

STUDY MATERIAL – 03

'THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH' : PART 1- SUMMARY

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Birth and Parentage

- It's time for some family tree action. Gandhi introduces us to some relatives and then goes into detail about his father and mother.
- Pops was a political official and served as prime minister for Rajkot and for Vankaner, two cities in India. He had no education but lots of life experience and was truthful and incorruptible. Sounds like a pretty good influence on our autobiography's hero.
- Ma was saintly and deeply religious. She would fast often, was informed about matters of government, and had good common sense.
- Gandhi is born on October 2, 1869, and spends his childhood in Porbandar, a city in India.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Childhood

- At age 7, Gandhi is a mediocre student but doesn't lie—he's a regular George Washington with a cherry tree.
- A teacher once tries to get him to cheat on a spelling exercise conducted for an inspector, and our autobiography's hero doesn't even realize what the teacher was trying to get him to do.
- Gandhi comes across two plays by chance. The devotion of the main character in *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka* for his parents inspires the youth.
- The honesty of Harishchandra in the eponymous play also inspires him. Devotion and honesty—yup, that's Gandhi.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Child Marriage

- Gandhi now tells us about his child marriage. He's married at 13. Wait, what? Yes, seriously.
- His parents choose his wife, and hers him. He says there are no moral arguments in favor of such young marriages, but that's the tradition.
- The adults decide to marry Gandhi, one of his brothers, and a cousin of his all at the same time in order to save money on the celebration.
- Gandhi's father is injured on the way to the wedding, but the teenager forgets grief in the excitement of the marriage.
- He enjoys the celebration, having no idea that as an adult, he will criticize the institution of child marriage.
- The newlyweds spend a nervous night together, which Gandhi doesn't describe. But he tells us he right away assumes authority over her as her husband.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Playing the Husband

- Discussing his marriage, Gandhi says the passion for truth is innate in him and put being faithless to his wife out of the question.
- But faithfulness has a dark side because, as a young husband, he wants to force Kasturbai, his wife, to also be faithful.
- She is, but that doesn't stop him from being jealous all the time and trying to control her.
- During the first five years of their marriage—from age 13 to 18—the two aren't allowed to stay together much.
- When they are together, Gandhi's lust distracts him from more productive things, such as teaching her to read and write.
- As an adult, he blames her lack of education on his lust.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

At the High School

- In high school, Gandhi guards his character carefully, becoming tearful at the least bit of bad behavior on his part.
- He dislikes sports, but he develops the habit of taking long walks, which he now says keeps him in good health.
- An innocent mistake of Gandhi's leads the headmaster to wrongly punish the teenager for lying. The incident leads him to see that a man of truth has to be a man of care as well. High standards, yo.
- Gandhi relates his experience learning Sanskrit in high school and advises readers that Indian higher education should include several languages. *¡Sí!*

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

A Tragedy

- Going against the warnings of his wife and family, Gandhi befriends a young man with a bad reputation whom he seeks to reform. Uh-oh.
- The friend reveals to him that many people secretly eat meat in violation of customs and religion. The friend also says eating meat makes the English occupiers physically bigger and stronger than the Indians.
- Under his friend's bad influence and seeking strength for himself and his countrymen so they may someday throw off English rule, Gandhi sets a date with his friend to eat meat—which Gandhi refers to as an experiment.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

A Tragedy (Contd.)

- The day arrives. Gandhi and his friend sneak off to eat meat. The goat meat makes Gandhi sick. That night, he dreams of a live goat bleating inside him, and he feels full of remorse.
- But he continues to eat with the friend and lies to his family about it. The lying gets to him, though, so he stops eating meat and never takes it up again for the rest of his life.

- The friend also takes Gandhi to a brothel. But, our autobiography-ing hero is too nervous to sleep with the sex worker. He says going at all, though, counts as a moral failing.
- Finally, the friend stokes Gandhi's jealousy about his wife.
- Gandhi's suspicions about her are not rooted out until later in life, he says, when he comes to understand *ahimsa*, which literally means non-violence.
- As an adult, when he thinks back to his days with this friend, he deplores his devotion to him.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Stealing and Atonement

- Gandhi and a relative begin smoking cigarettes. Man, he's going downhill fast. He even steals to support the habit.
- The lack of independence from their elders leads them to decide to commit suicide. But they chicken out.
- Somehow, the abandoned scheme gets them to quit smoking and stealing. As an adult, Gandhi doesn't smoke. (Good call, Gandhi.)
- Gandhi does steal one more time, at age 15. But he feels bad about it and decides to confess to his father in a letter.
- His father reads the confession and cries. The teenager sees the forgiveness and interprets it as a lesson in *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

My Father's Death and My Double Shame

- His father becomes very ill when the youth is 16. Gandhi takes to his bedside and loves to care for him, but he slips away to his bedroom at night due to lust for his wife, as he calls it.
- This practice of leaving his father for the bedroom at night leads Gandhi to not be present when his father dies.
- Recounting the story, Gandhi still feels ashamed about this and blames lust.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

Glimpses of Religion

- Between ages 6 and 16, Gandhi picks up religion from his surroundings, not school.
- A family servant teaches him to recite the *Ramanama* to ward off fear. He maintains the practice as an adult.
- Jain monks and his father's Muslim and Parsi friends come to the family home often and talk with Gandhi's father about religion.
- That breeds in the youth tolerance for different faiths.
- Gandhi finds he dislikes Christianity, however, because a convert to it began to eat beef, drink liquor, and changed his clothes to European dress.
- Gandhi has many questions about religion but finds no answers in the *Manusmriti* except for the conviction that morality is the basis of things and that truth is the substance of morality.
- Finally, Gandhi comes across a Gujarati stanza that advises returning good for evil. That becomes a guiding principle for him, and he decides to begin numerous experiments with it.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

Preparation for England

- Gandhi graduates in 1887. A family friend advises that he should be sent to England so he may study to become a lawyer and come back with a chance of becoming an official like his father.
- He visits people for advice and help regarding the trip. His mother worries if he goes to England, he'll be influenced to begin eating meat and drinking liquor.
- Gandhi promises his mother he won't do those things, and a monk has him vow not to touch wine, woman, or meat. Now, he may journey to Bombay en route to England.

Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

Outcaste

- Gandhi's fellow caste members believe he shouldn't go to England because they fear he'll violate their religion by eating and drinking like a European...and even just by sailing abroad there in the first place.
- Gandhi tries to reason with them, but to no avail. They kick him out of the caste.
- Gandhi leaves for England all the same.

Part 1, Chapter 13 Summary

In London at Last

- Gandhi is shy on the sea voyage; he's not comfortable speaking English. A passenger tells him he must eat meat in England, but Gandhi tells him about his vow.
- Once arrived, he's very distressed at night, crying and missing home and his mother. But he knows returning to India is out of the question.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Summary

My Choice

- Gandhi is now staying with a family. His friend in the family tries over and over to get him to eat meat. He refuses, eating what little he can. Aww.
- He searches for a vegetarian restaurant in London and finally finds one.
- There, he buys a book on vegetarianism.
- It inspires him to become a vegetarian by choice, not just because of his vow.

Part 1, Chapter 15 Summary

Playing the English Gentleman

- Gandhi's host tries to convert him to meat eating one last time. The effort fails, but Gandhi decides to put him at ease by becoming an English gentleman.
- Gandhi gets new clothes and tries to learn dancing, the violin, the piano, elocution, and other skills.
- But soon, he realizes he won't spend his life in England and that he should instead focus on his studies.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Summary

Changes

- Gandhi implements strict frugality into his lifestyle and develops the lifelong habit of managing money well.
- He also decides to study more and to prepare for the London Matriculation. This sees him studying Latin and other subjects.
- He says these changes harmonized his inward and outward life and made him more truthful.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Summary

Experiments in Dietetics

- Time for our autobiography's hero to conduct some experiments in dieting. Aiming for economy and hygiene, he tries many things, such as living only on dairy.
- The question of what exactly constitutes meat—eggs? fish? —weighs on him, and he decides to accept his mother's interpretation.
- This leads him to consider the nature of vows and pledges. He says they should be interpreted as the party administering them intends, or, if two interpretations are possible, as the weaker party means it to be.
- He joins a vegetarian society and starts a local vegetarian club. This gives him experience in running organizations

Part 1, Chapter 18 Summary

Shyness My Shield

- A debate comes up in the Vegetarian Society over whether the organization is only to promote vegetarianism or other morals as well.
- Gandhi sides with the losing view that the group should stick to its mandate of only being about vegetarianism.
- During this debate, and at other times as well, Gandhi has difficulty making public speeches.
- He says this shyness serves him well, however, because it makes him a man of few words.
- That makes him more truthful, he says, because he picks his words carefully.

Part 1, Chapter 19 Summary

The Canker of Untruth

- Child marriages are unknown in England, so Indian youths there feel ashamed to admit they're married.
- Gandhi, a married father, pretends to be a bachelor but is protected by his shyness.
- Confronted by a menu entirely in French, Gandhi is aided by an old lady who helps him order. They become friends, and she begins introducing him to young ladies, probably thinking he should get married.
- Gandhi writes her a letter confessing the truth of his marriage. Amused, she forgives him for the confusion, and the two remain friends.

Part 1, Chapter 20 Summary

Acquaintance with Religions

- Gandhi finds himself studying religious texts, among them the *Gita*.
- He meets a Christian who tells him that the Bible doesn't require meat eating or drinking alcohol. Gandhi reads the Bible at this person's insistence and likes the New Testament, especially the passages about altruism in the Sermon on the Mount.
- He observes a debate between a clergyman and an atheist, and it increases his dislike of atheism.

Part 1, Chapter 21 Summary

Nirbal ke bala Rama

- On a trip, Gandhi and a friend stay in a house with women whom he says are not very scrupulous about their morals.
- The friend begins to flirt with one woman who is hosting them. Gandhi flees to his bedroom, feeling pressured by lust but remembering his vow to his mother.
- Gandhi says the phrase "God saved me" has deep meaning and that worship and prayer are real and everything else is unreal. He says prayer cleanses a person of passions.

Part 1, Chapter 22 Summary

Narayan Hemchandra

- Our hero meets Narayan Hemchandra, a writer and translator.
- Gandhi teaches him English, and they go to visit a famous official.
- Hemchandra wears ragged clothes, has great simplicity, and strives to learn languages and travel the world. He's a curious cat all right.

Part 1, Chapter 23 Summary

The Great Exhibition

- Gandhi goes to the Exhibition at Paris in 1890. He enjoys the cathedrals and considers the Eiffel Tower a toy or trinket for adults. *Au revoir*, chapter 23.

Part 1, Chapter 24 Summary

"Called"—But Then?

- What about his law studies? A lot of that actually consists of attending social dinners. But he does read a great deal, including Roman Law in Latin.
- He passes his examination, gets called to the bar on June 10, 1891, and is enrolled in the High Court the next day. Congrats, Gandhi. On the 12th, he sails home.

Part 1, Chapter 25 Summary

My Helplessness

- Gandhi has been taught to read laws, but not how to *practice* law. He's intimidated by a famous lawyer who is said to roar like a lion in the courts.
- He goes to others for advice. Frederick Pincutt tells him to read the history of India and two books on physiognomy.
- Gandhi doesn't find the physiognomy books helpful, but he is reassured by Pincutt's advice that the young man doesn't need to roar like a lion in the courts and that honesty and industry are enough to make a person a good lawyer.
