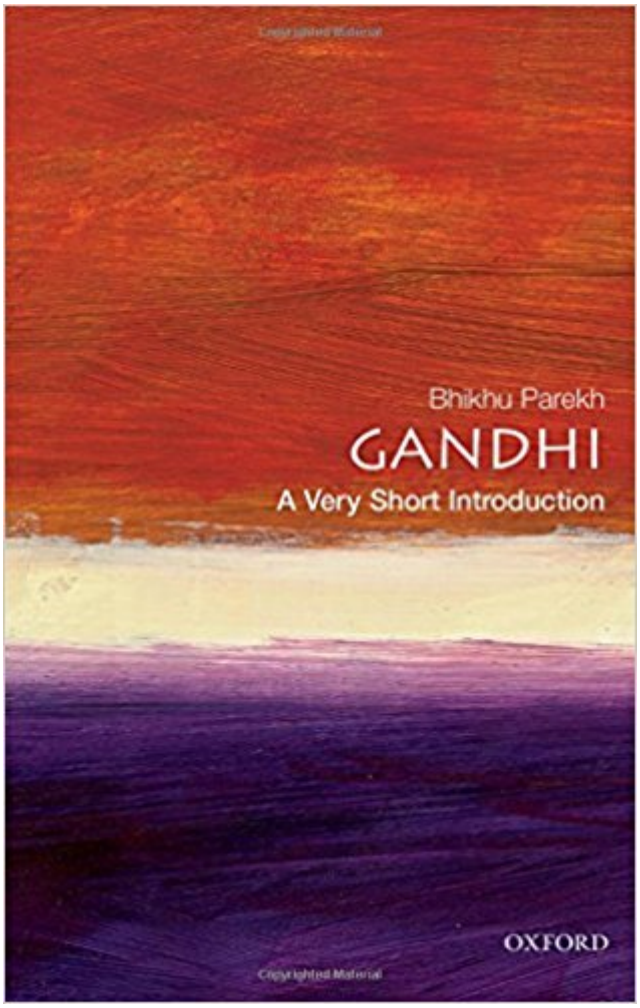
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Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



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Synopsis

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was one of the few men in history to fight simultaneously on moral, religious, political, social, economic, and cultural fronts. During his time as a lawyer in South Africa he developed his strategy of non-violence: the idea of opposing unjust laws by non-violent protest. He led the Indian National Congress party in three major campaigns against British rule, each culminating in his arrest.In Gandhi, a short introduction to Gandhi's life and thought, Bhikhu Parekh outlines both Gandhi's major philosophical insights and the limitations of his thought. Written with extensive access to Gandhi's writings in Indian languages to which most commentators have little or no access, Parekh looks at Gandhi's cosmocentric anthropology, his spiritual view of politics, and his theories of oppression, non-violent action, and active citizenship. He also considers how the success of Gandhi's principles were limited by his lack of coherent theories of evil, and of state and power. Gandhi's view of man as ascetic allows no room for expressions of the cultural, artistic, or intellectual. Furthermore, he was so hostile to modern civilization that he was unable to appreciate its complex dialectic or offer a meaningful narrative.Nevertheless, Gandhi's life and thought had an enormous impact on the Indian nation, and he continues to be widely revered--known before and after his assassination as Mahatma, the Great Soul.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An excellent intro for first-time western students of Gandhi and India."--Prakash Chenjen, Southern

Oregon University

Bhikhu Parekh is Professor of Political Theory in the Department of Politics at the University of Hull.

This book is commendable, in part because it refuses to view Gandhi through the gauze-covered lenses of romanticism and cheap sentiment. Parekh is short and direct, but instead of concentrating on the Mahatma's biography and political career it highlights Gandhi's place as a thinker -- as a political theorist, social critic, philosopher of religion, and cultural visionary. Parekh does not indulge in hagiography: his exposition is fair and broadly sympathetic, yet never blind to criticisms that might be plausibly leveled at Gandhi as an intellectual figure. The result is often disarming, in two distinct ways. First, Gandhi does not always come across as an infallible oracle of sacred insight. And second, when his arguments and analyses seem most convincing, they are often anything but congenial to the received socio-political wisdom of advanced modernity.Gandhi's limitations are displayed most clearly in Parekh's account of his religious thinking. The religious environment of Gandhi's childhood was, as Parekh puts it, "eclectic:" his mother was associated with the syncretistic Pranami sect of Hinduism, which venerated the Koran as a holy book along with Vedantic scripture, and his father, a chief administrator of the court of Porbandar, freely associated with Jains and Christians. This cosmopolitan religious background inclined Gandhi toward a position that contemporary theologians have dubbed "religious pluralism" ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • the conviction that all religions are valid paths toward transcendence and the holy, differing only in the vocabulary in which the sacred order is described and the perspective from which it is appropriated. Thus, as Parekh describes it, "For Gandhi, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions were all based upon specific conceptions of a personal God. They involved distinct forms of prayer, worship, rituals, and beliefs about his nature and relation to the world, and were all "sectarian." The "pure" or "true" religion lay beyond them, and had nothing to do with organization, belief, and rituals. It consisted in nothing more and nothing less than the belief that the universe was pervaded and governed by the cosmic power, and the decision to organize one's entire life accordingly. It involved living in the constant, intimate, and unmediated presence of the cosmic spirit, and represented the purest form of spirituality." (p. 32)

This book is an illustrative introduction to the life, ideas and influence of Gandhi. Parekh's analysis is balanced, objective and well substantiated by Gandhi's own writings. A solid work for those interested in the Indian political figure.

This was one of the best Very Short Introductions I've read. The author did an excellent job distilling Gandhis life and philosophy to around 140 pages. I discovered that I need to read more books about or by Gandhi. I agree with approximately 75% of his political and "spiritual" views. His views on human dignity, non-violence, non-compulsion, and the importance of agency all strike a chord with me.

It's a very short introduction to Gandhi. Not knowing much about the man I think this book did a good job of teaching the basics.

This book provides a great overview of Ghandi's ideals and logic. It also balances world views and conflicts and Ghandi's presumed purpose.

Bought the book for college, but ended up being interested nonetheless.

everyone should read this

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