

**MANDELA'S "LONG WALK TO FREEDOM" AS A JOURNEY INTO THE MAKING
OF A BLACK REVOLUTIONARY**

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Abstract:

Nelson Mandela's autobiography brings forth the contesting counters of self fashioning and tries to legitimize his experiences through those counters. His autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom" (1994) can be seen as the journey into the making of a black revolutionary in the backdrop of anti-apartheid movement. The racist segregation of the blacks in the hands of the white supremacist rulers of South Africa led to the rise of a nationalist movement spearheaded by African National Congress where Mandela occupied the centre stage. The life of Mandela can be seen as synonymous history of the South African anti-apartheid movement. Mandela's life is at once the record of the atrocities of the apartheid rule and testimony of a black revolution. His life is authentication of the struggle of the majority Black population fighting against the White minority having racist outlook.

Keywords:

Self-fashioning, Apartheid, Nationalism, Revolutionary, Counters of Contest

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The paper aims to show how the self-fashioning of the autobiographical subject is grounded in his/her understanding of the relation between the self and other that is, in turn, grounded in contexts of self-evaluation such as race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, generation, religion, etc. These contesting tools of self evaluation help us to understand the origin of the subject and in turn legitimize their experiences.

Nelson Mandela's "Long Walk to Freedom" (1994) is a record of the distressing effect of Apartheid, the power of Black protest and the flowering of New Africa. The autobiography traces the convergence of the identity of a nation with that of an individual. Mandela's life is so intertwined with the South African history that it becomes very difficult to differentiate between the two. The anti-apartheid movement led by ANC, Youth League and MK, the militant wing of ANC provided a strong platform for Mandela to lead a nation wrought in a quagmire of oppression and dilapidation from the white supremacy. Here the black revolutionary was born who at a time was also called as the 'Black Pimpernel'.

The South African history with the apartheid at the apex is by and large occupied by the role of Mandela and his comrades as a knight in shining armor against the dominant rule of the whites. Mandela led the political and moral crusade for majority rule in South Africa against the White segregation. The history of South Africa's struggle against apartheid witnesses the making of a leader who sacrificed his well being to bring the nation to the most coveted liberation from the racist rule. Risking his life, surrendering his personal freedom and his family's well being, Mandela emerged as dynamic black leader who spent twenty seven years of his life in different prisons of the country.

Mandela's work is a narrative of resistance against apartheid, racism, and patriarchy. His account of apartheid and resistance to it reinforces the importance of Black autobiographies as communal documents, though written by individuals. A particular autobiography recreates the history of their own societies by its writer, who narrates their own stories and histories based on

their own sense of the facts. In African context, even when an autobiography is the story of an individual, it is characteristically the representation of the individual in the service of a community. Since individual achievements are determined and enabled by the community, individuals normally recognize the community's role in the success and respect it. The life of an individual as recorded in African autobiographies ultimately becomes a way of discussing the community, especially the relationship between the individual and the community. Since Apartheid and its resistance, as championed particularly by the ANC, are very important aspects of South African history; Mandela's autobiography is an open record of it.

For Mandela Apartheid was a new term for the old idea which codified the oppressive system of all laws and regulations where the Africans were viewed as an inferior race and it was intended to suppress the non-whites forever. It was his colleagues chiefly Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada who felt the importance of Mandela's account of his life as the record of Africans' struggle against apartheid. Walter added that 'such a story, if told truly and fairly, would serve to remind people of what we had fought and were still fighting for'. Mandela affirms their idea and states in his book:

The idea appealed to me, and during a subsequent discussion I agreed to go ahead.
(Mandela, 477)

As a matter of fact, Mandela's autobiography is written as an anti-apartheid strategy. The argument in favor of an autobiography was put forward by Mandela situates his autobiography within his communally based society and he defines himself in relation to the community. By doing so, he succeeds in claiming his individual subjectivity within the framework of the collective. That claim allows him to champion the attempt of the community to assert a collective subject position in contrast to the object position the community is reduced to by apartheid. As Thomas Lodge puts it, 'It is a Bible for the freedom fighters and a symbol of political resistance'.

For counter-discursive purposes, he identifies pre-colonial features of the community and examines how members of the society are introduced to these features and integrated into the community. Mandela's narrative takes us back beyond the already-familiar terrain of his later public career, into the world of black South Africa and its tribal history.

At Mqhekezweni, after his father's death Mandela learns more about other aspects of African history, including histories of the Bosothe and the Zulu, and the colonization of South Africa (22). Chief Zwelibhanggile Joyi, one of the most accomplished story tellers of his time, tells tales of the arrival of the colonizers in South Africa. Chief Joyi's stories directly contest the standard British textbook version of history that, as Mandela comments, 'claimed South Africa with the landing of Jan Van Riebeeck at Cape of Good Hope in 1652' (Mandela, 24)

At home he listens to learn Xhosa history from his parents through moralistic tales that stimulates his imagination and he participates in communal rituals, including circumcision. As he recalls,

“ My life and that most of Xhosa at that time , was shaped by custom, ritual and taboo.....I soon assimilated the elaborate rules that governed the relations between men and womenI also learned that to neglect one’s ancestors would bring ill fortune and failure in life.”

(Mandela, 11)

Thomas Lodge notes that Mandela’s values were shaped by a childhood in rural Transkei, where he learned Victorian Principles of self control, etiquette, chivalry, and independence at Methodist run Schools and developed lifelong respect for British laws and principles. His upbringing in Royal Transkei Society shielded the child from humiliating encounters with Whites, allowing the adults to be less scared and more magnimous.

The foundations of his nationalistic outlook was shaped when he was still a boy who was groomed by the Royal Thembu chief Jogintaba in the in the lessons on democratic ideals. Mandela watched the proceedings of the court where the regent who would listen to the arguments of the tribal chiefs and finally deliver his judgment at the end. Mandela in a truthful confession says that ‘as a leader he have always followed the principles’ which he saw at the court.

Thomas Lodge critically examines Mandela’s autobiography where he takes up the cultural and ethical aspects of his African culture which was an important feature of his self fashioning as an African leader. By this time his initiation had become a key episode in his life history, “an extended narrative”, into which he condensed important social and cultural commentary. What Mandela’s story records is not a tradition inherited pristine and intact, but rather a set of rituals which by the early 1930’s were already losing some of their force and meaning. His autobiography emphasizes his own experiences of empathy and even kindness across South Africa’s historic social and political fault lines, experience that could reinforce a project of new nation building.

In his autobiography Mandela expresses his anguish against the Apartheid and racial segregation in the following words:

I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicized, when I knew that I would spend my life in the liberation struggle. To be an African in South Africa means that one is Politicized from the moment of one’s birth, whether one acknowledges it or not. An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area, and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends school at all. When he grows up, he can hold Africans Only jobs, rent a house in Africans Only townships, ride Africans Only trains, and be stopped at any time of the day or night and be ordered to produce a pass, failing which he will be arrested and thrown in jail. His life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth, dim his potential, and stunt his life. This was the reality, and one could deal with it in a myriad of ways.

(Mandela, 95)

To be black in apartheid reign was a racial inferiority designed to be suppressed who was devoid of the basic rights of life. The black man did not have 'defer automatically to a white, however senior he was'. Prior to his admission at Healdtown, Mandela was filled with the patriotic feelings of being a Xhosa and its rich cultural heritage. It was at Healdtown that he realized that he was a part of the larger African heritage and being a Xhosa was a part of it.

Mandela further asserts that the state of affairs around him inspired him to be a freedom fighter. He states:

I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth but a steady accumulation of thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced in me anger, rebelliousness, and a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people.

(Mandela, 95)

The Freedom fighter in him was not born in a day but was nurtured by certain influences of people and their ideas. He admits that the most influential person in his life was his lifelong friend Walter Sisulu. Paying his rich tribute to his friend, Mandela observes:

...I had come under the wise tutelage of Walter Sisulu. Walter was strong, reasonable, practical and dedicated. He never lost his head in crisis; he was often silent when others were shouting. He believed that the ANC was the means to effect change in South Africa, the repository of black hopes and aspirations. Sometimes one can judge an organization by the people who belong to it, and I knew that I would be proud to belong to any organization in which Walter was a member.

(Mandela, 95)

Apart from Sisulu, Mandela was also inspired by the electrifying nationalistic thoughts of Anton Lembede and A.P.Mda. Often these people gathered at Walter's house in Orlando. Mandela felt that Lembede's 'magnetic personality' and his original ideas on nationalism stimulated in him the quiescent freedom fighter. His disquieting ways of original thinking made a tremendous impact on him. He observes Lembede's notion:

...Africa was a black man's continent, and it was up to Africans to reassert themselves and reclaim what was rightfully theirs. He hated the idea of the black inferiority complex and castigated what he called the worship and idolization of the West and their ideas. The inferiority complex, he affirmed, was the greatest barrier to liberation. He noted that wherever the African had been given the opportunity, he was capable of developing to the same extent as the white man, citing such African heroes as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Haile Selassie. "The color of my skin is beautiful," he said, "like the black soil of Mother Africa." He believed blacks had to improve their own self-image before they could initiate successful mass action. He preached self-reliance and self determination, and called his philosophy Africanism.

(Mandela, 96)

Lembede's views on Nationalism were inspiring for the young Mandela. He asserts that he too had been susceptible to the British Colonialism and the appeal of being perceived by whites as "cultured" and "progressive" and "civilized". In this connection Mandela's quote Lembede's definition of African Nationalism which he had talked about in the African Newspaper *Inkundla Ya Bantu*:

The history of modern times is the history of nationalism. Nationalism has been tested in the people's struggles and the fires of battle and found to be the only antidote against foreign rule and modern imperialism. It is for that reason that the great imperialistic powers feverishly endeavor with all their might to discourage and eradicate all nationalistic tendencies among their alien subjects; for that purpose huge and enormous sums of money are lavishly expended on propaganda against nationalism which is dismissed as "narrow," "barbarous," "uncultured," "devilish," etc. Some alien subjects become dupes of this sinister propaganda and consequently become tools or instruments of imperialism for which great service they are highly praised by the imperialistic power and showered with such epithets as "cultured," "liberal," "progressive," "broadminded," etc.

(Mandela, 97)

The formation of the Youth League in 1944 gave a new facet to the freedom struggle lead by ANC as it forged a militant idealism in the minds of the prospective leaders of South Africa. Their basic policy was similar but their concern was to reaffirm the ideals which had gone sideways. Mandela sums up the aim and objective of the League in their following words:

African Nationalism was our battle cry, and our creed was the creation of one nation out of many tribes, the overthrow of white supremacy, and the establishment of a truly democratic form of government.

(Mandela, 99)

Mandela's book records many defining events in the Black South African's anti-apartheid struggles including , The Sharpeville Massacre, The Rivonia Trial, The Soweto riots, the attainment of Mandela's freedom and the end of Apartheid. The Sharpeville massacre was in fact a tragic incident which arose the whole of South Africa and the international community against the Government. Mandela holds out a picture of the massacre where the 'controlled and unarmed' PAC activists were open fired by the state police .Sixty of them lay dead ,while four hundred of were injured. A huge reaction followed. Mandela recollects the moment of this catastrophic disaster in the following words:

The shootings at Sharpeville provoked national turmoil and a government crisis. Outraged protests came in from across the globe, including one from the American State

Department. For the first time, the U.N. Security Council intervened in South African affairs, blaming the government for the shootings and urging it to initiate measures to bring about racial equality. The Johannesburg stock exchange plunged and capital started to flow out of the country. South African whites began making plans to emigrate. Liberals urged Verwoerd to offer concessions to Africans. The government insisted Sharpeville was the result of a Communist conspiracy.

(Mandela, 385)

As Mandela puts it, the massacre at Sharpeville created a novel situation in the country. In spite of the amateurishness and opportunism of their leaders, the PAC rank and file displayed great courage and fortitude in their demonstrations at Sharpeville and Langa. In just one day, they had moved to the front lines of the struggle, and Robert Sobukwe, the PAC leader was being hailed inside and outside the country as the savior of the liberation movement.

The second defining moment in the life of Mandela came when he was brought before the court to face the trial for the second time. The Rivonia trial where Mandela was the prime accused in the case which was christened as 'The state versus Nelson Mandela and others'. Mandela along with eleven of his compatriots was charged "with complicity in over two hundred acts of sabotage aimed at facilitating violent revolution and an armed invasion of the country. The state contended that Mandela along with their compatriots were the "actors in a conspiracy to overthrow the Government." (564) .The court convicted them and sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of incitement to sabotage, treason, and violent conspiracy against the South African regime. He and the other convicts were transferred to the Robben Island and thus became the world's most famous political prisoner.

Life on the Robben Island had never been an easy one. In his book, Mandela describes his inner conflict that he had to live with for so many years. In each day of his life he wondered and questioned if he had made the right decision of choosing to fulfill his duty towards his family. He couldn't be at his daughter's wedding nor was present when his mother or his two children died. His children grew up away from him, and when he finally came back to them, he was then the father for the entire nation. In his autobiography Mandela mentions this anguish in the following words:

For myself, I have never regretted my commitment to the struggle, and I was always prepared to face the hardships that affected me personally. But my family paid a terrible price, perhaps too dear a price for my commitment.

(Mandela, 623)

Mandela further states that every person has a twin obligation towards his family, parents and wife and children; he has also an obligation to his people, his community and his country. At the same time he maintains that in a country like South Africa which is crushed by Apartheid rule, it

becomes impossible for a black individual like Mandela to do justice to the twin obligations at the same time. He was ripped from his family when he tried to fulfill his duty towards his country. He was living a life of an outlaw in his own country. He was forced to live apart and was burdened by oppression and was subjugated to all kinds of hardships. In an attempt to perform his duty as a freedom fighter he had to sacrifice his duty as father, son and a husband.

Mandela was the sum total of the person what circumstances had made him of. His life is the history of South Africa. In it we can map out the rise of a nation from the quagmire of Apartheid and racism. His life witnessed the worst period of South African history where the majority population were deprived from equal opportunities and privileges. His life is the experience of South Africa in its struggle for freedom

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