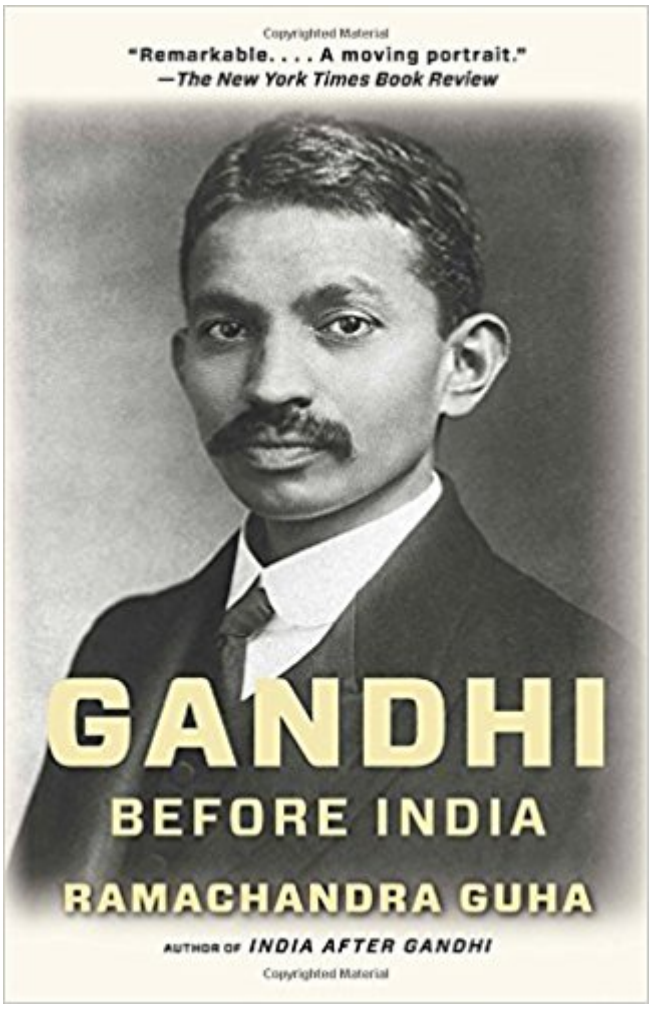
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Gandhi Before India



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Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book and a San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the YearA revelatory work of biography, Gandhi Before India is an illuminating portrait of the life, the work, and the historical context of one of the most abidingly influentialÃ¢â ¬â •and controversialÃ¢â ¬â •men in modern history. From GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s birth in 1869, through his upbringing in Gujarat and his years as a student in London, to his two decades as a lawyer and community organizer in South Africa, acclaimed author Ramachandra Guha brings the past to light with extraordinary grace and clarity. Drawing on a wealth of newly uncovered materials, Gandhi Before India strips away the myths that have sprung up around the Mahatma to uncover the remarkable story of how Gandhi came of age abroad, and how he set the stage for his return to India.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review For many Westerners, the mention of Gandhi evokes stock images of the frail, scantily dressed Indian spouting tomes about peace and brotherhood while leading a noble, nonviolent struggle for Indian independence. Relatively few realize that Gandhi spent decades living outside of the subcontinent, in Britain and especially in South Africa. Guha, who has taught courses on Gandhi at Stanford and Yale, covers his life from his birth in British India, in 1869, up to his departure from South Africa and return to India in 1915. There is much that is familiar here, including GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s asceticism, his passion for justice, and his gift for savvy political maneuvering. But GuhaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s account is full of surprises. In Britain, as a young barrister, Gandhi moved freely with a liberal and racially diverse crowd and proudly viewed himself as a

Ã¢â ¬Å“citizen of the EmpireÃ¢â ¬Â• while dressing stylishly. In South Africa, the rigid racial divisions shocked him, and it was here that he developed the tactics that he employed so effectively later in India. This is an outstanding opening volume of a planned two-volume biography of one of the most widely revered but often misunderstood figures in world history. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ã¢â ¬Å“Remarkable. . . . [A] moving portrait.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“Guha is a brilliant historian who combines the gift of a storyteller, the discipline of an academic and the critical ability of seeing Gandhi as a fascinating human being, by not placing him on a pedestal. . . . [He] has re-created the past by connecting scattered dots . . . to weave a rich tapestry.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •San Francisco ChronicleÃ¢â ¬Å“Striking. . . . Guha ably shows, for all that Gandhi influenced events in South Africa, it was he who experienced the greater change.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Economist Ã¢â ¬Å“Deeply contextualized, dexterously researched, and judiciously written, this deserves to become the landmark biography of the early Gandhi.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Maya Jasanoff, New RepublicÃ¢â ¬Å“Fascinating. . . . A biography with a remarkable ear for the resonances of GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s work and timeÃ¢â ¬â •for the fan-mail and hate-mail; for overheard disagreements with family and colleagues; for his exchanges with political acquaintances, including his enemies. . . . As exhaustively researched a biography of the African Gandhi as we will have for some time.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Independent (London) Ã¢â ¬Å“[A] magisterial study. . . . Guha summarizes the traits of GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s character and the stages during the first half of his life that prepared him for the much more difficult journey he would undertake once he returned to India. . . . I was rewarded beyond all of my expectations [by Gandhi Before India].Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Charles R. Larson, Counterpunch Ã¢â ¬Å“Substantial enough to be comprehensive, yet concise enough to be approachable by the general reader. . . . Sharp, insightful, balanced and impeccably researched.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Alex von Tunzelmann, The Times (London) Ã¢â ¬Å“A work of vivid social history as well as biography. . . . One of the surprises in Gandhi Before India is just how much fresh material it contains. Guha has a gift for tracking down obscure letters and newspaper reports and patching them together to make history come alive.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Patrick French, The Guardian (London) Ã¢â ¬Å“Fascinating. . . . [Gandhi Before India] reveals how an impossibly shy young man, who donned top hat and tails as a student at Inner Temple, transformed himself into ChurchillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Ã¢â ¬Ëœhalf-naked fakir,Ã¢â ¬â„¢ dedicated to his spinning wheel while simultaneously challenging the might of the Empire.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Sunday Times (London) Ã¢â ¬Å“The portrait offered in historian Ramachandra

GuhaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s biography is of Gandhi as a human being, not just a hero.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Financial Times Ã¢â ¬Å“Gandhi Before India should be required reading for the student of contemporary affairs. . . . GuhaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s carefully rendered observations about class, religion, and ethnicityÃ¢â ¬â •how they divide people and how they can be bridged by common concerns and simple decencyÃ¢â ¬â •are the heart of this book. . . . Remarkable.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Christian Science Monitor Ã¢â ¬Å“A magisterial history. . . . In Ramachandra Guha, a great man has found a great biographer, a wise, persistent and elegant historian who has done justice to perhaps his nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s greatest story. . . . One senses, in the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s approach, something of GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s own intensity and rigour. . . . [The] book never ceases to inform and intrigue.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Sydney Morning Herald Ã¢â ¬Å“What sets [Gandhi Before India] apart from other recent biographies . . . is GuhaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s resolutely non-scurrilous perspective. . . . What emerges in the end, with the slow magic of a film being developed in an old fashioned dark room, is a sharp picture of the intellectual growth of a remarkable man.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Hindustan Times (India) Ã¢â ¬Å“Many will come to this biography wanting to know more about Gandhi himself. . . . Guha relates all this wonderfully. His book is clearly a labour of love, though not of uncritical infatuation. What distinguishes it is the breadth of the contextÃ¢â ¬â •Indian, British and South African. Guha marshals his material sensitively and empathetically in order to give shape, colour and depth to the life of this saint-like figure.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Bernard Porter, The Literary Review Ã¢â ¬Å“Excellent and exhaustive. . . . Guha has done heroic work in reconstructing this period of GandhiÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life ... Gandhi emerges here as a fascinatingly complicated and contradictory figure . . . rich and absorbing, it will doubtless serve as the fundamental portrait of Gandhi for many years to come.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Sunday Business Post (Ireland) Ã¢â ¬Å“Guha is IndiaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s best-known historian, who marshals his wide scholarship in contemporary and modern history with a raconteurÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lucid felicity.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •DNA Mumbai

As a long time fan of the writer and having picked up this book in Berkeley, I was pleased to read that the book was born in Ram Guha’s mind when teaching a course on Gandhi at Berkeley in 1998. The title of this book is not just a play on words after his famous book India After Gandhi, it truly is 550 pages of the largely unknown story of Gandhi starting at birth (1869) and before returning to India after 20 years in South Africa (1894-1914).With a rigor that only Ram Guha is capable of, he arduously reconstructs the story of Gandhi’s first 45 years from contemporary records of his years in Porbandar, Rajkot, Bombay, London, Durban and Johannesburg. While

earlier works are a collection of writings by Gandhi or secondary works thereof, this book also referred letters written by others to Gandhi, papers of Gandhi's friends and associates in South Africa, records of governments of India, South Africa and England, and archived newspapers and publications of the time. It is a miracle that all these sources were stitched so perfectly in chronology and diligently edited to re-create a deeply personal story spanning his early childhood, relationship with his parents, relationship with Muslim friends from school and then abroad, relationships with his wife and children, relationships with Christians, Jews and Parsis in his life in London and South Africa, besides Hindus from different states, speaking different languages and from different socio-economic conditions. For a pious Indian bania, his work with women was far ahead of his time as well.As an upper-caste Hindu male in the 19th century, you can see his world view shift after finding himself among an oppressed minority in South Africa, discovering the power of his moral character and values, evolving into a leader of the Asiatics (including Chinese), while inspiring white South Africans alike, successfully experimenting with the ideas of passive resistance and satyagraha in the face of strong colonial leadership, before returning to India as "Mahatma" and contributing to the freedom struggle in a decisive way with the same ideas. As an Indian, especially as an immigrant, I could relate to the power of these foundation years - more than half his life - in shaping a personality that we know to be the legend who is practically immortal with what he stands for. Some of the most unknown stories of one of the most popular men on the planet. You must read it and get inspired with ideas that remain as relevant as ever in the 21st century.

What an interesting title. It's the "before" that at once catches the eye. While India and Gandhi are inextricably linked, this book derives its principal interest from how South Africa prepared Gandhi for his future role. As Jon Stewart remarked right away when he introduced author Ramachandra Guha on his show, Gandhi is truly a "global" figure in the highest sense of the phrase even in this era of mass celebrities where he stands taller than pretty much everyone else to date. Indeed, whatever may be the future of humanity, and, however and whoever writes it, Gandhi will always be an essential player in that account. In simple, clear, enthusiastic prose Guha charts the evolution of Gandhi from a modest young lawyer with unremarkable speaking skills, one who had yet to find his real mÃƒÂ©tier, to someone who became self-charged with a mission of fighting injustice in his own unique and now immediately, famously, recognizable way. In time to come, he was able to hold the attention of millions when he spoke. From what I gather reading this book, in the second half of the nineteenth century, racism in South Africa was raw and unspeakably vile. How on earth a shy young man coming from a subcontinent away, ostensibly to practice law on behalf of a small Indian

community in its diaspora, stepped up to a huge challenge involving the very foundations of justice as applicable to all (if it is to be just) while still maintaining decency, dignity, kindliness vis-a-vis the aggressive Boers and British is nothing short of revolutionary - in the best sense of that word. The thing is Guha (if I understand correctly) suggests that nothing in Gandhi's background probably predisposed him naturally to fight the battles that he met/chose. As the book points out, the "trader caste" from which Gandhi originated were just the kind of folks who abhorred rocking the boat. Profits rather than a desire for justice probably controlled their raison d'ÃƒÆ'Ã Â²tre. Guha's challenge is to show how from such a conservative seed bed arose this innovative "warrior" of the spirit and I believe this book does that very well. One critical facet that emerges from the book is that Gandhi possessed not only an abundance of "moral"/ethical courage but, surprisingly, a great deal of "physical" courage as well despite his apparent lack of physical prowess. Thus it is that Gandhi will always stand for me as the perfect antidote to the biggest bullies of his age. In researching source materials for this book, Guha took advantage of newly arrived access to archives from post-apartheid South Africa. That was a great move on his part. I leave with the perception that the greatest of persons are not necessarily born that way. Like the rest of us they too have to swim against the current to make something of themselves. But unlike most of us, time and circumstance evoke an amazing, out of scale, and yet benevolent response from them. Read, you have nothing to lose and much to admire!

I just completed reading this book. Another excellently researched, well written book by this author, though this is a bit of a slow read.I have read several books on Gandhi, with Gandhi (like history of Indian independence), watched the movie. But Gandhi always seemed either one dimensional or a superman. This is the first book that provides depth to Gandhi, at least made him more human to me.It does not diminish what Gandhi accomplished, it adds to it. Gandhi's personality grows in the book. One understands why Gandhi did what he did and how he did it. It has only increased my respect for the man. Many people criticize Gandhi and his methods, his leadership & philosophy. At time this has included me. However I think I have come to the conclusion that this criticism was/is unwarranted. Gandhi was not like Hitler or Stalin who imposed their philosophy on others through fear and repression. He instead showed an alternative way and asked people to follow. He did not stop others from leading. I think India and the world is better off thanks to this. And history shows that his methods take time to get results but overall the society progresses leaving behind little scars, which makes for a better humane world.

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