



GANDHI'S EXPERIMENT WITH LANGUAGE

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INTRODUCTION:

Mahatma Gandhi – as a writer of simple, easy, graceful, idiomatic, forceful and succinct prose he has no equals. Gandhiji's prose style attained the acme of perfection in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* which is unrivalled for transparent sincerity of heart and boldness of convictions. In order to express his individual convictions about Truth and Ahimsa and his experiments with Truth Gandhiji evolved an individual style which bears the stamp of his personality.

Before writing his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* Mahatma Gandhi had written numerous articles for the *Indian Opinion*, *Navjivan*, and *Young India*. He had also written *The History of Satyagrah in South Africa*, *Key to Health*, a large number of letters and pamphlets. Thus, before writing his autobiography he was well equipped with a fine style.

The writings of Carlyle, Ruskin and Tolstoy exercised formative influence on Mahatma Gandhi as a writer. Carlyle's *the Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* captivated Mahatma Gandhi and he felt spiritual and intellectual affinity with these writers. The prophetic and forcible style of these writers left an imperishable stamp on the style of Gandhiji.

Indeed, Mahatma Gandhi intended to write his autobiography not only for describing his own experiments with truth but also "to provide some comfort and food for reflection for my coworkers".

How vigorous, forceful, simple and graceful is Gandhiji's style in the following lines! Describing the nature of friendship he writes: "True friendship is an identity of souls rarely to be found in this world. Only between like natures can friendship be altogether worthy and enduring. Friends react on one another. Hence in friendship there is very little scope for reform. I am of opinion that all exclusive intimacies are to be avoided; for man takes in vice far more readily than virtue. And he who would be friends with God must remain alone, or make the whole world his friend".

The saying "style is the man" is applicable to Mahatma Gandhi's prose style. He was sincere in thoughts, words and deeds. With perfect candidness and sincerity he described even the great secrets of his life and did not conceal anything about his life from readers. His style reflects the transparent sincerity and frankness of his heart. In this respect he is unique in Indo-Anglian prose. Other Indo-Anglian prose masters, Pt. J.L.Nehru, Chakravarti Rajgopalachari, Lala Hardayal, Nirad C. Chaudhuri etc., have numerous graces and qualities in their prose but none of them could surpass Mahatma Gandhi in cultivating frank and sincere style. Indeed, perfect

sincerity, truth and frankness had been his chief aim in writing his autobiography. He wrote in its introduction: “.....I am not going to conceal or understate any ugly things that must be told. I hope to acquaint the reader fully with all my faults and errors. My purpose is to describe experiments in the science of Satyagrah, not to say how good I am”.

Mahatma Gandhi's prose style acquired a prophetic tone, as he had to exercise moral influence on his coworkers. The prophetic tone of his style echoes the prophetic utterances of Carlyle and Ruskin who tremendously influenced him. The following extracts from his autobiography and other writings illustrate the prophetic quality of his style:

1. “This Ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is vain unless it is founded on Ahimsa as the basis. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to attack and resist its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world”.
2. To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means”.
3. Every religion is as precious to me as my own Hinduism... No thought of conversion is permissible to me at all. We must help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman and a Christian to become a better Christian We must eradicate from our midst the secret pride that our religion is more true and that another's is less so. Our attitude towards all other religions must be absolutely clear and sincere. Our prayer for others should never be, “Oh God, give me the light which Thou hast given me,” but “Give him all the light and truth that he needs for his highest attainment.”
4. “All your scholarship, all your study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth would be in vain, if at the same time you do not build your character and attain mastery over your thoughts and actions. When you have attained self-mastery and learnt to control your passions, you will not utter notes of despair”.

Terseness of expression is a great virtue of Mahatma Gandhi's prose style. He possessed it in a greater degree than any other prose writer in Indo-Anglian literature. This terseness is attained by the use of weightiest and simplest words and by a persistent avoidance of superfluous epithets. His autobiography, articles and speeches are the best specimen of lucid and succinct prose. His sentences are arranged with compactness and strength. He expressed his thoughts in the fewest possible words and employed only such terms as are the most expressive, and which add something material to the sense. Examples of succinct, precise and aphoristic style abound in his prose. A few examples are quoted below:

1. “there could not be a cleaning without clean confession.”
2. “.....but to me the Gita became in infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference.”
3. “I was a cruelly kind husband.”
4. “service without humility is selfishness and egotism.”
5. “The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust.”
6. “Life is greater than all art.”
7. “Truth is hard as a adamant and tender as a blossom.”
8. “Though God may be Love, God is Truth above all.”
9. “A Satyagrah struggle is impossible without capital in the shape of character.”
10. “Non-violence is the summit of bravery.”
11. “Politics bereft of religion are a death trap because they kill the soul.”
12. “Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of Reason.”
13. “The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humanity.”
14. “Woe to the teacher who teaches one thing with his lips, and carries another in his breast”.
15. “Fearless is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral.”
16. “A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks he becomes.”
17. “Work done spontaneously and joyfully is never oppressive.”
18. “A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech; he will measure every word.”

Mahatma Gandhi employed similes, metaphors and other figures of speech to express his thoughts vigorously, forcefully and emphatically. Below are given the examples of the artistic and poetic use of simile:

1. “Truth is hard as adamant and tender as a blossom.”
2. “Sir Pherozeshah had seemed to me like the Himalaya, the Lokmanya like the ocean. But Gokhale was as the Ganges.”
3. “Truth is like a vast tree, which yields more and more fruit, the more you nurture it.”
4. “Polak who joined the Phoenix settlement took to it “like a duck takes to water.”
5. The under-dog “live packed like sardines.” The following are the examples of metaphor:
 - a. “Mine was but a feeble pipe amongst those veteran drums.”
 - b. “The deeper the search in the mine of truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there,

“A cruelly kind husband” is an example of oxymoron.

CONCLUSION:

Mahatma Gandhi’s prose style is unique for precision, clarity, frankness, sincerity, prophetic tone and vigour in Indo-Anglian prose. His is an idiomatic style which is remarkable for purity and propriety in the use of words and phrases, and clearness and unity in the structure of sentences. Gandhiji’s style is always correct in construction and perspicuous in meaning.

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