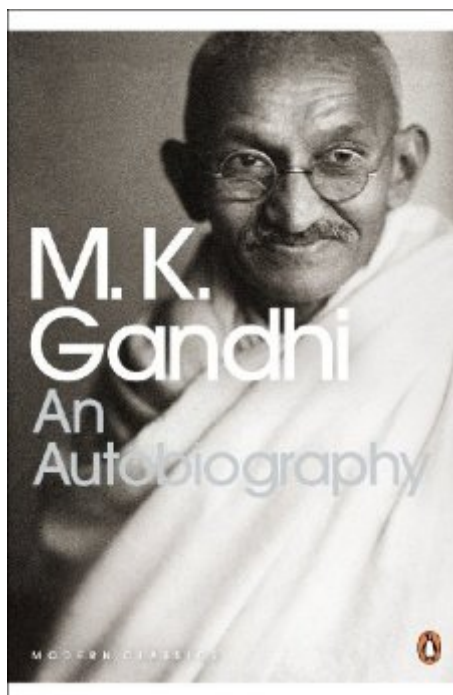


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An Autobiography (Penguin Modern Classics)



Synopsis

Gandhi's non-violent struggles against racism, violence, and colonialism in South Africa and India had brought him to such a level of notoriety, adulation that when asked to write an autobiography midway through his career, he took it as an opportunity to explain himself. He feared the enthusiasm for his ideas tended to exceed a deeper understanding of his quest for truth rooted in devotion to God. His attempts to get closer to this divine power led him to seek purity through simple living, dietary practices, celibacy, and a life without violence. This is not a straightforward narrative biography, in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi offers his life story as a reference for those who would follow in his footsteps.

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Customer Reviews

In many ways, this is a somewhat unusual autobiography. It is as remarkable for what Gandhi decides to leave out as for what he includes. He obviously didn't intend to deal with every major event, and delve into every area. It is less a comprehensive narrative than it is a series of reflections on his life. Some have criticized the book because he often deals more intensely with questions about what kind of diet he would follow than many of the great historical achievements of his life.

But Gandhi was who he was as an international figure because of who he was as an ethical individual. The moral seriousness with which he broods over his diet reveals a great deal about who he is as a person. As a side note, I should add that when I read this book, I had been thinking about becoming a vegetarian, and while I found no new arguments for doing so in this book, his moral example gave me the courage to do so. The greatest quality about this book is one it shares with most of Gandhi's writing: when he writes you get the sense that he is giving us his unedited thoughts. During even the greatest crises in his struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi's writings have the quality of a transcription of what he is thinking. More than any figure I can think of, Gandhi revealed precisely what he was thinking. The almost complete lack of artifice in his writing is one of the most impressive aspects of his writing as a whole and of his autobiography in particular. One is struck by his honesty, by his humility, and by his intense, almost overwhelming, moral passion. This is not a literary masterpiece. If one goes into it expecting it to rival such other autobiographies as Rousseau's *CONFESSIONS* or Nabokov's *SPEAK, MEMORY* or even Franklin's *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, one will be disappointed.

From this book we can see that Gandhi took everything in his life, from the smallest details of his diet to the grandest political decisions, very, very seriously. He believed that only a blade of the purest metal could cut through illusion to reveal the underlying truth of a society and of a world. The key to this purity for Gandhi was integrity and consistency in every word and deed. If he made a promise to abstain from milk, or to support a particular political position, he would keep that vow even at the risk of his life. This concept of integrity started from Gandhi's personal life and extended outward to each community and each nation that he touched with his message and with his political campaigns. When he worked to elevate the status of the Indian community in South Africa, he worked simultaneously to improve the sanitary habits and internal justice of that community, thereby ensuring that there was integrity not only in the nation of South Africa, but also in the Indian community itself. The same pattern can be seen in his work with the Champaran peasants ("ryots") to remove the crushing feudal tribute of indigo required of them by their landlord masters. As he led that campaign, he simultaneously established schools in the region and once again taught the rudiments of sanitation to the oppressed farmers. And of course his tireless campaign against untouchability, and his work to heal the rifts between Muslims and Hindus were both attempts to ensure the integrity of Indian society itself, which he considered a necessary part of attaining Indian independence from Britain, thereby helping to heal the inconsistency of colonialism at the global level, which in turn brought greater integrity to international relations.

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