



Reviewing Biography: A Short Review of Mandela's Biography 'Long Walk to Freedom'

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Abstract:

Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* is divided into 11 distinctive sections which symbolizes distinctly important phases in his life. His labeling to those life experiences manipulates the importance and his approach towards those events. The style of his narration is formal yet sensitive as it takes the reader into confidence and sways him the real picture of the self. The consistency in narrative style is maintained throughout its length. He gives importance to the direction of achieving the effect on the reader by joining smaller incidents into a unified whole.

Keywords: *Biography, Revolution, Literature, Politics, Philosophy.*

Nelson Mandela, the first black South African President elected democratically, is the moral and ethical face of humanism in the world. His autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) is written after becoming the first President of South Africa. His life involved intense struggle and sacrifice for his nation and humanity. His autobiography is very unique and inspiring to many who are fighting against any injustice anywhere in the world. The form, narration and the style is also characteristic. His life struggle is revealed and the contributions of ANC and his coworkers have received great importance in the book. His legacy is unfolded through this epic autobiography. As a reader one get lost in the past and present times of South Africa. Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* is divided into 11 distinctive sections which symbolizes distinct important phases in his life. His labeling of those life experiences signifies the importance and approach towards those events. The word *Long* in the title shows the struggle, hardship and sacrifices made by these freedom fighters against the apartheid regime. The adjective in the title "long" signifies many connotations attached with the word as it hits clearly



towards the efforts and suffering he endured in his slow 'walk' towards freedom. It stretches the journey of life into a long span of time. Humanism is the philosophy that puts human welfare at the center and subsides all other religious, political, institutional and other issues. Nelson Mandela by taking the fight of common black citizens of South Africa for justice against the Apartheid regime makes him a true humanist. His autobiography which depicts his philosophy and sacrifice thus becomes a document of humanism. Nelson Mandela's autobiography fulfills all the distinctive features of the genre. It tries to point out some of the integral features of the genre. The form needs to possess and display in its content as well as expressions.

The title '*Long Walk to Freedom*' has been reinforced with the subtitle *The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. The title clarifies its literary stance. The autobiography is in prose form of writing and it is factual rather than fiction. He dedicated the book to his long list of lovable blood clans, he dutifully adds, "to all my comrades, friends and fellow South Africans whom I serve and whose courage, determination and patriotism remain my source of inspiration." (Mandela, 1994) Nelson Mandela assimilates two families, the first his personal family and the other is the entire nation South Africa as family and gratifies his love towards all—love which was the sole principle of his life and duty.

The very act of writing down a life story in the form of an autobiography constitutes an attempt on the part of the writer to justify one's life and implicate it in every act of autobiography. It is his life story. It is an example in his autobiography. He had achieved the highest point of his life. Nelson Mandela in his acknowledgement claims that "I began writing it (autobiography) clandestinely in 1974 during my imprisonment on Robben Island." alike Mahatma Gandhi, who started his autobiography during his imprisonment. Jail seems to be an ideal place for political autobiographers. Solitude seems a necessary factor for all political personalities as they all fall short of time and being busy and surrounded with people all the time. Martin Luther King Jr attempted to write his autobiography titled as '*Stride towards Freedom*' but could not complete it in his short span of life simply for "want of time". Nelson Mandela admits "since my release, my schedule has been crowded with numerous duties and responsibilities which have left me little free



time for writing.”

The autobiography depicts the minute details of the land “Qunu village” that was situated in a narrow, grassy valley crisscrossed by clear streams and overlooked by green hills.”. He was rooted in his village and its customs. The village was the starting point of his life journey. He very minutely described the childhood memories related with place, people and time. The vivid description of his mother land, the different places he had been, and the journey he undertook to visit many countries across, all become part of his descriptions.

The African continent magnified his length of the journey. Secondly ‘Long’ also means the historical past and its distance from the present. Colonialism began in South Africa in 1652 followed by the Slavery and Forced Labor Model in 1652, Jan van Reinbeck set up a refreshment location in what is now Cape Town, and requested slaves. The black history of oppression and colonialism had been a “long” and unforgettable memory for every black South African. The past was gloomy with its humiliations, discrimination and slavery. Obviously, there was no resistance from any quarter because this group was considered as traders as the earlier European visitors’. This was the beginning of the Dutch colonization of South Africa which lasted 144 years (1652-1802) followed by British rule of 187 years (1806-1993). The Cape of Good Hope passed into the hands of Britain in 1795. The British victory of 1795 against the combined Franco-Dutch forces in Europe helped in capturing the Cape. It was however handed back to Holland in 1803, temporarily though and Britain took it over again in 1806 permanently. The population of the Cape then reached to 75,302 consisting of 20,000 hottentots (Khoi), 25,757 white colonists and 29,545 slaves mainly from Madagascar’ “At the end of 1950, there were just four independent nations in Africa-Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa, which was ruled by a white minority. By the end of 1960, with gaining their independence that year alone, as Britain, France, and Belgium all but dismantled their colonial empires in Africa.” This shows how South Africa struggled a lot more than its neighboring countries for its freedom. It’s the longest struggle which symbolizes painful historical memory. “It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people.”



Freedom didn't come that easily to Nelson Mandela and South Africa, it wasn't revolution which happened in a short span of time but it was a prolonged journey. He says, "I have walked that long road to freedom" The time accounted in achieving the freedom was like a dark night of South African history. On 24th May 1994 the parliament was officially opened by Nelson Mandela, the new President of country and the ANC framed a democratic written constitution the guaranty of the basic rights for the South African people. The transitional constitutional document was drafted in 1993 and the revised document adopted by the Constitutional Assembly in May 1996.

Overall, the period of colonialism had shown the brutal and non-human face in the history of South Africa. The practice of apartheid was the second cruel phase in world history i.e. the first was Nazism of Hitler. The apartheid practice of South Africa had turned Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi to Mahatma Gandhi; a non-violent leader that had produced another non-violent leader in the history of South Africa. Nelson, the world leader continued Gandhian philosophy even after the independence of South Africa and ruled the country only for five years to spread peace, equality and fraternity among South African black, white and Coloureds. Nelson Mandela came to power

with the goals to establish the real rainbow nation, console the souls of sufferers and show the right path of progress to the younger generation. This idea of ANC carried forward in the consequent chapters as well.

The autobiography of Nelson Mandela is not just a book of fascinating stories but it is the epic story of the man and nation who attained their common goal of freedom and justice. The story told by the subject itself is not only fascinating but also very true and realistic. The small boy from a remote tribal village of South Africa came across his way towards the basic problem of the country that was racial discrimination. He thought beyond himself and became the part of the struggle which had no destiny. The mighty military rule was too powerful to combat but he with his organization stood against the notorious apartheid. It wasn't simple and easy. He took on the battle. The story of the struggle is the central theme of the autobiography. It doesn't remain a personal story but goes on to become a document of struggle and humanism.



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