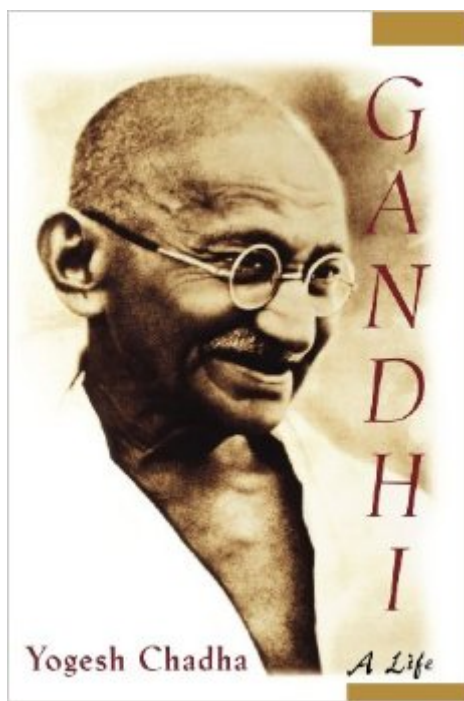


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GANDHI: A Life



Synopsis

The Internationally Acclaimed Biography of One of History's Monumental Figures Gandhi: A Life The first biography of this important figure in over twenty years, Gandhi: A Life rescues the man from the myth, revealing the transformation of an ordinary, timid young man into a leader whose stand against a mighty empire brought millions together. "Until another Gandhi scholar comes along who digs deeper and can write more movingly, Gandhi scholarship will be well served by Chadha's effort." —The Washington Post Book World "It is well-balanced, even-handed, and, like its subject, inspiring." —Kirkus Reviews "An engaging work worthy of a wide audience." —Library Journal "A sober, sensible, and notably fair account of this most quicksilver of personalities — far from uncritical — But on the whole he is approving, even reverential. Usually he convinces one that this is justified." —Daily Telegraph (London) "The first major biography to appear for twenty years — [with] a depth and authority which others have lacked." —The Independent (London)

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Customer Reviews

After having read mahatma gandhi's autobiography which does not reach towards the later part of his life, i was keen on getting a complete account of his life. I must say that Chadha's book proved immensely satisfying and educative in this regard. The book is very thoroughly researched and its best attribute is that in it Chadha tries to stick to facts and takes up the role of the narrator rather than put in his own personal views. Invariably biographies make a picture of the person as the biographer chooses to think about him or her, but in reading this book one gets the feeling that

Chadha has tried to consciously hold back his opinions and remain historically accurate. He leaves the judging to the reader. All the same the book is definitely not dull and dreary. It vividly brings out the great man's character along with his faults. It shows Gandhi as human and definitely not a saint. It is when we realise this that we truly understand the greatness of the mahatma and the courage, strength of character and truth on which his life, movement and teachings were based. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who wishes to learn about the mahatma.

I purchased this book because I wanted to learn more about Gandhi and his influence, given that he's been regarded as the father of modern India, and was an inspiration for Martin Luther King Jr. Gandhi: A Life is a densely packed book; I wouldn't say it's hard reading, but there's a huge amount of material here. Unfortunately, I felt disappointed by it since it does a good job of presenting the basic facts of Gandhi's life (carefully cross-checked for accuracy, the author assures us in his foreword), but goes no further than that. As such, it will teach the reader much about what Gandhi did and said, and about the state of India circa 1890-1948, but it will provide little insight into the man himself. As one would expect, facts about Gandhi's later life are more readily available than about his earlier life. Despite this, the first third of the book feels the most rewarding, as several formative events provide profound insight into the man, including his vegetarianism and policies of non-violence. His gradual development from a shy young lawyer with stage fright into the powerful and dogmatic leader is carefully shown through his experiences in South Africa. His return to India prior to 1920 and his ascension to the top of Indian politics, though, is not as successful. Just when we most need explanations and interpretations of Gandhi's behavior, Chadha fails us. Gandhi suddenly ceases to talk on Mondays, for some reason. He acquires what is essentially a cult of personality, but his own personality seems basically unlikeable, and the personalities of those around him are left sketchy. Chadha introduces supporting characters with a few paragraphs when they appear, but then takes as a given that their behavior will be understood. While I can understand the desire to deconstruct the mythology around a figure such as Gandhi, it seems to me that the author does us a disservice in not probing deeper into the figure, even if he does have to work with some less-well-documented material. Such interpretation seems to me to be an essential part of being a biographer. The book concludes on its lowest note, a three-chapter description of the plot (if it can be called that) leading to Gandhi's assassination. Filled with characters who never met Gandhi, and whose motivations were not particularly profound, it adds almost nothing to our understanding of Gandhi, those around him, or his nation. It is, ultimately, a digression and an anticlimax. If pure facts about the life of Gandhi are what you're looking for, then this is the book for

you. If you're looking for interpretation or better understanding of who he was and why, then I recommend you look elsewhere.

After having read Gandhi's "My experiments with truth" I found Chadha's book very helpful about the context surrounding Gandhi. This book almost reads like a Hypertext document in that Mr. Chadha takes you to the source of Gandhi's many inspirations e.g. Tolstoy. So a reader doesn't have to go to library and find Tolstoy, Ruskin, etc. Chadha also throws light on many persons who were followers of Gandhi in South Africa. Chadha also quotes from many friends and adversaries of Gandhi in South Africa. So this book gives lots of insight into Gandhi's past. This is indeed a very well researched book.

This is the second biography of Gandhi that I have read in the last few years. Yogesh Chada's book being much longer than the previous biography that I read, I hoped to get more detail and more insight about that extraordinary man named Gandhi. This much praise I can give to Chada: he did his homework. Gandhi: a Life is a non-stop list of facts; overpowering, insightful, and boring. It sounds harsh for me to say that, because this book is an excellent account of Gandhi's life in terms of facts, but it simply has no narrative flow. And after 500 pages it becomes overwhelming. For so much reading, I took away far less from it than I would have supposed. This works very well if one is researching Gandhi and needs the details of certain events and episodes in India's independence movement, but the dryness of it all makes it hard to remember and appreciate the story that is being told. Gandhi may be the subject of this book, but it is objective in the extreme; removed of life, sapped of interest. But it is factual, and if that is what you are looking for in a biography, then you have hit pay dirt with Chada's work. And for that I cannot completely be upset with this book. It is effective in certain ways, but not in all the ways I was looking for.

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