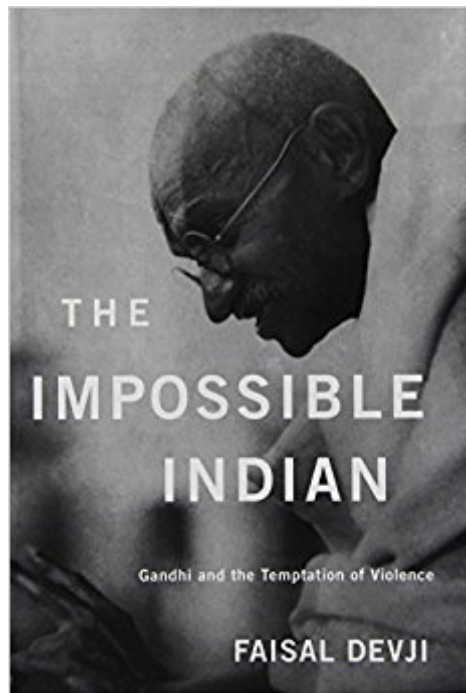


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The Impossible Indian: Gandhi And The Temptation Of Violence



Synopsis

The Impossible Indian offers a rare, fresh view of Gandhi as a hard-hitting political thinker willing to countenance the greatest violence in pursuit of a global vision that went far beyond a nationalist agenda. Revising the conventional view of the Mahatma as an isolated Indian moralist detached from the mainstream of twentieth-century politics, Faisal Devji offers a provocative new genealogy of Gandhian thought, one that is not rooted in a clichéd alternative history of spiritual India but arises from a tradition of conquest and violence in the battlefields of 1857. Focusing on his unsentimental engagement with the hard facts of imperial domination, Fascism, and civil war, Devji recasts Gandhi as a man at the center of modern history. Rejecting Western notions of the rights of man, rights which can only be bestowed by a state, Gandhi turned instead to the idea of dharma, or ethical duty, as the true source of the self's sovereignty, independent of the state. Devji demonstrates that Gandhi's dealings with violence, guided by his idea of ethical duty, were more radical than those of contemporary revolutionists. To make sense of this seemingly incongruous relationship with violence, Devji returns to Gandhi's writings and explores his engagement with issues beyond India's struggle for home rule. Devji reintroduces Gandhi to a global audience in search of leadership at a time of extraordinary strife as a thinker who understood how life's quotidian reality could be revolutionized to extraordinary effect.

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Customer Reviews

This powerful book brings out very clearly Gandhi's conceptions about the socially embedded but

solitary moral agent and about responsibility for moral action. Devji manages to tease gently out of Gandhi's writings intellectual-political positions that both surprise and enlighten the reader. The questions he asks and the propositions he puts forward are sometimes disturbing as they challenge many of the everyday assumptions of those who connect politics to the idea of rights. (Dipesh Chakrabarty, University of Chicago) Considering how much has been written about Gandhi over the years, it is impressive to read a book that presents such a fresh and insightful view of the Mahatma and his ideas. Devji effectively situates Gandhi, not as an outmoded, sentimental idealist, adrift in an anachronistic rural utopia, but as a remarkably original thinker who speaks to many of the most pressing issues of modernity and present-day politics - not least the abiding problem of violence and the place of minorities within contemporary societies. (David Arnold, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) This subtle yet polemical study presents M.K. Gandhi as the genius behind an anti-majoritarian type of mass politics which emerged in the twentieth-century but still awaits proper elaboration. Devji's highly original portrait is not always salubrious but it makes Gandhi look all the more radical, and sometimes almost like a postcolonial heir to Friedrich Nietzsche. (Leela Gandhi, University of Chicago) This remarkable book will secure Faisal Devji's reputation as the boldest historian of twentieth century political ideas of liberation and humanity. Freeing himself from both the hagiographic cant and cynical clichés, Devji has presented us with a Gandhian book about the Mahatma, embracing contradiction, forsaking easy friends and embracing obvious enemies. Devji is able to show that Gandhi sought nothing less than to erect a new sort of moral subject in India during British rule, a subject who can, even at great cost, make history as she pleases, placing the exigencies of justice, freedom, and truth securely within the search for a sovereign self, free of the tyrannies of various seductive images of the inevitability of political modernity. Neither Gandhi nor political theory will be the same again. (Arjun Appadurai) This is an account of the Mahatma as a political thinker, one who recognized how the quotidian reality of modern life could be radicalized to produce the most extraordinary effects. Devji's book reveals Gandhi to be a hard-hitting political thinker, someone willing to countenance violence to achieve his objectives; it challenges the idealistic portrayals of the Mahatma that prevail even today. (The Caravan 2012-09-01) Rarely someone manages to restrict his engagement to Gandhi's thoughts alone; and even more rarely someone manages to decipher Gandhi and make a value addition to the existing body of knowledge. The book by Faisal Devji, aptly titled *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence*, presents one such rare work and should be celebrated as a collectors' item. There is something strikingly distinct about Devji's style. He invokes, then whets the intellectual taste-buds of his readers and then takes them on a roller-coaster ride in richly sourced

complex of abstract ideas. (Swaran Singh The Hindu 2012-10-02)Historically rigorous and topical. (Aditi Saxton Tehelka 2012-10-13)Faisal Devji's The Impossible Indian is an audacious book. He approaches Gandhi counter-intuitively; instead of foregrounding Gandhi's non-violence, Devji explores what he calls 'the temptation to violence.' His earlier work on jihad and terror gives him insights into the fascination with violence as a legitimate means of politics...He shows Gandhi engaged with the question of violence inherent in Empire and fascism. Gandhi is concerned about the civil war in South Africa and the possibility of such a war starting in India. Devji convincingly argues that, for Gandhi, sovereignty and its validation lies not in the State but within the ethical self-a self rooted in dharma and engaged in moral negotiations with real and potential violence. In the course of this argument, Devji also provides a departure from Gandhi's reading of the Bhagvada Gita as a discourse on detached action. Gandhi saw the Gita as a spiritual guidebook, in the sense that it enlightened him in his quest for the moral agency that lay within. This search for a solitary moral agent committed to ethical action and duty, willing to grapple with modernity as also with violence both of the traditional structures and that of modern civilization, makes Devji's Gandhi a political philosopher whose revolutionary potential is yet to be grasped. (Tridip Suhrud The Caravan 2013-02-01)[A] rich and provocative book. (Thomas Meaney The Nation 2013-06-03)

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