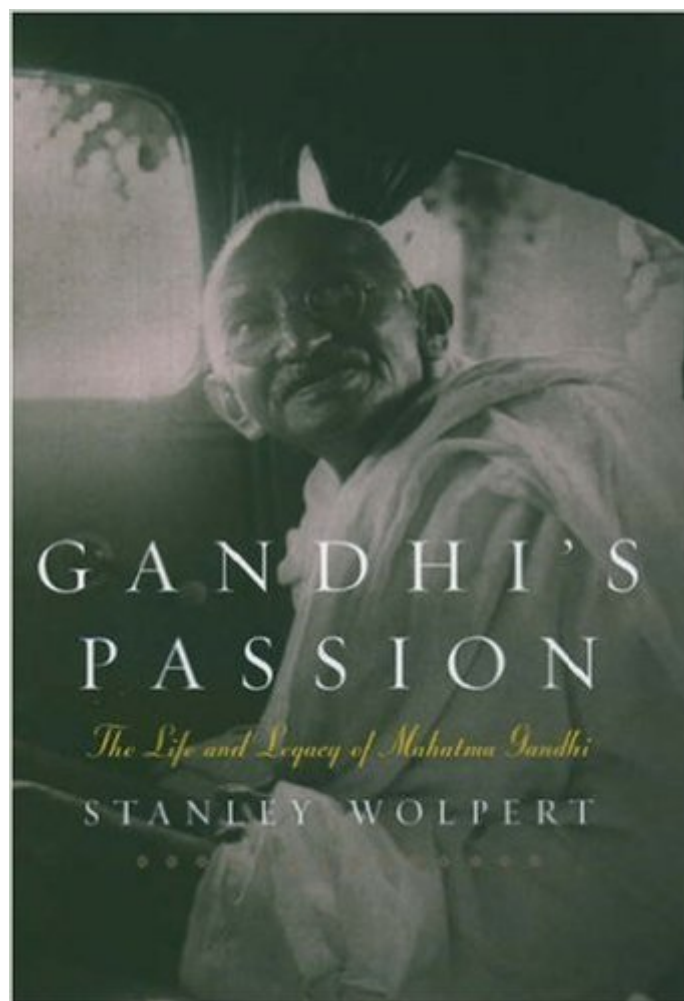


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Gandhi's Passion: The Life And Legacy Of Mahatma Gandhi



Synopsis

Mahatma Gandhi, through his indomitable will and selfless determination, transformed himself into a model of courage and integrity for India's people to emulate in their nonviolent struggle for political power. More than half a century after his death, Gandhi continues to inspire millions throughout the world. Yet modern India seems to have abandoned much of his nonviolent vision, joining the nuclear arms race. Inspired by recent events in India, Stanley Wolpert offers this subtle and profound biography of India's "Great Soul." Wolpert compellingly chronicles the life of Mahatma Gandhi from his early days as a child of privilege to his humble rise to power and his assassination at the hands of a man of his own faith. This trajectory, like that of Christ, was the result of Gandhi's passion: his conscious courting of suffering as the means of reaching divine truth. From his early campaigns to end discrimination in South Africa to his leadership of a people's revolution to end the British imperial domination of India, Gandhi emerges as a man of inner conflicts conquered by his political genius and moral vision. Early influenced by nonviolent teachings in Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Buddhism, he came to insist on the primacy of love for one's adversary in any conflict as the invincible power for change. He fearlessly courted suffering and imprisonment in pursuit of his moral vision. The sweet reasonableness of his "Great Soul," combined with the steel of his unyielding opposition to intolerance and oppression, would inspire India like no leader since the Buddha--creating a legacy that would encourage Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and other global leaders to demand a better world through peaceful civil disobedience. Gandhi's Passion is a remarkable tribute by a historian at the height of his narrative and analytical powers. Wolpert boldly considers Gandhi the man, rather than the living god depicted by his disciples. He thus provides an unprecedented representation of Gandhi's passionate personality and the profound complexities that compelled his actions and brought freedom to India.

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Customer Reviews

Overwhelmed by the hundreds of books already available scrutinizing, criticizing and or eulogizing the controversial life of Gandhi, Wolpert's dilemma when he thought of writing a book about Gandhi was what would he write that others have not written yet. Nevertheless, after so much introspection he has decided to write this book tempted by the significance of Gandhi's teachings in the wake of India's nuclear test of 1998. But, unfortunately, his attempt is falling woefully short of providing any new information on the life of Gandhi or is unable to challenge a critical mind on the life of one of the great and yet controversial figures of the 20th century. In his work, Wolpert portrays a dutiful Gandhi of esteemed ideas and vision. But by often succumbing to Gandhi's saintly aura, Wolpert is unable to provide valuable insight from a historian's perspective on the circumstances and events leading to the spiritual development of Gandhi that we saw in him starting in South Africa, a topic that not many historians (may be except Judith Brown) tried their hands on and succeeded. Without any analysis of that sort, his work is nothing but yet another addition to the mundane category of political biography of Gandhi. Contrary to the popular belief that Gandhi is the culprit for the partition, Wolpert has given many proofs from history for how the partition could not have been avoided despite Gandhi's many overtures and thus was absolving Gandhi completely from the crime. While that should be the right thing to do, Wolpert is also pointing out Gandhi's reluctance to listen to C.R. Das's (one of Gandhi's staunch supporters) candid and most plausible plea to Gandhi to accept Jinnah's proposal and work towards a peaceful partition.

Good biographies, especially the scholarly kind, invite us to reconstruct or at least revise our estimate of the subject of the biography. Stanley Wolpert, an eminent scholar of Indian history, who acquired quite a bit of notoriety in India by publishing what now sounds like an innocuous novel about Gandhi called *Nine Hours to Rama* (1966), has now revisited the Mahatma by writing a biography which is neither hagiographical like so many memoirs and the Government of India financed movie of Gandhi's life by Attenborough nor dismissive like the estimate of the man and his message offered by the likes of Arthur Koestler. Wolpert looks at Gandhi as Hindu Indians would wish to see him, as a yogi whose accomplishments as a prophet of nonviolent revolution changed the world's ways of looking at the discourse of power. The habit of automatically associating

Gandhi with saintliness has kept most writers about him bound to the notion of glorifying him or glossing over his weaknesses which were many and substantial. Now fifty-three years after his death, being in possession of greater knowledge about the man, his strength, and many unwise and vain activities, we find it tempting, urged by Wolpertâ™s narrative to speculate on how things might have turned out for India in particular and the world in general had the Mahatma (the great souled one) possessed greater self-awareness or his nature were less paradoxical, the contradictions in his character preventing him from gaining the kind of influence on India, perhaps making it imperative for his country to adhere to most of his unquestionably valid basic moral principles.

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