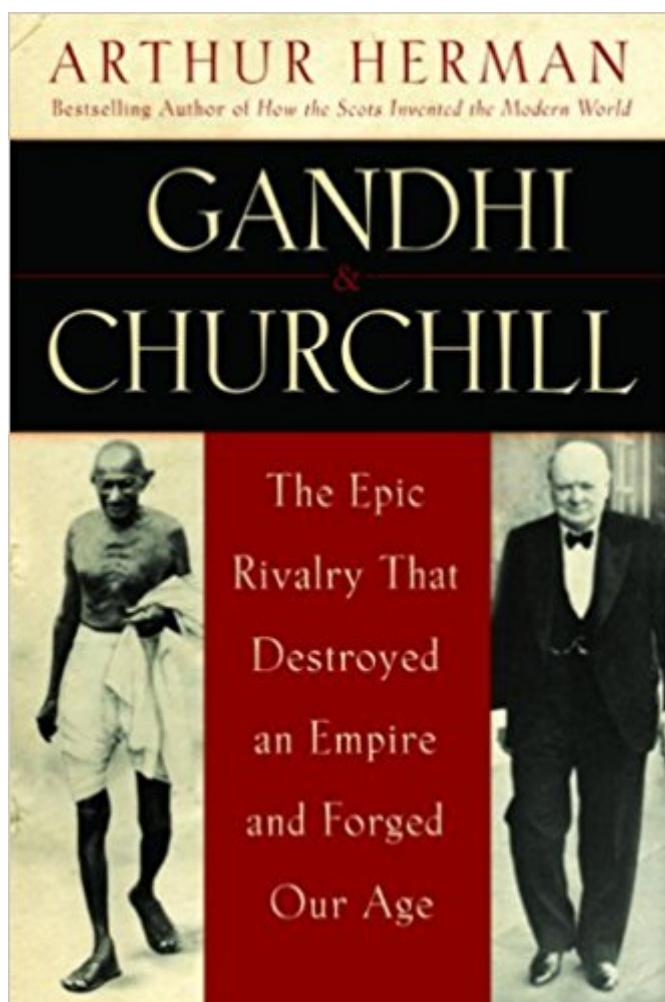


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Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed An Empire And Forged Our Age



Synopsis

In this fascinating and meticulously researched book, bestselling historian Arthur Herman sheds new light on two of the most universally recognizable icons of the twentieth century, and reveals how their forty-year rivalry sealed the fate of India and the British Empire. They were born worlds apart: Winston Churchill to Britain's most glamorous aristocratic family, Mohandas Gandhi to a pious middle-class household in a provincial town in India. Yet Arthur Herman reveals how their lives and careers became intertwined as the twentieth century unfolded. Both men would go on to lead their nations through harrowing trials and two world wars and become locked in a fierce contest of wills that would decide the fate of countries, continents, and ultimately an empire. Gandhi & Churchill reveals how both men were more alike than different, and yet became bitter enemies over the future of India, a land of 250 million people with 147 languages and dialects and 15 distinct religions the jewel in the crown of Britain's overseas empire for 200 years. Over the course of a long career, Churchill would do whatever was necessary to ensure that India remain British including a fateful redrawing of the entire map of the Middle East and even risking his alliance with the United States during World War Two. Mohandas Gandhi, by contrast, would dedicate his life to India's liberation, defy death and imprisonment, and create an entirely new kind of political movement: satyagraha, or civil disobedience. His campaigns of nonviolence in defiance of Churchill and the British, including his famous Salt March, would become the blueprint not only for the independence of India but for the civil rights movement in the U.S. and struggles for freedom across the world. Now master storyteller Arthur Herman cuts through the legends and myths about these two powerful, charismatic figures and reveals their flaws as well as their strengths. The result is a sweeping epic of empire and insurrection, war and political intrigue, with a fascinating supporting cast, including General Kitchener, Rabindranath Tagore, Franklin Roosevelt, Lord Mountbatten, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. It is also a brilliant narrative parable of two men whose great successes were always haunted by personal failure, and whose final moments of triumph were overshadowed by the loss of what they held most dear. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This is NOT a fast read, if you really think about the sweep of history as you have been taught in over-simplified stories of colonialism. The writer leads you in a journey that challenges your views on many fronts. As I read this focus on India, and extension to Burma, it reminded me of the modern Vietnam quotes recently that point out that American War in Vietnam was nothing compared to the centuries long history of domination by neighboring countries like China and Japan. Indian culture was centuries older than British culture and yet the Darwinian curse of natural selection misinterpreted as a "right to rule" is dissected slowly and carefully as we get to chapter on Ghandi. The Gujarat region comments led me off to study that region as the special project of the new leader of India, today, Modi. But that's another story. History proves that all things are temporary and prejudices are no basis for governance. Recently Modi visited Pakistan and shook hands with their leader to great dismay of the military in both countries who have been fighting for years. We will see what the next steps bring. The Indus River Valley thirty centuries before Ghandi's birth the Harrapans traded with Indian Ocean neighbors. That's my next deep study perhaps, the Harrapans. Hopefully at age 80 I will live long enough to see India and Pakistan stop killing each other over Kashmir, and the extremist-fundamentalists stop using religion to justify rape and terrorism. Brexit shrinks the old British Empire even further. Lessons abound around us. "Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Defined Our Age."

A fascinating portrait of two men, who because they were facing in opposite directions, could not

work together for the benefit of India and/or the U.K. Churchill lived long enough to see the results of his failed efforts to keep India tied to England. Gandhi did not live long enough to see the total destruction of his dream to return India to a collection of agrarian villages. Herman does a good job of illustrating that Gandhi and Churchill were cut from the same cloth, however unlikely it sounds. Both were willful, stubborn to the point of arrogance and totally dedicated to their opposing visions for India's future. Ultimately, both were defeated and one has to wonder how it might have worked out had they been able to pull together in the same direction.

As an Indophile, I was naturally drawn to the book. I thought I knew a lot, but I learnt a lot more. I was fascinated by lives two flawed persons growing up worlds apart crossed. One, a war hero, driven by ambition at any cost while the other striving for independence for his people through peace. My take home: Ultimately, once we have had a few more big wars over the course of next few decades and centuries, the apostle of peace shall still be remembered fondly, while the other is likely to be a footnote on a history page.

A very fine dual biography. Those wishing to learn more about the founding of modern India and Pakistan and the withering away of the British Raj are encouraged to buy and read this book. Churchill and Gandhi are giant personalities of the first half of the last century, with their political and moral acts still echoing in today's world. Dr. Herman writes with authority, balance and insight while explaining the motivations of these two inspirational leaders--both having serious flaws and blind spots--who were so at odds for several decades over the future of the British Empire and, more specifically, the fate of its subjects on the subcontinent.

This book reveals the history of Gandhi and Churchill and their unique historical roles without 'taking sides.' There were many competing cultural and political dimensions to these unique men who were at the center of the ferment in their very different planets.

So much ink has been spilled in writing about the independence of India and the interaction between the two great legends Gandhi and Churchill. Yet this new book by Arthur Herman adds still more details to an old and familiar story with interesting revelations. Rather than reviewing the lengthy details one should perhaps focus on a brief comparison of the two legends especially now that the dust has long settled and the fog cleared making the view clearer and more objective. No feature is perhaps more contrasting than the backgrounds from which the two leaders emerged.

Churchill came from a well known family in an upper British society. In his biography he bemoans the little attention his father gave him and the love he was deprived of, an issue which affected his adulthood. To add insult to injury, his mother was more concerned about her love affairs than about her son and saw it best to leave Winston in boarding schools for most of his childhood. By contrast, Gandhi grew up in a simple, middle class, loving family who cared much about his education to send him to Britain for his law degree. Unfortunately, he was always conscious about his backward and his impoverished people (how despicable my people are!), especially in view of the highly civilised British communities. From the start it was clear that both men were devoted to improving the conditions and prestige of their own people. But both had serious stumbling blocks. Churchill, who was obsessed with the art of war ('...I know how miserable it can be but I love every second of it') started his career being rash and impetuous. He rushed his government into trying to save Antwerp and later, to defend the Dardanelles against the Germans, with heavy losses and failures in both. The name Churchill quickly became a bad word. As for Gandhi, contrary to general belief, he spent 75% of his career trying to improve the lot of the Indian minorities in South Africa. He tried to change the laws, to organise his people and to show them how to strike, but with little success. Frustrated, many people turned against him. At one point he was even physically attacked by his people. The government imprisoned him for inciting trouble. What kind of rapport did these two leaders have with their people? The fact is that they both had mixed results. Gandhi, back home from Africa, was much misunderstood by his native Indians. On one hand, he loved the British Empire and took pride in belonging to it. On the other, he hated its arrogance and reluctance to expedite India's independence. His own people were confused and many could not trust him. Even his political philosophy concerning non-cooperation and peaceful resistance was not well received or understood. Churchill, after his initial disasters, also had a tough time trying to regain the trust of his party. But his tough stand against Indian independence for forty long years ('Britain is nothing without India') was not diminished causing much frustrations to his people and to Gandhi himself. The author focuses also on the two leaders' personal differences even in their eating habits. Churchill loved his Cuban cigars, whiskies with his meaty foods, a combination which Gandhi steered away from following his mother's advice to avoid English food ('they eat animal meat' !!). He stayed a vegetarian all his life. But, at home Churchill cherished his wife, Clementine, and remained in close touch with her throughout his career. Gandhi was not as lucky; he fought frequently with his wife, Kasturbai, once even having to send her back to her father for a while (recalling the old popular song: Angelico! Mama got to take you back, and teach you all the things you lack...). The fact that she was illiterate must have stood in the way of their attempt at harmony

until later in their lives. If good temperament is crucial to charisma, how did these two leaders fair on this score? For Churchill, his rash attitude got him in trouble early on, especially at the Dardanelles where Britain lost over 400,000 lives following his plans and suggestions. Having been disgraced he was avoided and remained inactive for some time. Later on he was known for his excitement and aggressiveness in handling matters as well as in his attachment to tobacco and alcohol. (Later during WWII he regained his popularity thanks to his elocution as when he promised his people nothing but ' blood, sweat and tears'). Vis-a-vis Gandhi, he was disrespectful calling him names and urging his destruction. To him Gandhi was nobody and his actions no more than an act. Gandhi himself was mostly calm, collected and peaceful in spite of his frequent imprisonments. He stayed away from all forms of excesses. His main concerns were to rid India of the clutches of the British and to pacify and unite his own people. He excelled in the former task through peaceful resistance but stumbled on the latter due to entrenched, tenacious, racial differences which led later to his assassination. Sadly, he did not live to witness his country's full independence for which he fought so hard. The author should be commended on his extensive research and his engaging style. Fuad R. Qubein Oct. 2016

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