

# NELSON MANDELA'S LONG WALK TO FREEDOM AS AN ESSENCE OF HIS VIEWS AND VALUES

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**Abstract.** This article dwells on the most essential views and values of Nelson Mandela as expressed in his acclaimed autobiography.

**Key words:** Nelson Mandela; autobiography; nonviolence, African history.

Autobiographies are of special interest both to literary criticism and as objects of multidisciplinary research, particularly if they are penned by a Nobel Prize winner. The work we would like to concentrate on is no exception to this rule. Nelson Mandela was a nonviolence anti-apartheid and social rights activist who became South Africa's first black president after winning the country's first democratic election from 1994 to 1999. After becoming involved in the anti-apartheid movement in 1962, he led a campaign of peaceful, nonviolent, defiance against the South African government and its racist policies. Because of his political commitment at this time, before being elected president, Mandela had spent 27 years in prison for political offenses. In 1993, Mandela and South African president F. W. de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to dismantle the country's apartheid system [5; 6; 9].

However, the work we are discussing is unique in yet another respect, mainly in the fact that, despite being an autobiography of an African man, it has been highly appraised by readers of all races. "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But <...> if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" [7]. These were the words of a man resolutely committed to his motherland, to the fight against the apartheid in South-Africa, to his colleagues who had lived it for more than 40 years. Despite this, what his work promotes in the first place, is the understanding that fighting does not equal violence. One of the most important quotes could be considered the following: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite" [2, p. 457].

As the author unfolds before us the story of his childhood, student years, and the long period of fighting for his values, this is what we observe – love for his motherland, for African history and for his people. The early chapters of the work could be considered a real encyclopaedia of life of an African village, and the unadorned style without excessive embellishment, but with pinpoint authentic details

made more for promoting African culture and traditions than research and tourist-targeting descriptions. Against this background, the further hardships of the road taken by the author, meticulously described in eleven chapters of this work, did not harden his heart, but strengthened him in his conviction that the society has to change their mindset and should allow others to live in peace. And one of the questions he answers with this work is: how can we heal after human rights have been denied?

This work is essential for anyone looking for deeper understanding of African history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For almost 40 years, South Africans experienced a period of domination of the white people. During this period, all the rights of the black people were devalued. Democracy, free expression, individual freedoms, in short all fundamental human rights were destroyed – the right to vote, to attend the same establishments and enjoy the same privileges as the whites. In addition, they had to work hard for miserable wages, pay exorbitant home rents and taxes to the government and local authorities who were not even responsible to them.

The basic and fundamental rights of humans once stolen have been restored, but how can the nation heal after the rights of man have been denied for such a long period? The answer given by Nelson Mandela: violence will not bring us closer to our objectives, what we have to think about in the first place is caring for others. “A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community life would go a long way in making the world the best place we dreamed of with so much passion. It is easier to break and destroy than to build. Heroes are those who make peace and build” [8]. These words, spoken by Mandela in Soweto on 12 July, 2008, are the essence of his biography and his life, and perhaps they explain why so many people find them a greatest inspiration.

It is with this in mind that he has opted for peaceful means in order to solve this problem: “Democracy meant all men have to be heard, and decision was taken together as a people. Majority rule was a foreign notion. A minority was not to be crushed by majority” [2, p. 29]. This is not a line from a manifesto, as it may seem, but a recollection from tribal meetings led by the regent at the Great Place in his childhood, which laid a strong base for his beliefs and values. And this was what empowered him later to state: “Our march to freedom is irreversible. We must not allow fear to stand in our way” [4, p. 217]. In Mandela’s view, appropriate measures must be taken, in particular: peace is the most powerful weapon that any community or nation can have for development. Peace is not only the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, without distinction of race, color, creed, religion, sex, class, caste or any other social factor of difference. Religion, ethnicity, language, social and cultural practices are elements that enrich human civilization, adding to the richness of our diversity.

Only through sacrifice, disciplined mass action, especially promoting a message of forgiveness and equality that victory can be assured. Mandela also used

the nation's enthusiasm for sport as a pivotal point to promote reconciliation. People "have shown quickly a tremendous capacity to join hands when facing difficulty". The system eventually collapsed because of the unity of those who were denied their rights, and because all sectors of society recognized that they had more to gain from working together than from fighting each other. It is, therefore, on one's own tolerance that one can base one's true dignity. It is that same quality that has helped the African people, so quickly, to lay the foundations for a better life.

We would like to conclude with a quote from J. Kile: "We are inspired by the patience, wisdom and integrity with which Mandela led his nation in their pursuit of equality and freedom. He is a great moral hero and we all could learn much from his long road of sacrifice toward personal and national liberation" [1].

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