

Book Review

by Roslyn Fuller

The Story of My Experiments With Truth

By Mohandas K Gandhi

(Penguin)

IT IS SAID that lawyers never waste a word, and this is undoubtedly true of the man who became known as 'Mahatma' the world over.

In this autobiography of just over 450 pages, Gandhi sets a standard for spare and low-key writing that quite possibly hasn't been equalled since the book first came out in 1948. But this literary style is not without its reasons: as the title indicates, this is the story of Gandhi's experiments with truth, and therefore sentimentality and bias are methodically stripped away from its pages.

The quest for truth, the reader quickly realises, was at the centre of Gandhi's life – satyagraha (non-violent resistance) and liberating millions from colonial domination were no more than the pleasant by-products of this search.

Deeply religious yet unrelentingly logical, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* chronicles Gandhi's life from childhood through to the early 1920s, about a quarter of a century before Gandhi's death.

This is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book: it was written long before the author became a global superstar. In fact, he began writing it in



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jail in order to make his weekly contribution to the magazine *Navjivan*.

Seen in this context, the author's unwavering faith is even more impressive. How, you might ask yourself, did he manage it?

And the wonderful thing about this book is that it will tell you a tale all the more interesting considering its main character started out as a high-caste Indian-British subject who, in his own words, claims to have hardly "known anybody to cherish such loyalty as I did to the British Constitution" and who winds up as a loincloth-sporting ascetic hell-bent on independence.

However, the way to Mahatma-dom is not as straightforward as one might think, and in keeping with the title, Gandhi frequently dwells less on political events – which were well-known to his audience – and more on the background information, often detailing his hands-on experiments in the fields of nutrition and medicine (one of his life-long interests) as well as thorough analyses of his domestic and business arrangements.

Claims that the reader needs a good grounding in Indian and South African politics in order to follow the text are unfounded. A concise description of each participant is faithfully provided the moment they are introduced to the reader, and although the information is presented in an incredibly condensed format, the short chapters make it easy to digest in whichever increments you prefer.

Since the content is some of the most compelling in the world, *Experiments With Truth* is all-around highly recommended reading.



Photo: Thorsten Metz

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