

Gandhi Film Summary

Gandhi by Richard Attenborough

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Context

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest leaders in modern times. He helped India's people to gain their independence and move along a path toward equal rights for everyone. In the film, viewers see Gandhi and his life, both the good and the bad, and learn more about the real man whom so many loved and admired.

As a young man, Gandhi visited South Africa, where he discovered that anyone who was not white was treated as being inferior to the whites. He could not understand this attitude, so he strove to help the colored people of South Africa to have the same opportunities as the whites.

Eventually, Gandhi returned to his home country of India and was asked to help them win freedom from the British as well. Although India did not become one country as he hoped, many of his goals were achieved, and he always stuck to the belief that all protest should be nonviolent in nature.

Richard Attenborough has been an actor, director and producer during his long career. *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) is Attenborough's first directing endeavor, but his lifelong ambition was to direct this film, *Gandhi*. He also directed *Cry Freedom* (1992) and *Shadowlands* (1993).

Ben Kingsley is actually half of Indian descent and half English; thus, he had a good understanding of events for this role. Kingsley spent most of his time working in the theater until the great success of *Gandhi*. He has since appeared in *Bugsy* (1991), *Searching for Bobby Fischer* (1993), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Rules of Engagement* (2000) and *Oliver Twist* (2005).

Candice Bergen is widely known as a popular comedian, performing as the first female host on *Saturday Night Live* in 1975. However, *Gandhi* was an excellent serious role for her. *Carnal Knowledge* (1971) won Bergen some attention, but *Starting Over* (1975), in which she co-starred with Burt Reynolds, really brought Bergen to the spotlight. She performed on television for years in the series *Murphy Brown* while also appearing in such films as *Made in America* (1993), *Miss Congeniality* (2000) and *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002).

Martin Sheen's role in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) brought him rave reviews. Besides his exceptional performance in *Gandhi*, he also appeared successfully in *The Dead Zone* (1983), *Da* (1988) and *Catch Me If You Can* (2002).

Gandhi swept the Oscars with eight award wins: Best Actor in a Leading Role for Ben Kingsley; Best Art Direction-Set Decoration for Stuart Craig, Robert W. Laing and Michael Seirton; Best Cinematography for Billy Williams and Ronnie Taylor; Best Costume Design for John Mollo and Bhanu Athaiya; Best Director for Richard Attenborough; Best Film Editing for John Bloom; Best Picture for Richard Attenborough; and Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen for John Briley.

Summary and Analysis

Gandhi begins with a quote about how every event can't be recorded, but a man's heart can be seen through the events that are recorded. Then, the film begins on January 30, 1948. Nathuram Godse, a young man, walks through a large crowd of people going to say prayers and looks back at a rough-looking man sitting on the side of the street. When the group arrives at their destination, Gandhi comes out, helped by a young woman. Then, Godse whips out a gun and shoots Gandhi.

Gandhi dies, and viewers are then transported to a huge funeral, where thousands of people watch on either side of the road with reverence for the great man. Broadcasters begin to chronicle the great but simple life of Gandhi as he led his people to freedom. Numerous people join the procession, including a white American.

The scene changes to a train going through Southern Africa in 1893. A young Gandhi sits in a first-class car on a train and asks a young worker if he thinks about hell. Gandhi begins telling the worker about the book he's reading.

In the hall, the conductor and a white man who saw Gandhi in the car a moment before discuss how he got a ticket in South Africa. They then confront him. They do not believe that he can be an attorney because he's colored. The conductor and white man demand that he go to third class if he doesn't want to be off the train. He points out all his successes, but they throw him off at the next stop anyway.

Later, in a beautifully decorated room, Gandhi talks to several men who are British, Indian and Muslim, and they try to explain the situation to Gandhi. He has trouble believing that colored people are so mistreated, and he wants to change it. He decides to write to the press around the British Empire, and the other men realize that he'll cause a good deal of trouble.

Soon after, many people stand in a square in response to Gandhi's article. Although he expected a thousand people, there are only a few hundred. Gandhi begins to make a speech about gaining justice for the Hindu in the British Empire, specifically those in South Africa. He realizes they must do everything peacefully.

When Gandhi does not speak well, his friend Kahn takes over the speaking. After a few moments, the police burst in while the men are planning to burn the Apartheid parcel. It is government property, and an officer threatens to arrest the first person who burns one. Kahn burns the first and is arrested before Gandhi begins to burn the rest. Even when the police warn everyone again, Gandhi burns the parcels. His wife runs toward him, but the police grab her. After they beat him, he still throws the packets in the fire until he passes out.

Elsewhere, Lord Irwin's assistant tells him about Gandhi's action. At Gandhi's home, his wife bandages his face, and his children run in to see him. Gandhi then goes out to



work and is met outside his home by Charlie Andrews, a reverend from India. Charlie has heard many things about Gandhi and has come to help.

Andrews and Gandhi talk about what Christ meant by turning the other cheek. Gandhi believes that it means being willing to be beaten several times and show that you won't strike back or be turned away. As they walk along the street, three young men stop Gandhi and try to throw him off the street, but he refuses to move. They back down. Gandhi believes that the Hindus could learn a lot from Jesus. When he arrives at the office, he learns that the parcel law has been changed.

The story then turns to Judge Broomfield and reporter Vince Walker, who are discussing the situation. Walker wants to meet Gandhi. Broomfield warns that Gandhi is shrewd. Later at the river, Gandhi tells Walker that all men should live together happily. Walker asks what he should watch for in Gandhi's plans, and Gandhi says he's still trying to find an answer.

Gandhi points out that there are unjust laws, while Walker says Gandhi is a pretty small minority to take on South Africa and the British Empire. Gandhi is building a village with friends. Walker thinks he's ambitious, but Gandhi says he hopes that he's not. Walker is surprised that Gandhi helps out with the basic chores of the community.

Gandhi leaves Walker for a moment and goes inside their home; there, Gandhi explains to his wife that she should help as well, even though she will be working for the untouchables. He asks her to do it with joy or not at all. When she refuses, he tries to throw her out. She asks if he has no shame, and he sits down. He's not sure what is the matter with him, and she tells him that he's human. Finally, she agrees out of love for him to do as he asked.

Gandhi later speaks to a large crowd to talk about the new law that all Indians must now be fingerprinted, and anything other than a Christian marriage is not considered valid. His friends are impressed with his speaking skills. Everyone becomes upset with the new laws, and the men say they're willing to die to fight the law. Gandhi points out that they should never attack or kill anyone, but they will refuse to do as the police say. They know they will be put in prison, but they will keep their self-respect. Gandhi would rather give the government his dead body than his obedience. The crowd begins to cheer. Together they stand up and sing "God Save the King."

The people then begin a march carrying signs that read, "We are citizens of the Empire." Viewers learn that some of the men from a nearby mine were put in jail, and Gandhi wants them to be freed. People join them as they go on their way, and then the police drive up. Gandhi stands up to General Reginald Dyer, and the police drive away until the cavalry returns to attack a few moments later. Everyone lies down in front of the oncoming stampede, and the officers are forced to stop their horses. Gandhi is arrested, and the police leave.

At the Christian church on Sunday, Reverend Andrews speaks to his parishioners about Gandhi. Many people walk out as he begins to discuss how men who defy an unjust law



should be treated fairly. In the prison, Gandhi gets in line for his food. He talks to his friend who was already in jail. Only a few women may be out there to do the work, since everyone is being arrested. The guards then call for Gandhi.

Gandhi is brought to see General Jan Christiaan Smuts. Gandhi sees that his photograph is all over the front of the many newspapers. The general wants to have the law repealed that Gandhi has such a problem with, but he expects future Indian immigration to be stopped. Gandhi says that since immigration wasn't an issue, they fought so that it wouldn't be fair to make it an issue now that they're at an advantage. Frustrated, the general frees Gandhi, and the other prisoners will be freed in ten hours. Gandhi has no money for a cab, so Gen. Smuts has his butler loan him some money, much to Daniels' chagrin.

Next the film moves to Bombay, India in 1915. Many people are standing on a boat watching some men from the military. The rich are waiting to get off when Gandhi is applauded as he gets off the third class section of the ship. Reporters crowd around him and his wife as the crowds greet them with cheers. As they ride through the streets, thousands of people cheer for Gandhi. Sardar Patel greets him as a national hero. As they drive, Gandhi is saddened by the peasants on the street.

That afternoon at a luncheon, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Mr. Kinnoch talk to Gandhi about joining their struggle. They are concerned that he is planning to fight with the British and are annoyed by his nonviolent position. Rev. Andrews comes to Gandhi and takes him to meet Professor Gokhale, who sent him to South Africa to meet Gandhi. Gokhale wants Gandhi to quit his practice to help raise India from servitude. Gandhi points out that he knows nothing of India, but Gokhale pushes him to go find the real India so he can say what needs to be said. Gokhale believes that he can now die in peace.

Next viewers see Gandhi on his journey to find India, and he travels past the workers and the poor areas of the country. At one point, he and his friends climb atop a train to meet some poor men who travel on the top of the train. Later, Gandhi talks to several men who believe that he must continue to make an impact. As they continue on their journey, they come across some insurgents who killed an English soldier and a few poor people and derailed a train.

At a rally, Jinnah speaks about the British power, and then Gandhi is introduced. Gandhi speaks to the people about what should happen in India. In this tent, they make speeches for one another, but the people of India are untouched by these statements. They are hungry and don't want to give power to rich Indian men who will just take the place of the British. He wants all the leaders to stand with the millions who toil each day so that they can truly represent the people. His statements receive applause, but some are angry.

Gandhi talks to several wealthy men at his home and points out that the Indian men are told how to live. They have come to talk to him and learn from him. Some of them only want home rule. Gandhi wants to fight to change things rather than to punish and points



out that there are better ways to change things than using violence. The men are not convinced that Gandhi can make any type of difference.

Then, Gandhi goes to see an old man whose family is about to lose their home because the British want the rent paid in cash. Gandhi offers to do what he can. A policeman then comes and has Gandhi arrested.

Later while enjoying a game, the rich white soldiers are called to go work at a riot going on outside the prison. Meanwhile, Rev. Andrews arrives at the prison and asks to see Gandhi. Gandhi has decided to live like the poor so that he can relate to them. The soldier allows Andrews to go in to talk, and Gandhi tells him to take the assignment he was offered in Fiji. Gandhi explains that everyone needs to be sure that what they do can be done by Indians alone. Before he goes, Gandhi asks Charlie to deliver the message of freedom to the world. Gandhi reassures Charlie that they will always be in each others' hearts, so there are no goodbyes.

In the courtroom, everyone is talking about what's going to happen. The judge orders Gandhi to leave the province for disturbing the peace. Gandhi respectfully refuses to go, and the judge asks if he wants to be in jail. Gandhi simply says, "As you wish." The judge then tells him he is free to go by paying bail until the judge reaches a sentence, and when Gandhi refuses to pay, the judge releases him anyway to the cheers of thousands in the courtroom and the street. Several men, friends of Nehru, come to help Gandhi. He needs the events documented, and the young men agree to live with the peasants in order to help.

Several months later at the lieutenant governor's house, the lieutenant governor talks with another man about the way he treats the problems that have arisen. Gandhi has now become an international hero. The people want rebates on rents paid, the choice of crops and a part Indian person to hear grievances. The governor agrees to make both the British government and Gandhi happy.

Elsewhere, Gandhi and Dr. Kallenbach arrive to meet with Patel, Jinnah and Nehru. One man has seen that men are arrested without warrants for having Gandhi's materials. These men want to fight, but Gandhi wants to keep the resistance nonviolent. He wants to change the minds of the British rather than kill them. Gandhi wants to call on the nation for a day of prayer and fasting on April 6 when a new law is supposed to go into effect. The country will stop, and the British will be terrified. The men agree that this is a brilliant idea and begin making their plans.

At a fancy dinner, the news is delivered to the British leaders that the buses, trains and everything else has come to a complete stop. Gandhi has planned a parade for the next day in Bombay, and they plan to arrest him. They succeed.

In the prison, Gandhi is brought to see Nehru. He reports that riots have been going on ever since Gandhi's arrest. Both the British and Indian people are being killed. Gandhi thinks maybe the people aren't ready yet. The government is more afraid of terrorism than of Gandhi, so they agree to release him if he'll speak to the people. He agrees.



While a man for nonviolent protest is giving a speech later, the entire army comes out to break up the group. The crowd is surrounded as the soldiers begin drawing their guns. The speaker encourages the people to remain calm, and then the British fire on the entire group of men, women and children. By the time they are through, over 1,000 people die. The leader is later tried and punished.

Gandhi's wife later talks to the men and women of India. Then, Gandhi gets up to speak, and the crowd goes wild. Gandhi tells the crowd that in order to gain independence, they must prove themselves worthy of it through Hindu and Muslim unity while treating the British with kindness. He asks them to join by bringing their clothes so that, like him, they all wear only a loincloth. Then, they set the clothes on fire so that it can be seen for miles.

Soon after, two of Gandhi's friends meet Mirabehn, the daughter of an Englishman, so that she can meet Gandhi. She arrives at his house, and he greets her. She tries to bow to him, but he won't allow it. He invites her to be his daughter. Gandhi soon finds out that some Muslim and Hindu men began to fight and helped the government instill martial law. Gandhi realizes that the British are desperate. He asks Mirabehn what the workers in England believe, and she says that the people understand.

A torch-lit parade occurs late one night. During the parade, one man is beat up by a group of others. When those in the parade see what's happening, they chase the perpetrators through the streets, setting buildings on fire. Gandhi and the other men are upset. Gandhi believes that this violence cannot be allowed, and the movement must be stopped. He wants no part of a freedom won by violence. The other men don't believe that the nation will stop marching, but Gandhi says he'll ask them to stop and fast until they do.

Gandhi goes through with his plans to fast while his wife and Mirabehn worry. She tells him that the violence has stopped almost everywhere, but he refuses to end the fast until it's over everywhere. She thinks he's stubborn and isn't sure that this is right. She turns him over because he's too weak to move himself. He tells her that when he's down, he remembers that the ways of truth and love always win in the end. Gandhi's friends arrive and tell him that the movement has ended everywhere, and everyone is praying the Gandhi will end his fast. The people are even giving clothes to the police in the street.

After Gandhi ends his fast, he walks around with help, but one day the soldiers arrive and arrest him for sedition. The family can't believe that he's being arrested after he just stopped a revolution. In the courtroom, Gandhi stands before the judge on his own. Everyone, starting with the judge, stands up to honor Gandhi with respect when he comes. Gandhi admits that he wants British rule to end and admits that he's guilty as charged. He asks for the severest possible penalty, so the judge sentences him to six years in prison, though he hopes that someday the British will decrease the sentence.

As soon as Gandhi gets out of prison, though, he begins to speak to the people again. Walker has returned to the scene and is on his way to see Gandhi. While Walker



watches later, Gandhi and his wife say their wedding vows again. They were both thirteen when they were married. Later Gandhi looks out at the ocean and talks to Walker about the possibility of another movement and the distance Gandhi has gone to make a difference.

Elsewhere, some British leaders discuss how they can control India by controlling the salt and water. On a specific day, Gandhi is planning to have the people raise their flags while he arrives at the sea to make salt on the anniversary of the massacre after a 248-mile walk. The act is symbolic, and the British choose to ignore it, not believing that it could bring down the British Empire.

Walker and other reporters await Gandhi's arrival so that they can cover the story. Crowds have gathered to cheer on Gandhi. The plan is to provoke action. Gandhi is in control since he knows the movement will become even more powerful if they are arrested. The soldiers arrive at the beach, though, and clear it by beating and arresting over 60,000 people even though the people were not violent.

Gandhi writes a letter to the British letting them know that he plans to lead a raid the next day on the saltworks. The leaders demand that the soldiers keep the saltworks open. Gandhi is arrested, and the next day, his wife speaks to a large group outside the saltworks.

As Walker and others watch, the soldiers and the people meet outside the saltworks. The people simply walk up to the soldiers, who then attack them. The women then come to care for their men while others walk up to the soldiers. Each group is beaten ever more severely, and the plan goes on throughout the night. Walker writes back and says that India is free and has more morality than anyone in the West.

Gandhi is taken to see the leaders of the British Empire in India. He is told that he is invited to an all-government conference in London to discuss the possible independence of India. News coverage is then shown of Gandhi at the conference. When Gandhi returns, he tells them that independence will now fall to the wayside. The British are preparing for war, but he doesn't want to take advantage of that. When they leave, he wants to see them off as friends.

At a train station, some soldiers ask about the focus of Gandhi's speech for the night. He plans to speak against war. He is arrested and so is his wife after she says she will give his speech if he's not there.

While Gandhi is in prison, a reporter from *Life* magazine sees the prison where Gandhi and some of the other congressional prisoners are being held. She goes in to talk to Gandhi, but he can't understand why she wants to talk to him while the war is going on. He still believes independence will come after the war. Jinnah has now received power from the British and is inciting the Muslims against both the British and the Hindu. He tells her that happiness comes from doing good works.

Later, the same reporter talks to Gandhi's wife and Mirabehn. His wife is proud of Gandhi for wanting to help women have better lives as well. After making a solemn vow,



Gandhi gave up the passions of married life so that he could find the way to God. At the prison, Gandhi's wife has a heart attack and passes away. Gandhi is brokenhearted and tells his wife and dearest friend goodbye.

Gandhi meets with Jinnah, and Jinnah expresses his concern that the Hindus will be ruled by the Muslims. Gandhi wants them all to be equal. Jinnah wants Pakistan to be the area where the Muslims are highly concentrated. Gandhi is stricken by this news. Later, Gandhi again meets with Jinnah. He explains to some people that he wants to represent everyone and begs them to stop the violence and intimidation. One man watches from the car, the same man who Godse sees before the assassination.

Gandhi talks to Jinnah about putting the Muslim fears at rest. Gandhi wants Jinnah to be the first Prime Minister of India. The Hindus, on the other hand, are concerned that Jinnah will use the power only to help the Muslims. Gandhi stands between the two groups and is given the choice of two independent countries or a civil war, so Gandhi must choose independence.

While everyone else celebrates independence, Gandhi alone mourns the separation of the country. Soon after, the India/Pakistan border is guarded by troops, and people move to one side or the other of the line. The divisions in the country are causing madness. When Gandhi talks with leaders about the problem, he leaves because he has no more help to give. Viewers see that riots are taking over the cities, and chaos is controlling the land. Gandhi watches from a balcony, his heart filled with sadness.

Gandhi once again begins fasting to stop the violence and insists on continuing to fast even if it causes his death. He is visited by Jinnah when the Pakistani leader hears of his condition. He begs Gandhi to stop and tells him that the fast has helped. Gandhi feels that the only thing that has happened is that he's become a little thinner. Jinnah says that 5,000 Muslim and 5,000 Hindu students are marching to meet, but Gandhi does not believe this is enough. He refuses to sit by idly and watch the destruction of all he has lived for.

The audience then sees women and children being attacked by mobs as buildings are burned to the ground. Gandhi receives more visitors. He is about to die from his fast. A Hindu leader who has told his men to go home and lay down their arms comes to see Gandhi. They try to convince him that he can do more by living than dying. Gandhi just wants the fighting to stop and never start again.

Later, a huge crowd of people listens to a speech begging them to put away their weapons and desire for revenge. Gandhi is dying because of their madness. At last, men come to Gandhi and leave their weapons at his feet as part of their promise to stop fighting. Gandhi tells them to go and God be with them. One man begs Gandhi to eat and admits that he will probably go to hell, but he doesn't want Gandhi's life on his hands. Gandhi tells him to get out of hell by raising another boy as his son now that his son has been killed. The man begins to cry, and Gandhi ends his fast.



Later, Gandhi is again interviewed by *Life* reporter Margaret Bourke-White, whom he tells that all battles should be fought only in the heart. Gandhi has tolerance for others because he has struggled with his demons. Two women help Gandhi out of the building, and Margaret feels that he's sad and feels that he's failed. Mirabehn believes that he offered the world a way out of madness, but neither he nor the world sees it.

As Gandhi is helped through the crowd, viewers come back to the beginning as he goes to prayer, and he is shot by Godse. Then, the screen goes black as Gandhi says, "Oh, God. Oh, God." We see a fire raging as a huge group of people looks on. We then hear him saying that truth and love always win.



Characters

Mohandas K. Gandhi, played by Ben Kingsley

Description

Gandhi is one of the greatest peacemakers who has ever lived. His theory of nonviolent protest has inspired thousands of people since to use these same principles to win their rights. In this film, Gandhi is presented as a person rather than just as a heroic, iconic figure.

Gandhi first begins to fight injustice while living in South Africa. He sees how terribly colored people, including himself, are treated, and he simply can't understand why people would treat one another in this way. From there, Gandhi eventually returns to his home of India and leads the way for independence from the British. Over the course of many years, India finally gets its freedom, though Gandhi considers it to some extent a failure because there are some splits among the Hindi and the Muslims.

Analysis

Gandhi is a brilliant lawyer when viewers first meet him. He has received top honors and worked on important cases around the world. He is happily married to a beautiful wife who loves him dearly. When he sees injustice, though, Gandhi refuses to simply close his eyes to the pain of the people.

Gandhi's strength and courage lead him to become a major force in bringing justice to people around the world. He first helps end some of the injustice in South Africa before returning to India and fighting for their freedom with nonviolent protest.

Gandhi is a committed and patient man. He is willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. When needed, he goes on hunger strikes to make points to the people and leaders, and he almost dies from this a couple of times. Gandhi's perseverance leads the way for independence for his nation and for thousands of people in later years who followed his example.

Kasturba Gandhi, played by Rohini Hattangadi

Description

Kasturba Gandhi is Gandhi's beautiful wife. When he first begins his fight against injustice, she thinks he is crazy. He wants to create a community that doesn't follow the old traditions, but she hates that idea.



Over time, Kasturba becomes Gandhi's most loyal helper. She agrees to let go of the old ways for fair ways, and she even speaks to women publicly about their rights. Kasturba and Gandhi live many years as brother and sister rather than husband and wife, but she is happy to be by his side in this important fight.

Analysis

Kasturba is a kind, confident woman. She is mother to several children, and she prides herself in taking good care of them and her husband. Although she helps Gandhi in his mission, she seems to believe at first that it is just a phase.

As time goes on, Kasturba becomes one of the most powerful and outspoken women in the movement. More than anyone else, she understands Gandhi and helps relay his messages in a way that women will understand. She also talks to men, trying to convince them to embrace women as their equals.

Gen. Reginald Dyer, played by Edward Fox

Description

General Reginald Dyer hates Gandhi. Although he respects his power, he cannot imagine why this man would want to take down the British Empire. Dyer does all he can to keep the British in power, but in the end, the power of the people is simply too strong.

Analysis

Like the rest of the British, Dyer believes that this movement for equality and independence will quickly come to an end. He is surprised to discover that Gandhi and his followers have no plans of giving up.

Lord Irwin, played by John Gielgud

Description

Lord Irwin leads India in the name of the British Empire. Although at first, he believes Gandhi's protests are just temporary, he quickly becomes concerned when the entire nation begins to get behind Gandhi.

Analysis

Lord Irwin works closely with General Dyer to keep Gandhi and the people under control. When he cannot successfully keep the nation at rest, he is finally forced by the Empire to give up and return to Britain.



Kahn, played by Amrish Puri

Description

When Gandhi arrives in South Africa, he meets with Kahn and a few others to discuss the way things are there. Gandhi has been shocked by his treatment on the train, but the others explain to him that things are simply that way.

Over the years, Kahn and Gandhi work closely together to bring rights to the people. At Gandhi's first meeting in South Africa, Kahn takes over the speaking so that it will be more convincing. Although they are good friends, in the end, they disagree over whether India should be split between the Muslims and the Hindi.

Analysis

Kahn is a strong, courageous man. He is very rich, and Gandhi helps spark his interest in changing the way things work both in South Africa and India. Although they sometimes disagree over methods and outcomes, the two provide a powerful force to lead both Muslims and Hindi to freedom in India.

Mirabehn, played by Geraldine Jones

Description

Mirabehn reads about Gandhi and is impressed by him. She goes to visit, and Gandhi invites her to be his daughter. For years after, she commits her life to helping him and taking care of him and Kasturba.

Analysis

Mirabehn is a sweet young woman who comes to India to give her life to the cause of freedom both for men and women. Alongside Kasturba, she helps care for Gandhi and speak to women about freedom.

Vince Walker, played by Martin Sheen

Description

Vince Walker is an American newspaperman who meets Gandhi when he first begins his work in South Africa. Walker is concerned with where this movement will go, but Gandhi tells him to be patient. When Gandhi begins campaigning for freedom in India, Walker is there again to cover the story.



Analysis

Walker covers the story of Gandhi from an American perspective. His character in the film helps viewers see things from the point of view of those who were outside of the country and movement.

Margaret Bourke-White, played by Candice Bergen

Description

Margaret Bourke-White is a lovely young reporter working for *Life* magazine. She is sent to India to interview and photograph Gandhi. While there, she learns more about him for the article that is eventually published in her magazine.

Analysis

Like Walker, Margaret helps give viewers an outside perspective on the events in India. We see what Americans like Margaret want to know and gain more insight into Gandhi's thoughts through her interview.

Rev. Charlie Andrews, played by Ian Charleson

Description

Rev. Charlie Andrews and Gandhi meet in South Africa when Gandhi is first beginning his work there. Andrews supports him wholeheartedly and even speaks to his white congregations about equality for everyone.

Although Gandhi and Andrews are good friends, Gandhi asks Andrews not to help with the movement in India. They remain close, but Gandhi wants the people to know that they can do things on their own without the help of white people. Instead, he asks Andrew to go back and talk to people on the white side of the issue.

Analysis

Andrews and Gandhi form a special relationship. The two are much alike and are able to discuss religion and philosophy openly. Throughout Gandhi's life, Andrews is always there to help him through the difficult times.

Themes

Fighting for Justice

Injustice controls much of the world. Gandhi is a man who can see the injustice for what it is and demands that the leaders make changes in the laws. He refuses to take no for an answer as he fights for justice for all people.

Gandhi also uses others to help the fight for justice. He realizes that there is power in the masses. When many people band together to fight for a cause as a community, then true change can occur. Although all of Gandhi's goals are not achieved, he does make a dramatic difference in his world.

Desire for Peace

Gandhi desires true peace over everything else. Although he realizes that true peace can only come through some strife, he does his best to bring peace to his country and the world.

Gandhi also uses peaceful protests to make a difference. Rather than starting a revolution, he convinces people to work loudly but calmly for peace. He believes that only a peaceful revolution can bring about change and peace that will last.

Gandhi's desire for peace allows him to suffer many difficulties as he seeks peace. He even goes on hunger strikes for weeks to convince the people to demand peaceful changes and to keep working as one in their goals.

Dedication to a Cause

When people think about commitment to a cause, Gandhi is one of the first people they think about. He refuses to let anything stand in his way as he seeks freedom and equality for everyone, both when he lives in South Africa and in his home country of India.

Gandhi's unbelievable commitment to his goals inspires nations and changes the world. He goes against all the prejudices and unfair laws to make sure that his people and all people who were persecuted are treated fairly and kindly.

Gandhi is willing to risk his family and his life to pursue his goals. His relationship with his wife changes dramatically over the years so that he can focus more of his energy on his goals. He also risks death by going on hunger strikes to make his point to the people, the politicians and the world.

Style and Cinematography

Gandhi by Richard Attenborough is an epic film. At over three hours in length, the film encompasses all of Gandhi's life. Viewers discover that Gandhi was just a normal person who had big dreams. His first actions in South Africa set him on a path to change the world, including his own country of India.

The setting is superb in this film. Since the director is seeking to recreate history, he uses a set that makes viewers believe that they are really there in the action. The film never seems redundant, and every new place actually looks authentic.

Ben Kingsley helps bring the film together. Part Indian himself, he understands the lives of the people. He creates an authentic representation of Gandhi and truly brings the person to life in his portrayal.

Motifs

Journey

The journey motif is a popular one. Gandhi makes several journeys, physical, mental and emotional. He spends his time during these journeys growing as a person and preparing to lead the greatest nonviolent protest in history.

Gandhi first journeys from his home of India to South Africa. In South Africa, he discovers that anyone of color is treated as lower than the whites. He begins to lead the people there to find a sense of independence and equality.

Gandhi also grows mentally and emotionally. He goes from being a young, idealistic man to being a powerful world leader. He uses his wisdom and influence to make a difference both in South Africa and in India.

Non-Violent Protest

Gandhi decides to follow Jesus' example of "turning the other cheek" by avoiding violence and protesting with nonviolence. Gandhi is smart enough to realize that the British can easily take the movement down if they try to use violence, since the British military is so powerful. Thus, Gandhi convinces others to use a different method.

Gandhi and his followers use non-violent protest in South Africa to help gain equality for all people of color. Once he has had some success there, people begin begging him to come to India, his homeland, and help them gain their independence.

Over many years, Gandhi and his followers are able to help the people of India win freedom from the British. When needed, he protests his own followers through hunger strikes to make his points. With time, most of his goals are achieved, and he is heralded as a hero in India and around the world.

Historical Era

Most people have heard of Gandhi but few actually know a lot about him. Richard Attenborough's film brings the historical Gandhi to life so that younger generations can see him as a real person.

The historical era helps grab the interest of all viewers. This epic film shows the true success of Gandhi. Viewers see that he helped not only change lives in India but also in South Africa and around the world. Martin Luther King, Jr. also followed Gandhi's example to help achieve equality for African Americans in the United States.



Symbols

Gandhi's Loincloth

When viewers first meet Gandhi, he is a fairly wealthy, well-dressed man who has made a name for himself as a lawyer. He continues to take on this attitude while working in South Africa. However, he eventually changes many things about himself when he returns to India.

While working in India, Gandhi begins wearing a loincloth. He realizes that the normal people need to understand that he is on their side. Gandhi believes that the people shouldn't feel that they are being ordered about by yet another group of wealthy people who don't understand their needs.

Gandhi's loincloth is symbolic of his attachment to the people. He understands their plight and tries to relate to them as he seeks to win freedom for all of India. Although many of his wealthy friends don't understand, Gandhi gains the trust of the entire country and world.

The Funeral

The film begins with a scene of Gandhi's funeral. There are thousands of people gathered along the streets, and reporters and news teams from around the world are there to report on Gandhi's funeral.

Gandhi spent his life working to bring equality and peace to people all over the world. His work began in South Africa, and then his own people begged him to return to India to help them gain freedom from the oppression of the British.

Gandhi's funeral is symbolic of his lifelong work and the love and admiration he inspires. Although he is often ridiculed and even hated by some, Gandhi makes a huge difference during his time. With his death, he finally receives all the respect and admiration he always deserved.

Gandhi's Community

When Gandhi decides to help India win independence, he decides to do it on his own terms. He doesn't just want men or the rich to be free; instead, he wants freedom for everyone, including women.

Gandhi seeks to make his point by starting his own community where everyone is equal. He wants people to see that his ideas can and do work. When he first explains to his wife that she needs to work just like everyone else, she is appalled, but he makes it clear that this is the only way they can reach their goals.

Gandhi's community is symbolic of his ideal future. He creates a place where everyone is accepted and equal while holding on to some of the old traditions as well. Gandhi's community becomes an example for the rest of the country and a refuge for those who need help and acceptance.

Essay Questions

Why is Gandhi forced to move on the train?

What does Gandhi decide to do after he moves to South Africa? Why?

Describe the first public meeting Gandhi calls.

Who helps Gandhi during his work in South Africa? How does his work in South Africa differ from his later work in India?

Why does everyone want Gandhi to return to India?

What does Gandhi ask Kasturba to do to promote equality?

Why does Mirabehn come?

What technique of nonviolent protest almost kills Gandhi several times? Why does he use this method?

How does Gandhi die?

Describe Gandhi's funeral and its significance.