

Gandhi. By David Arnold. (Harlow, England, London and New York: Pearson Education Unlimited, 2001. Pp v + 266. Contents, preface, conclusion, glossary, guide to further reading, chronology, maps, index.)

Gandhi is a very concise book covering the life of Mohandes Karamchand Gandhi. David Arnold, a Professor of South Asian History at the School of Oriental and African studies, attempts to separate Gandhi's life into manageable sections, as well as examine many of the contradictions that permeated Gandhi's life. Arnold's work is part of a larger series called Profiles in Power, which examines other notable individuals who made indelible marks on history.

The book begins with look into the class system that established order within India. Arnold uses his analysis of the caste system to frame Gandhi's rise. As the son of a *diwan*, or chief minister, Gandhi would have been able to lead a very nice life. During these first chapters, the author describes the religious life and beliefs that Gandhi experienced as a child. Each piece of the puzzle reveals a little more of the processes that helped shape Gandhi into a *mahatma*. Gandhi's secular education also shaped Gandhi's views and Arnold ends his *Diwan's* Son chapter with a discourse on Gandhi's time in London.

Arnold places great emphasis on Gandhi's time in South Africa. He calls the twenty-one years spent there "a decisive phase in his [Gandhi's] career." (44) Racism and hardships showed Indians no safe quarter in South Africa. Gandhi was among the upper class of both Indian and, as a lawyer, even British society, but he saw the inequality that his people faced and decided he must do something. Arnold's use of Gandhi's personal letters, paired with other scholarly works on the matter, reveal that the times and events in South Africa galvanized Gandhi into the man of change that became legend.

The author captures the South African governments disgust with Gandhi with J.C. Smuts remark, “The saint has left our shores, I sincerely hope forever.” (73) Arnold then compares how much time the young Gandhi spent abroad to how much time he spent in India after 1915, with the latter years of Gandhi’s life spent mostly in India. There is also a revelation: even though Gandhi received the title of “saint” not long after returning to India, he was slightly out-of-touch with modern Indian policies.

Gandhi was not out-of-touch with the peasantry, however. Official orders, changes in the Raj’s power, and numerous other governmental issues did not hinder the following that Gandhi gathered. Essential to the movement of Indian nationalism and a sense of working together was Gandhi’s peasant satyarahis. These “truth-forces” or struggles for truth called many people’s attention to Gandhi’s cause.

Part of Gandhi’s power came from non-violent resistance, mainly civil disobedience. Arnold shows how Gandhi’s involvement in a Mill Workers dispute and strike in Amedabad widened his swath of involvement from peasants to working class and beyond. The struggle to maintain and control public agitation while maintaining a non-violent approach was something that Arnold contributes to Gandhi being revered as a holy man, semi-divine, or even an avatar.

Modern nationalistic causes were not Gandhi’s aim when he first returned to Indian, argues Arnold. Even though Gandhi believed in the right to expression in the mother tongue, he still had to prove his “nationalist credentials” when he tried to mobilize opposition to British rule in India. The subcontinent was poised on the edge of change, marched to the precipice by Gandhi himself, all that was needed was a catalyst. The First World War influences many countries nationalistic cries. For Gandhi the war

came at a perfect time. Arnold believes that due to the huge number of men and supplies sent to the European campaign from India, gave India a stronger footing in dealings with London that it ever had before.

With the increase of political clout, the need for Gandhi to spearhead the movement may waned a bit. In fact, Gandhi lamented that he no longer could control forces, and that no one listened to him anymore. Arnold calls many of the end results of the 1920s “anticlimactic” for Gandhi. He writes of Gandhi’s imprisonment, his days as a “half-naked fakir,” and his principal fasts with included chart. The Inter-war years saw Gandhi traveling back to London to attend the Round Table Conference, change in India was as impotent and problematic during this time as it was anywhere. Arnold delves into Gandhi’s religion as a explanation of Gandhi’s eventual assassination. According to Arnold, Gandhi still saw himself as a devout Hindu, but was influenced greatly by Christianity. Influx from a western religion while trying to replace western rule did not sit well with some Indians, and it added to Gandhi’s complexity.

Gandhi and all his contradictions may have been the perfect man to usher change into the Indian system. Unlike other colonies, India had its own hierarchy and millions of people followed it. Hindu’s elaborate notions of status, purity, and pollution, were stark contrasts to the rational of London. Gandhi sought power from more than just political or religious orders, in order to change India, Arnold uncovers that Gandhi had to change the Jewel in Britain’s crown one facet at a time.

“Gandhi’s death allowed him to be both Christian saint and an upholder of Hindu tradition,” Arnold closes with the suggestion that Gandhi’s true power came after his death. Only then could the world settle on the legacy of Gandhi. Only then could these

contradictions of his life be seen not as incompatible, but as two sides of the same coin. Arnold ends with a long list of things that Gandhi is celebrated for, concluding that Gandhi was all of these things, but “none of them in isolation does true justice to the complexity of the man and the contradictions of his life and legacy.” (235)

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