

Reflection on nelson's mandela biography

[Literature](#), [Autobiography](#)



Nelson Mandela has earned a place among the world's greatest leaders of the 20th century by his struggle against oppression and apartheid as well as his leading role in steering his country from minority rule to democracy. He is often ranked together with some world great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King jr. among others.

His contribution to the social and political freedom of his country is nothing short of exemplary. His great sacrifice in the face of personal danger has inspired millions of people worldwide. He has demonstrated that staying focused on a goal and never losing sight of it is the only way of achieving greatness. This paper critically examines the life and times of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela highlighting some of the examples of his contribution to the rise of his country and followers.

Biographical Information

Nelson Mandela was born in 1918. His father Henry Mandela was a cultural chief and his mother was the third wife to the older Mandela. He started school at the age of seven at the Wesleyan mission school and later Clarkbury Boarding Institute. He studied BA at the Fort Hare University where he met his friend and colleague Oliver Tambo (Johns et al, 19). After fleeing from his royal home where he had been brought up, he went to Johannesburg where he continued his BA studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Thereafter he joined the University of Witwatersrand where he studied law and left in 1942 after completing his degree.

Nelson Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1944 and after the 1948 victory of the Minority National Party, he led the ANC defiance campaign against the apartheid that segregated alongside racial lines especially against the Africans and coloreds (M Meredith, & Martin, 26). In 1956 to 1961, Mandela was tried for treason but was acquitted. This freedom was short lived because Mandela had started agitating for a military arm of the ANC and co-founded Umkhomto We Sizwe (spear of the nation) abbreviated MK. As the leader of this arm of ANC, Mandela coordinated a sabotage campaign that was aimed at the military as well as government targets. Consequently he was arrested and sentenced for five years in prison.

In 1963, together with other leaders of Umkhomto We Sizwe, Mandela was brought to trial for an attempt to overthrow the government by violent means. He was sentenced for life. This was the beginning of twenty seven long years as a prisoner. In 1985, President P. W. Botha extended an offer of freedom from prison on condition that Mandela renounce armed struggle.

However, Mandela turned down the offer releasing a statement that received much media coverage internationally. He was released unconditionally five years later by President Frederick. W. De Klerk. In 1991, Mandela was overwhelmingly elected the president of the ANC and his old friend Oliver Tambo became the National Organizing Chairperson (M Meredith & Martin, 21).

The events that followed the Mandela release and his consequent rise as the president of ANC marked a major social and political transformation in South Africa that culminated in the 1994 democratic general election that saw Mandela become the first black South African president. In his five years as president Mandela adopted policy of reconciliation and negotiation that made him a most popular political figure internationally. He has won over 100 awards and is thus one of the most celebrated icons in the world today.

However, his under his leadership the ANC through the Umkhomto We Sizwe and in its efforts to bring about changes in the society committed human rights violations (Sparks & Allister, 48). This fact Mandela conceded and apologized. Additionally, his reign as president has been criticized as having failed to effectively address the problem of HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Mandela's Contribution

From an early age, Mandela became aware of the social and political imbalances that existed in his country. He developed a keen interest in assessing ways in which he could contribute to bringing about changes in the society. He had a desire to rid society of the inequalities that characterized the apartheid rule. When he joined the ANC in 1944, his desire was to confront the apartheid policies of racial segregation a task that he undertook with zeal and consistence.

During these days his contribution in creating public awareness of the evils of apartheid was significant. He prepared the people for the struggle that took a long time to bear fruits. Mandela has become a political and social

model because of his undying faith as well as enduring challenges without compromising personal integrity. He for a long time represented the face of struggle against inequality not only in South Africa but also in the world.

His contribution to education stems from his early realization that education was essential in creating a more knowledgeable society that would embrace change and seek opportunities that a free society could offer. Although he left Fort Hare University after only two years, his desire to continue with education was so great and so he joined the University of South Africa and later on the University of Witwatersrand. Later on during his years in prison, he continually encouraged his fellow prisoners to continue with their formal schooling. After he became president he used his position to raise funds for building schools in rural areas and was quoted as saying “ education is the key for the future” (Sparks et al, 40). His prison block became known as the Mandela University.

Although Nelson Mandela had many reasons to be bitter and vengeful his ideal of justice for all, the people in South Africa was a light on his path and guided his thoughts and actions. This way, he was able to contribute to the democracy in South Africa. His struggle against oppression and against the system that made the African people slaves in their own country was instrumental in the achievement of freedom. When freedom was offered to him on condition that he forsake the ideals for which he lived by, Mandela releasing a statement through his daughter that said

“ What freedom am I being offered while the organization of the people remains banned? Only free people can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts” (Nelson Mandela as quoted in Johns et al 33)

His uncompromising stance became a source of hope and inspiration to his people because they saw his courage and was inspired.

Mandela's contribution to the transition from minority rule to democracy is probably one of his most outstanding deeds in the world today. His gospel of peace and reconciliation reverberates in all his messages and has earned him the title of international statesman as well as making him the recipient of 1993 Nobel Peace Prize together with F. W De Klerk. Mandela's belief on conflict resolution have served an important role in uniting South Africa at the time of need and has given the country a sense of identity. This can be seen in the way Mandela's speech after the assassination of Chris Hani[1] prevented the blood shed that was eminent. Mandela appealed for calm in a speech that is widely quoted internationally.

“ Tonight I am reaching out to every single South African, black and white, from the very depths of my being. A white man, full of prejudice and hate, came to our country and committed a deed so foul that our whole nation now teeters on the brink of disaster. A white woman, of Afrikaner origin, risked her life so that we may know, and bring to justice, this assassin. The cold-blooded murder of Chris Hani has sent shock waves throughout the country and the world. ...Now is the time for all South Africans to stand

together against those who, from any quarter, wish to destroy what Chris Hani gave his life for – the freedom of all of us". (Nelson Mandela, 54)

Mandela the Leader

One of the leadership qualities that are exemplified by the life and times of Nelson Mandela is sacrifice. His lengthy stay at prison where he was away from his family demonstrates the fact that his struggle was not focused on the individual but on the nation. The quality of being able to remain focused even in the face of death distinguishes Mandela the man from many leaders in the world today. He has remained steadfast to his ideals and to his people in his entire life.

Mandela has through out his life demonstrated a myriad of leadership qualities including ability to listen effectively. Ability to bring together people with different opinions, open mindedness, understanding cultural differences, humility and modesty, ability to motivate and unfailing faith in a free society.

These qualities were put to test when Mandela was faced with the challenge of leading the country through the transition period from apartheid to democracy. His charismatic and pleasant personality, quick wit and ability to empathize with the suffering have endeared him to the world. Mandela leaves behind a powerful legacy and a model of what exemplary leadership is all about.

His devotion to the liberation of the people of South Africa both black and white has born fruits because today South Africa has made significant strides

towards democracy and is a beacon of hope in the entire of Africa. It can be said that Mandela has achieved his dream of a democratic and free society, an ideal for which he lived and was prepared to die. He now stands tall as an advocate of international reconciliation.

His faults and the faults of his government have been pointed out as the failure to provide leadership in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS (Mandela, Nelson, 263). Additionally, the armed wing of ANC has been accused of human rights violations. On both counts, Mandela is quick to accept the mistakes and take responsibility for the actions. In the latter case, Mandela advised his fellow ANC leaders against denial of those accusations. He undertook different projects aimed at addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS after his term as president of South Africa in order to make up for the failure of his government (Mandela, Nelson, 301).

Conclusion

For a man who spent twenty seven years in prison for his ideals of a democratic and free society, Mandela comes out as a powerful and dedicated leader who is hard to fault. He began his struggle as a freedom fighter who became impatient with peaceful means of achieving peace. However, through his prison life he was transformed and became an advocate for peace through negotiation. As he states in his autobiography, he learnt to bear with his enemies and not bearing grudges for any lengthy period of time. He was very successful as a leader especially in guiding his country through transition. Although he had every reason to be vengeful and

bitter, he embraced principles of reconciliation and negotiations after his release from freedom as well as in his term as President of South Africa.

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[1] Chris Hani was a senior leader in the African National Congress and was assassinated on 10th April 1993 outside his home.