

The "long walk to freedom" by nelson mandela review essay sample

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This book is an autobiography describing the life of Nelson Mandela. He was the first president of South Africa. He started writing this book in 1974 while in prison. Mandela stopped writing the book after the authorities confiscated his materials in the prison. He resumed writing in 1990s after his release. In the book, Mandela describes his life from childhood to his old age. He paints a clear picture of himself for readers to see the true man that he was. Born in a small village that he calls Mvezo, Mandela led a simple life as a child. The family was wealthy by the standards of the time.

However, the state of poverty was common for all native Africans as they had been sidelined by the colonialists. His father was a traditional chief of Mvezo confirmed by the King of the Thembu tribe (Mandela, N: p 2).

However, his selection had to be ratified by the British colonialists before he could be recognized as a chief. He was entitled to a small salary for acting as a local magistrate. Mandela grew up witnessing the oppressive measures put by the colonialists upon the native Africans. Like many other South African children, Mandela attended schools that were set aside for the black children (Howe, R W: p16). His father had great respect for education and this is how Mandela got lucky to be among the few African children who got educated at that time.

Mandela describes his family background in the book. He states that his father had four wives. His mother is Nosekeni Fanny. She was the third wife of the chief. Each wife had a homestead that had a fenced-in enclosure for

animals, fields for growing crops and one or more thatched huts (Mandela, N: p3). He states that the homesteads were miles apart and his father had to walk long distances to visit each of his family. His father had thirteen children, among whom four were boys and nine were girls. Mandela was the eldest child in his homestead and the youngest of all the sons in the family. His siblings were three sisters.

Mandela describes how his father ended the family chieftainship on the account of his insubordination to the white rule. As a result of the lost power, the family suffered greatly. As stated in the book, the family had enjoyed some degree of wealthy life thanks to the chieftainship that was reserved for the family. This position was inheritable, being passed from the father to the eldest son. Consequently, due to hard times, Mandela's mother decided to move to Qunu where the family could be supported by friends and relations (Mandela, N: p3). It is in Qunu where Mandela shaped the focus of his life through education.

Nelson Mandela's autobiography sheds the light on his achievement. The struggle of the ANC Party, to which Mandela belonged, is at the centre of this story. It stands out in the history of fighting for freedom. It sought for equal representation of all persons living in South Africa and not just the freedom of a particular race or colour.

Mandela had a very strong stance in matters of freedom. To show his oneness with other people in the quest for the freedom, Mandela said that the freedom was indivisible. He meant that the freedom was not exclusive

such that some people had it while others lacked it. He stated that the chains that tied any one of them were the same chains that tied all people. He claimed that the same chains tied him (Meredith, M: p34). He meant that every person was responsible in the fight for the freedom because it was a collective objective

Soon after Mandela won the elections that show him become the first black African president for South Africa, he delivered a speech to the people. He told them that all people were equal before the law. There would be no difference between a Black and a White. All would be treated equal (Meredith, M: p36). Black people had the right to be wherever they wished to be similar to the rights that the Whites had. Above all, Mandela told people to forgive each other and allow peace to prevail. He said that he had endured suffering in the hands of the Whites. However, he was willing to forgive them. He was determined to work with all people of different races to bring prosperity to South Africa.

The book is filled with political undertones. As Mandela was growing up, there were two political parties that belonged to Africans to fight against the rule of the Whites. The two political parties were African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). In 1960s, the two political parties were banished by the white authority (Ross, R: p43). As a result, they went underground to adopt new tactics to fight the White rule. South Africa was subjected to the apartheid regime and repressive laws were the order of the day. One of the recognizable events at that time is the Sharpeville massacre. Very many South African's lost lives.

While ANC tactics were to use peaceful approach to rebel the White government, PAC decided to use force to do so (Walker, E: p29). Its agenda was to hold a series of nationwide demonstrations. At that time, Blacks were excluded from living or even working in the White areas unless they had a pass. No Black was supposed to be in the urban areas without a valid pass. In case one was found, it resulted in immediate arrest and summary trial. This was followed with deportation of the person to his or her village and subsequent arrest of the employer and prosecution. Police cars were seen everywhere in the urban centers patrolling White areas to round up any "illegal" Black found 'loitering' without passes (Howe, RW: p42). It is the Sharpeville massacre that triggered the events that followed until the liberation of the country.

Black people had congregated in Sharpeville to demonstrate against the requirements that Blacks carry passes wherever they went. The crowd converged at a nearby police station singing and chanting while challenging the police to arrest them for not carrying passes. Incidentally, police opened fire on the demonstrators, killing about 69 people and injuring about 186 others (Eades, L M: p37). The crowd was unarmed. They were performing a peaceful demonstration to show the government that they did not like the idea of carrying passes. Apparently, on the same day, in Lunga, 2 protesters had been shot down by the police while 49 got injured (Eades, LM: p38). These killings resulted to more anger among the Blacks.

There was a massive stay-away from work. Anti-pass demonstrations were continued. As a result, prime Minister of the White government, Hendrik

Frensch Verwoerd, declared a state of emergency. Police officers and security forces were given mandate to arrest and detain the Blacks without trial. This led to many Blacks getting arrested. Many of them were leaders of both ANC and PAC. The two political parties were banned and stringent repressive laws were laid down to discourage any dissidence to the White rule (Ross, R: p45).

Moreover, the government banned publications that were believed to promote objectives of communism. Many people were banned from holding offices (Meredith, M: p54). Among them were practicing lawyers. Nelson Mandela was both a practicing lawyer and an active member of ANC. He was thus banned from practicing and later on, he got arrested among many other Black leaders. Banned people endured severe restrictions on their movements and their political activities. Also, association with other people was limited. The aim of the government was to silence the opposition to its apartheid policies and to suppress their political activities. The government also used other forms of repressions such as indefinite detention and political assassinations to survive the opposition

Mandela details how he managed to carry the objectives of ANC forward secretly together with other leaders. They formed secret armed resistance groups. This resulted in the armed struggle that followed later on. The ANC launched its armed group by the title, Umkhonto we Sizwe, meaning 'Spear of the Nation' under the leadership of Mandela and others (Mandela, N: p58). This happened in December 1991. Meanwhile, PAC formed Poqo, meaning 'Alone'. Both groups were to conduct sabotage campaigns with one aim; to

overthrowing the South African government. Moreover, Mandela was a prominent and active member of ANC. He championed and contributed in establishing the Youth League and organized a number of strikes.

He participated in the defiance campaign. Initially, he participated as a volunteer in the ANC. He was a lawyer. According to Mandela, their aim was to replace the repressive rule with a democratic government that represented all the people in the land. It is for these reasons that Mandela and other designers of the operations of the ANC got arrested in 1963. They were tried for treason. Mandela was sentenced for life imprisonment on Robben Island in June 1964 together with seven other colleagues. However, ANC did not die because one of its leaders, Oliver Tambo, managed to escape arrest and went in exile from where he coordinated the activities of the ANC. Nevertheless, Mandela's prominent presence and his adamancy in his struggle for freedom of South Africa forced him to live as a fugitive. He lived a hard life. However, he never surrendered, but eventually got arrested and underwent many trials. As a result, he thus became a national hero.

During the establishment of the movement, Mandela went around within Africa to seek for financial support from the willing states. The movement required arms to use against the government officers. Many nations including the democratic Republic of Congo supported the mission of ANC. Addis Ababa offered military training to the ANC soldiers Mandela being among them. This resulted to South Africa invading several African states that were thought to be supporting the ANC activities. The moment Mandela

came back from his tour he was arrested. He had no opportunity to interact with his colleagues.

The White government tried many tactics to suppress the liberation movements completely to no avail (Walker, E: p49). Detention of the political leaders did not help. They employed the services of the assassins and bombers to destroy the ANC completely to no avail. As Mandela comments in the book, the spirit of South Africans to see equality was unperturbed.

Resistance grew more and more. As the government tightened its measures against the ANC, rebellion became stronger and stronger. The law of apartheid persisted throughout the years that Mandela was in prison. Many people died. Properties were destroyed in the hands of the police. Women were raped and children were mistreated. However, the struggle continued.

Mandela and his colleagues faced many trials (Walker, E: p73). The best that came as a result of all these trials was more strength for the struggle for the freedom. Mandela and his colleagues got hardened instead of losing hope.

They became more motivated instead of giving up. The trials were nonetheless challenging and lasted for a long time. The government was doing all it could to silence Mandela and his colleagues but to no avail. Many charges were presented by the prosecution to have them imprisoned but due to lack of evidence, they amounted to nothing serious. However, prisoners would get jailed for minor charges in some instances. The only significant trial that had a great impact in the lives of Mandela and his colleagues was the one that was held in Rivonia. This trial followed the arrest after Mandela had orchestrated the formation of the famous group MK

(Spear of the Nation) from ANC. The group would sabotage all the activities of the government. Consequently, Mandela and his colleagues were accused of treason and were sentenced for life imprisonment.

It can be said that Mandela didn't actually choose to be a political activist. He rather found himself willingly to be an activist in the ANC Party. This party was composed of members of all colors and races. The party held a belief that it was only political equality that could bring apartheid to an end in South Africa. It is important to state that Mandela was a very resolute person. He had put all his determination in the liberation of his country from the racial segregation rule. In 1961, he said that he had only one choice in his heart. His choice was never to live South Africa. He also stated that he would never surrender in his quest for the freedom of South Africa (Cory, G: p39). This was a strong message. This same message is echoed in the entire book. It is this resolution that made him rise to the limelight.

Mandela was arrested and charged two times. He was convicted during the two events. However, unlike in the first time, in the second time he was sentenced to a lifetime imprisonment during the Rivonia Trail. Mandela and other convicts were taken to Robben Island where they were to serve their sentence (Meredith, M: p85). While there, they became the world's most famous political prisoners. It was here that the star of Mandela shined bright. There were more and more demonstrations to force the government to release him from the prison. The more the government refused to heed to the public, the worse the situation became. Mandela and his colleagues continued their fight against racism while inside the prison. In a twist of

things, Mandela and colleagues manage to make the prison their place of advancing their knowledge and techniques.

Incidentally, Robben Island Prison became like a learning place because it became a school where political activists got to learn many things (Mandela, N: p86). For instance, they were able to learn their political ambitions and aims from each other. It is the place where all their misconceptions were subject to a radical change. Nelson Mandela got an opportunity to inform the rest what ANC stood for. He corrected the notion that others had about the ANC party being a Communist Party.

Many things continued to happen while Mandela and his colleagues were in prison. More importantly, police started to arrest prominent ANC leaders. Many of them managed to escape and left their country for exile. In the meantime, the MK movement continued its sabotage activities and the number of armed struggle victims was gradually increasing. Many died while others suffered injuries. In the 70s there was a rebellion emerging from youths (Ross, R: p78). This time it was championed by the angry revolutionary youths. This coincided with the emergence of the Liberation Movements across the Continent in general. South Africa was in a ' burning' state.

Before his release, Mandela devised a new leadership technique. He thought that political non-militant approach would be the best as the ultimate solution for the crisis that the country faced. He initiated meetings with other political leaders in the prison with him and laid down groundwork for the

future contacts. He realized that he needed to negotiate with all other leaders in the formation of the strong and inclusive government (Ross, R: p99).

The economic situation of South Africa during the time of the book was dire. As described in the book, there was extensive stay-away from work as many Blacks boycotted work. This meant that there were no workers in the markets and in the industries. The Whites depended on the Blacks for labor. Consequently, the strikes that persisted in 1960s resulted in enormous economic break down. There were no workers available in the fields. Shops were closed down. Mines were also left without laborers. Hospitals did not function as well. The impact of the strikes on the economy was huge.

In addition, during the strikes and demonstrations, a lot of properties were destroyed. Houses were burnt down in the market places. This situation worsened the economic situation. Vehicles could not move from place to place to transport products for sale in the market as they did normally. There was fear everywhere and nobody dared do any activity that could put their lives at risk. Apparently, many vehicles were destroyed. Roads were not spared.

Due to the bad situation in South Africa, the UN had put trade sanctions on the nation (Walker, E: p97). This meant that South Africa could not participate in any trading relationships with any country composing the United Nations. Consequently, the economy of South Africa went down more deeply. As described in the book, the times became hard for the native

people. Even the Whites felt the impact of the economic crisis. In addition, due to increasing social unrest, other members of the international business community withdrew its investments in South Africa. The European Union members, Japan and the United States imposed sanctions on South Africa too. These nations banned new investments in South Africa and banned exports from South Africa.

Mandela was concerned about the public opinion of the country (Walker, E; p98). Many nations including the US voiced their concern with the state of South Africa. In addition, the Security Council called for an immediate end of the turmoil in the country. These nations supported the goals that Mandela and ANC had for the country. They stated that equality should be incorporated in the governance of the country. Many more countries became concerned with the state of affairs in the country following the Sharpeville massacre

The National Party made a few amendments in their laws. However, these amendments did not interest the international community. They did not clarify the necessity for the equality in the governance. They did not provide for equal representation of all the communities in the government. In the meantime, the ANC party had got into a controversy for some time. It wanted to engage into negotiations with the government. Mandela decided to seek public opinion on the issue especially from the international perspective. Consequently, the party entered into the negotiations. The results of these negotiations were the release of all the political prisoners and putting to an end all the sanctions that had been imposed on some

political parties. Also, there was a requirement for the government to amend some of its laws and regulations. It is then that Mandela was released together with others. Consequently, the state of emergency was lifted (Eades, L M: p94).

Despite being free, Mandela did not feel like he was free. He could not perceive any freedom. He did not have freedom to choose a neighborhood to live in. He did not have freedom to take his grandchildren to the school of his choice. He had no freedom to vote. He also did not have any freedom to nominate himself for election. To Mandela, these restrictions amounted to a lack of freedom. Racism was still rife.

As a result, Mandela's political struggle took a new direction. There was violence and extreme bloodshed (Ross, R: p87). The international pressure on the ANC increased. However, the ANC did not back down nor disclaim their core principles that culminated to the setting of the date for the new election in which Mandela was a nominated candidate. The elections were done in 1994. South Nelson Mandela won the elections. This was the first democratic election held in South Africa in its history. As the president, Mandela issued a work agenda to the people of South Africa. First of all, he asked them not to expect a luxurious life but to work hard for the better of the country. Laws were changed to fit the new structure of Freedom Charter. That was the core message of the ANC. It was aimed at uniting all the people in the country. However, there are instances of lack of equal rights and opportunities. Political discriminations are also evident.

Mandela suffered during his 'Walk to Freedom'. He suffered from imprisonment, trials, segregation, and isolation and deprived of a dignified life. Like Mandela, every person struggling to make things better, sufferings became inevitable. In his book, Mandela explains how he had to deal with inner conflicts for years. He wondered each day whether he had made the right choice in choosing to fight for the country at the expense of his family. He highlights his inability to attend his daughter's wedding. He was not present when his mother died. He felt pain when he realized that his daughters had grown without him. However, upon his return to them, he was not only present as their father, but the father of the entire nation (Mandela, N: 102).

Mandela's fight for freedom was not an easy journey. It made him a fugitive, other time a vagabond with no home or family. He lived a desperate life though he was a man who could be enjoying his life with his family. Nonetheless, he fought without relenting until the ultimate achievement of the freedom for the people of South Africa. He states that he cherished his freedom, but he cherished the freedom of all the people even more. Even though Mandela spent 27 years in prison, he never lost his dignity. In any case, his fame rose markedly. He confronted every challenge without fear. He never surrendered to despair. Mandela demonstrated great courage that he shared with other great people in the world. He stated in one of his famous speeches that courage was not absence of fear but the triumph over it. In this statement, he lived to its letter. He triumphed over his fear and the fruits were the liberation of South Africa.

There are lessons that the world learnt from the effects of racial discrimination that plagued South Africa in 1960s. The Sharpeville massacre sensitized the world on the perils associated without apartheid. The UN passed a resolution to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination in 1965. These declarations were supported by many governments in the world. When the UN put economic sanctions in the 1960s because of the state of the nation, it was to show the world that it did not support the apartheid regime that was propagated by the National Party governing the country. The National Party was composed of the Whites only.

In view of the surrounding circumstances described in the book, it is clear that Mandela deserved the recognition that he got. Serving 27 years in prison and yet finding it easy to forgive the White regime was truly emotive. Not many leaders could have done such an act. Many of them would have opted for retaliation and revenge. However, unlike others, Mandela taught the world the hardest lesson; that forgiveness was a necessity for peaceful coexistence. War does not win happiness, it only brings more sadness. The story of Mandela can be summarized in a few words as the story of a great leader who came from African continent. It is an emotive, compelling and uplifting story. It is a story of an epic life characterized with hardship, resilience and ultimate triumph. The language used is simple to be understood by any reader. The story is simplified to accommodate all levels of readers. The context is very clear. It is a story told in such clarity and eloquence of a born leader.

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