



Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptations of Violence

Faisal Devji

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While in his own time Gandhi was recognised by friends and enemies alike as a major political force, not only in India but the world at large, in our own day the Mahatma has been reduced to an idealist by his supporters as much as by his detractors. Whether this idealism is regarded as sincere or hypocritical, Gandhi has also become a resolutely Indian figure today, capable only of inspiring others in the most general way. Yet the Mahatma always considered his practices as being realistic and even mundane in the ease of their application, while at the same time holding them to possess universal potential. India for him was only the site of an experiment in non-violence. Given that Gandhi had become during his own lifetime one of the world's most famous and admired men, indeed one of the earliest figures who enjoyed such global celebrity, these grandiose impressions of his mission were not out of place. This book is about the Mahatma as a political thinker, one who recognised how the quotidian reality of modern life could be radicalised to produce the most extraordinary effects. In this sense he belongs with Lenin, Hitler and Mao as one of the great revolutionary figures of our times, though his politics was of course directed along paths other than state-building. Focussing on his unsentimental engagement with the hard facts of imperial domination, fascism and civil war, this study places Gandhi at the centre of modern history, exploring the new political reality he claimed to have discovered. This was a politics the Mahatma mobilised in practices that required as much sacrifice, and even death, as those propagated by his revolutionary peers, if for very different reasons. The Impossible Indian reveals Gandhi as the hard-hitting political thinker he was and confirms the contemporary relevance of his legacy to the world at large.



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