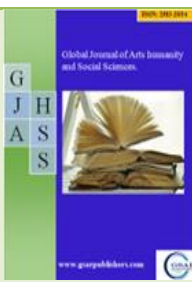
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Mahatma Gandhi as a Prose Writer

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi, widely recognized for his leadership in India's independence movement, was also a prolific writer whose prose, deeply philosophical and deeply connected to his spiritual and political principles, played an integral role in shaping modern India. This article examines Gandhi as a prose writer, exploring the themes, style, and impact of his writings, especially his journals, letters, and autobiographical works. Gandhi's prose is not only a political tool but also a moral guide that continues to inspire many globally.

Keywords: Gandhi, Prose Writing, Non-Violence, Political Writings, Spirituality, Autobiography, Truth, Journalistic Writings.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is celebrated as one of the most influential leaders in the history of India and the world. Although his contributions as a political leader and social reformer are widely recognized, his writings, particularly his prose, have a profound place in both literary and philosophical circles. Gandhi's prose transcends the traditional boundaries of political rhetoric, blending ethics, spirituality, and social reform into a potent literary expression. His prose writing serves as a unique medium through which he communicates his ideals of truth, non-violence (Ahimsa), and satyagraha (truth-force).

This article examines the prose of Mahatma Gandhi, focusing on his philosophical outlook, the themes of his writing, and how his prose serves as a vehicle for both personal and national transformation. In particular, the study will explore his writings in journals such as *Navjivan* and *Young India*, his letters, and his autobiographical works like *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Gandhi as a Prose Writer: A Literary Approach

Gandhi's prose reflects a unique blend of simplicity and profundity, grounded in his life's core principles. His commitment to truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) is evident not only in his speeches but also in his written words. Gandhi's literary style is often characterized by directness, clarity, and a moral tone. His language is simple and unpretentious, making it accessible to a wide audience while simultaneously addressing complex philosophical ideas.

Gandhi's prose also embodies a spirit of personal accountability and self-reflection. His works are frequently introspective, especially in his autobiographical writings. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is an example where Gandhi speaks candidly about his moral struggles and intellectual development. His writings are not just theoretical discourses; they serve as practical guides for living an ethical life. Gandhi's emphasis on self-discipline, fasting, and non-violent protest is rooted in his understanding that personal transformation is crucial to societal change.



Themes in Gandhi's Prose

- 1. Truth (Satya) and Non-Violence (Ahimsa)** One of the central themes in Gandhi's prose is his unflinching belief in truth and non-violence. These two principles are the foundation of his political philosophy and are intricately interwoven throughout his writings. Gandhi often stated that truth is God, and non-violence is the highest form of spirituality. These beliefs are reflected in the simplicity of his prose, which, though deeply philosophical, is never clouded by complicated rhetoric. Gandhi's commitment to these ideals is especially evident in his correspondence, where he repeatedly urges his followers to adhere to these principles in every aspect of life. He writes in a letter to a follower, "If you want to find God, you must seek Him through truth and non-violence."
- 2. Self-reliance and Swaraj (Self-Rule)** Another significant theme in Gandhi's writings is the concept of self-reliance, or *swadeshi*. Gandhi's idea of self-rule extends beyond political autonomy to encompass economic and moral independence. He urges Indians to boycott British goods and revive traditional crafts like spinning khadi. His famous slogan, "Do or Die," encapsulates his call for Indians to take responsibility for their own destiny. In his journal *Young India*, Gandhi frequently wrote about the need for self-reliance, both at the individual and national levels.
- 3. The Role of the Masses in Social Reform** Gandhi's prose is often concerned with the social and moral upliftment of the masses. He was a champion of the rights of the untouchables, whom he referred to as "Harijans" or children of God, and in his writings, he advocated for their inclusion in society. His prose is filled with moral exhortations for social justice, urging his readers to reject caste discrimination and embrace equality. Gandhi believed that true social reform could only be achieved through the active participation of the people, and this belief permeates his prose.
- 4. The Concept of Ahimsa in Political Action** In his political writings, Gandhi stresses the power of non-violent resistance. His prose reflects his belief that non-violence is the most powerful weapon for achieving social and political change. Through his writings in *Navjivan* and *Young India*, he elaborates on the theory of *satyagraha* (truth-force), encouraging his followers to engage in non-violent protests against colonial rule. Gandhi's prose emphasizes the moral superiority of non-violent methods, arguing that violence only perpetuates suffering and injustice.

Gandhi's Prose in Journals and Letters

One of the most important mediums through which Gandhi communicated his thoughts was his journalistic work. Through publications like *Navjivan* and *Young India*, Gandhi was able to

reach a vast audience, discussing a wide range of social, political, and spiritual topics. These journals allowed him to present his thoughts in a direct, personal, and accessible manner. Gandhi used these publications to engage in a dialogue with the Indian people, responding to their concerns and guiding them in their struggles for independence and social justice.

Letters played a crucial role in Gandhi's prose writing, offering another intimate window into his thoughts and beliefs. Gandhi's letters were often addressed to friends, followers, political leaders, and even adversaries. Through his letters, he not only provided advice but also shared his vision for a better world. One of the most notable aspects of Gandhi's letters is his gentle tone, even when engaging in serious political discourse. For example, in his famous letter to Hitler, Gandhi urges the German leader to renounce violence and adopt non-violence as a way to achieve peace. This letter, like many of his other written works, reflects Gandhi's unwavering belief in the power of persuasion over coercion.

Opinions of Others on Gandhi as a Writer

Mahatma Gandhi's writings have long been the subject of scholarly attention and critical analysis. His prose, often praised for its clarity, moral force, and simplicity, has been seen not just as political discourse but as a vehicle for spiritual and philosophical ideas. Scholars and critics have offered various perspectives on Gandhi's role as a writer, acknowledging both the impact of his prose and its moral and literary significance.

1. Gandhi's Simplicity and Accessibility

Several scholars emphasize the simplicity and directness of Gandhi's writing. His prose, though deeply philosophical, is grounded in simplicity and moral clarity, making it accessible to a wide audience. Bhikhu Parekh (2001) describes Gandhi's language as "straightforward and unadorned, which helped bridge the gap between his complex ideas and the common people" (p. 58). Parekh highlights that Gandhi's ability to communicate profound concepts like non-violence and truth in a clear and accessible manner was one of the key reasons his writings resonated with the masses.

In *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*, Parekh argues that Gandhi was not just a political leader but a moral teacher, and his prose functioned as a moral compass for his followers. According to Parekh, Gandhi's simplicity was a deliberate choice, meant to align with his belief in the importance of inner purity and truth (p. 65).

2. Literary Quality and Spirituality

Another scholar, Haraprasad Bhattacharya, in *Gandhi's Prose: A Study in the Ethical and Political Dimensions* (2000), also comments on the literary quality of Gandhi's writing, calling it "remarkably spiritual and ethical, rooted in a deep engagement with his personal experiences of suffering and search for truth" (p. 42). Bhattacharya argues that Gandhi's prose transcends mere political rhetoric, and it is this spiritual dimension that lends his writing its enduring power. He writes, "In his prose, Gandhi weaves together the political and the spiritual seamlessly, where

every word carries a deep ethical weight” (p. 45). Bhattacharya underscores that Gandhi’s writing is grounded in his personal commitment to spiritual self-realization and that this underpins his advocacy for social and political change.

3. The Impact of Gandhi’s Autobiography

Gandhi’s *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is often cited as one of the most important autobiographies of the 20th century. In *Gandhi’s Autobiography: A Study in Self-Reflection* (1982), scholar Judith Brown suggests that Gandhi’s autobiography provides an intimate look into his intellectual and spiritual development. Brown notes, “The self-reflection evident in Gandhi’s autobiography allows us to understand his moral evolution, which was as important to him as his political activism” (p. 109). She highlights how Gandhi uses his personal story to address larger themes of self-discipline, truth, and non-violence, making his autobiography not just a historical document, but a philosophical treatise.

According to Brown, Gandhi’s self-reflective writing serves as a guide for readers to embark on their own moral and spiritual journeys. She writes, “What makes *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* so compelling is its honest exploration of the tensions between personal flaws and the pursuit of moral purity” (p. 113). Gandhi’s decision to share both his moral struggles and his successes gives his prose an authenticity that has contributed to its lasting appeal.

4. Gandhi’s Prose as a Political Tool

Gandhi’s journalistic writings also hold a unique place in the study of his prose. His works in *Young India* and *Navjivan* serve as important political documents that shaped the course of the Indian independence movement. According to Mary Fisher in *The Non-Violent Revolution: Gandhi’s Legacy* (1996), “Gandhi’s essays in *Young India* are not just political statements; they are an embodiment of his ethical beliefs, aiming to shape the character of the nation” (p. 22). Fisher argues that Gandhi’s prose in these journals is deeply intertwined with his political vision for India, and through his writing, he sought to cultivate a sense of national identity rooted in moral values, self-reliance, and non-violence.

Fisher continues, “Through his prose, Gandhi did not just challenge colonial rule but also sought to transform the very moral fabric of Indian society, urging readers to adopt a new way of thinking about self-rule” (p. 24). In this sense, Gandhi’s journals are political tools that reach beyond simple activism, urging readers to internalize the ethical foundation of the independence movement.

5. The Ethical Dimension of Gandhi’s Writings

In *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Biography* (2004), historian David Hardiman points out that “Gandhi’s prose offers a vision of the future where social and political change is inseparable from personal moral transformation” (p. 89). Hardiman believes that Gandhi’s writing challenges traditional political discourse by emphasizing the moral dimensions of resistance and reform. He writes, “Gandhi’s prose is not just an invitation to political activism; it is an invitation to rethink what it means to live a good

life” (p. 92). This perspective reveals the dual purpose of Gandhi’s prose: to advocate for political change and to inspire a profound personal transformation in his readers.

Hardiman also observes that Gandhi’s writing in letters to political leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah reveals his commitment to dialogue and moral persuasion, even in the most heated political contexts. “In his letters,” Hardiman writes, “Gandhi consistently demonstrates his belief that the power of words, guided by moral principles, could bring about even the most difficult political reconciliations” (p. 95).

Conclusion

The prose of Mahatma Gandhi, as discussed by various scholars, is remarkable for its simplicity, clarity, and ethical depth. Scholars agree that Gandhi’s writings, whether in the form of his autobiographies, journal articles, or letters, serve as more than just political commentary. They represent a moral and spiritual guide that is deeply connected to his personal quest for truth and non-violence. His prose continues to inspire readers not only in the context of political change but also in the realm of personal moral and spiritual transformation. The opinions of scholars such as Bhikhu Parekh, Haraprasad Bhattacharya, Judith Brown, Mary Fisher, and David Hardiman underscore the multifaceted nature of Gandhi’s prose, which remains an enduring legacy in both literature and philosophy.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi’s prose writing is a powerful testament to his personal commitment to the principles of truth, non-violence, and social justice. His works are not merely political treatises; they are moral and spiritual guides for living a purposeful life. Through his journals, letters, and autobiographies, Gandhi offers a vision of personal and national transformation that continues to inspire individuals and movements worldwide. His prose, marked by simplicity and clarity, speaks to the power of words in effecting social change, reminding readers that true freedom comes not just from political independence but also from moral and spiritual awakening.

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