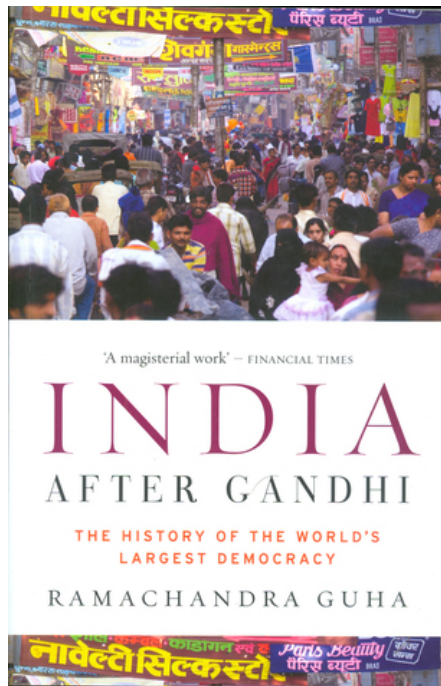




India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy

Ramachandra Guha

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India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy Ramachandra Guha

A magisterial account of the pains, the struggles, the humiliations, and the glories of the world's largest and least likely democracy, Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* is a breathtaking chronicle of the brutal conflicts that have rocked a giant nation and the extraordinary factors that have held it together. An intricately researched and elegantly written epic history peopled with larger-than-life characters, it is the work of a major scholar at the peak of his abilities...

India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy Details

Date : Published July 24th 2007 by Ecco (first published April 20th 2007)

ISBN : 9780060198817

Author : Ramachandra Guha

Format : Hardcover 912 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, India, Nonfiction, Politics

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From Reader Review India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy for online ebook

Abhishek Srivastava says

A very comprehensive history of modern India, and it's surprisingly interesting and gripping given that it is a historical record. A must read for any one who wants to know how modern India came to be, esp. for those of us who were not born when we were not the fast developing nation we are today. Some of the descriptions and narratives are very transcending. They make you feel nostalgic of an event even when you never were there in the first place. It makes you proud and sad and excited and ashamed all in the same book. In short, it tells you about India, why it is unique and what is good and bad about it, and also what we need to do to improve.

It has its shortcoming and there are points where the author's personal views have influenced what should otherwise have been an objective record (Nehru's regime and later BJP's hindutva) but the sheer length and breadth of the content that Guha has presented here, is just so humbling and detailed. The minor flaws are actually minuscule in the larger picture.

Sidharth Vardhan says

"Indians are better speakers than listeners, and Indian politicians especially so."

There probably never will be a completely satisfying book about India but this one really far exceeded what I could have expected. In here is no talk about the 'Hindu way of life' (thank you Naipaul) or other vague expressions and generalizations like that. There is, in fact, the very opposite, a great diversity of voices looking at the subjects from different perspectives.

At a few times, I didn't agree with author's conclusions (view spoiler), but that is a matter of subjective judgement.

What is likable is that there are at least representations of different perspectives rather than just superlative judgements. (view spoiler)

He is worshipping no idols either. What I feared was that he would present one or other icons in too good a light. While he has his favourites, here too he is willing to look at both sides of all the coins. M. K. Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, India (the country) - have all received both praises and criticism mostly where due. The author is not afraid of calling it a spade if he thinks it is a spade - even if it is a religious spade. And you know how big a deal that is in India.

What is more, I learnt about a lot of Wikipedia page deserving people who have been mostly forgotten by popular mind. (Come to think of it, I should have a Wikipedia page!.) A good portion also went to recording experiences of minorities, marginalized groups and refugees. Then there are many very touching as well as hilarious moments in it. It might sound like a oxymoron but it is an entertaining history book.

One thing that has been heavily criticised by author (and rightly so) is the idea of Hindu nationalism, but I think I shall repeat author's argument of the concluding chapter on this point:

"India is merely a geographical expression. It is no more a single country than the Equator."
-Winston Churchill

You know what is common between India and the world? They are both predicted to be about to be fallen apart every few years. Churchill's accusation, though ignorant, is at least understandable – not so much from Nobel prize winning historian, not so much from a politician who had fate of India in his hands for several years but still. Look at what Wiki uncle tells about 'nation':

"Nation (from Latin: natio, "people, tribe, kin, genus, class, flock") is a social concept with no uncontroversial definition, but that is most commonly used to designate larger groups or collectives of people with common characteristics attributed to them—including language, traditions, customs (mores), habits (habitus), and ethnicity."

Now above mentioned concept of nation is rather common. England wants her immigrants to learn English, because, well you know, it is England. U. S. A. Is worried that immigrants aren't leaving their cultures behind and melting away into melting pot. The famous two- nation theory, forwarded by both Hindu and Muslim right, which lead to the red partition was based on this definition.

But then how do you explain India?

What is that attribute common among Indians? Language - European Union has 28 countries and 24 official languages. India alone has 22 scheduled languages (among others). There is no one language spoken or understood throughout the country. There are no common traditions and customs either – we have scores of different religions, festivals, food items, dances etc making tradition in different parts. Ethnicity – We are screwed there as well with simply countless Ethnic groups. A last theory is common struggle against common enemy. British government quickly comes to mind but those now living in Pakistan were a part of this struggle too and still there was partition, while there were parts of (new) India that didn't participate in struggle.

There are a few things that do come close – Indians are fairly united in their wars against outsiders but that is more *because* of national identity rather than cause of it. Same for sports (cricket obviously getting special mention). Another thing is we enjoy same entertainment (movies, singers etc.) – but that entertainment too is shared with Pakistanis. (Still it is good to see that author should talk about those things that make us at least more Indian than our politicians ever did.)

So it would appear India is an impossible nation. And still, it was exactly the country that so many of the freedom fighters fought for. Ever since, although Hindu nationalists have tried to force some sort of common tradition down Indian throats – cow-worship and Hindi language among others, their efforts have got no long term success, India remains; and remains impossibly despite huge differences on the basis of religion, region, language, caste, class, customs etc. Somehow like members of a joint family who might at times fight and threaten to but won't part, people have learned to live together through a sense of mutual respect. And that might just be what Indian experience have for Euro-American world to learn from.

S.Ach says

We Indians mostly read history, reluctantly though, only in school. After that, the next dose of history comes from media in the form of debates and analysis. "Reading History" as an hobby comes to negligible

percentage of people. This is mainly because of the aversion we develop during our history classes in school, courtesy the insipid and tedious nature of the school curriculum focusing on 'when and what' rather than 'why and how'.

When I was in school, in the mid-90s, our history lesson on India ended with British leaving our country. What happened after that was never mentioned or discussed. So I was completely ignorant of the names like "Sheikh Abdullah", "Jai Prakash Narayan" or events of 'emergency' and 'Operation Blue Star' or the wars India fought with her neighbours. So there has been a huge gap of almost 50 years in my knowledge about my own country from the time of independence to the time when I started reading newspapers zealously. This book fills that void.

Having read this mammoth of book on the political history of post-independent India, I find myself much more informed about the present state of country than before. So, as far as knowledge on India is concerned, there is now two Mes. Me before "India after Gandhi" and Me after "India after Gandhi"

This book recounts the events in the post-Independent India till the late 80s in chronological fashion as those unfold in a completely unbiased or un-opinionated tone, making it read like a political thriller than a scholarly work on History. The only other history book that had such pacy readability was "Freedom at Midnight".

After the 80s the remaining events of the last three decades have taken shapes of essays or as the author calls those 'historically informed journalism'. The author believes that thirty-years is probably the right amount of time to pass before concluding any event to be an historical account.

This book should be a mandatory reading in our high-school curriculum, if India is serious about building an informed generation to take her forward.

Kali Srikanth says

"If you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong."

— Terry Pratchett"

India is world's largest *but least likely* democracy. But how it still survives?

To me, Indian history always meant what happened till 1947 (year of Independence) or perhaps my knowledge expands one little year further till Gandhiji's death. I was kept in the dark all these years about what happened once India gained its independence. *Remember? none of our academic books mention what happened after India got its independence, either.* But ironically that is the most crucial period of our country which tests our integrity, intelligence, power, responsibility and many more constitutional lessons to come. And this epic volume offers mountainous account of our pains (partition, Riots, assassinations of leaders), conflicts (never ending Kashmir problem, Nagaland 'land issues', trouble with tribal), humiliations (war with China), challenges (Constitution, New political parties, foreign policies, plans) and glories (inclusion of princely states, first general elections, wars with Pakistan etc.,) of our country.

Though this book attracted some criticism that author distorted some facts and truths in the wake of his unquestioning loyalty to the congress party which celebrates a rich legacy, I feel, at-least this book filled my huge knowledge gaps by relating me the events that occurred in 65 years after independence. I can decide later which point of view I shall consider things from. So no complaints there.

Finally, If You have time (remember it's 900 odd pages volume) and curiosity (Motivation is what gets you started, but *habit* is what gets you going) about the affairs of our country, it's a great book to own.

4.75/5 to this near perfect book. *History never seemed this entertaining.*

Rajat Ubhaykar says

Lest we begin taking the existence of India for granted. In this book, Ramachandra Guha takes on the difficult job of instilling a reasonable degree of patriotism in your average armchair skeptic without resorting to India-Pakistan jingoism or sanctimoniously reminding us of our glorious ancient history. He succeeds magnificently by furnishing an insightful post-independence (albeit Nehruvian) narrative history of India that sheds light on the unprecedented miracle that is the Indian nation-state. This book is essential reading for every Indian who's interested in understanding how we've come to be the way we are and where we might be going. After all, why must history end where India's tryst with destiny begins?

Jonfaith says

My own view – speaking as a historian rather than citizen – is that as long as Pakistan exists there will be Hindu fundamentalists in India. In times of stability, or when the political leadership is firm, they will be marginal or on the defensive. In times of change, or when the political leadership is irresolute, they will be influential and assertive.

This sweeping history was a revelation. I feel as if I was simultaneously dazzled and lost. My chief response was a desire to read more both by Nehru as well as about him. I pondered concepts like communalism all week and made comparisons with other places, other history. Nehru apparently once confessed to Andre Malraux that his greatest challenge was creating and maintaining a secular state in a religious country. It was interesting how in the Nixon biography I recently read much was made about how Nixon felt Nehru and Indira Gandhi looked down upon him, a grocer's son. Little of that surfaced here--which is appropriate when considering the grand grievances of Nixon.

People have been predicating the doom of India since its Independence, some are now predicating that half of the nation is becoming California, the other half Chad. The resilient Indian embrace of democracy is the most encouraging, especially as across the world the institution appears to be falling from fashion.

Anirudh says

A good compilation of post independence Indian history by Ramachandra Guha. It also gives a good perspective to understand present day India. The book is rich in detail and the writing style of Guha is brilliant and makes the book a very interesting read. But at a few places Guha does compromise objectivity in favour of Nehru, especially in his telling about Nehru's grand centralized socialist economy and his foreign policy of Non-Aligned movement(India and the Non-Aligned Movement.) both of which are more or less proven wrong in retrospect(NAM is debatable).

In short, the pros of the book –

The period between 1947 and 1950, the making of the constitution and the consolidation of the princely states was very well covered. It could have been made better by covering in more detail Ambedkar's contribution, and his story and how he came to be in the Constituent Assembly in the first place. This part of the book makes the whole book worth reading.

The reordering of the states on linguistic lines and Potti Sriramulu's battle.

The cons of the book are –

The author has hardly written about Indian politics since Rajiv Gandhi's time. Guha goes off on a tangent about the role of cricket, Bollywood and other cultural events. Nothing gets spoken about the liberalization of 1991, the effect of the collapse of the Berlin Wall on India, Pokhran nuclear tests, the Bofors scam etc.. The events that take place after 1985 have been given very little space in the book. (I personally think that this was done because it becomes impossible to tell India's tale beyond 1985 without pointing out the many mistakes made by Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, which the author seems very reluctant to do)

Should have covered the period of emergency and the Janata Party's first non-congress government that followed in more detail.

A certain amount of objectivity would have been good while discussing Nehru's policies and his five year plans in the 1950s and the events that led up to the Indo-China war.

Another similar book which I have not read but intend to is Bipin Chandra's India Since Independence. I hear the book covers post 1990 events in more detail, should check it out.

But overall the book is well written and definitely worth a read (a couple of reads actually).

Jerry Jose says

Text book history of India often and for most people including me, reaches a clincher by the midnight of 15th August 1947, the day of Independence. What followed then after, for more than a half a century is, usually, the privilege of intellectuals and quasi historians on social media. It is like those *Marvel* movie after credit scenes that we all pretend to understand, and then silently google afterwards. This book intends to be the *Rosetta Stone* in breaking that barrier.

Though my reasons for reading were, availability of a fresh copy in library and unavailability of the books I wanted to rent, this seemingly boring political book, for me, was an emotional and intellectual roller coaster ride, through the gripping history that shaped world's largest democracy into what it is today. Guha's approach, though a bit verbose and fat for scholarly, prep purposes; felt more like a follow up to Nehru's 'Discovery of India', and in a way, to be imitating the latter's elegant prose in process. It was an absolute delight to read with the insightful research filled with verbatims, references and conflicting viewpoints, news excerpts from inside and outside the sub-continent, foreign correspondent views, and notes from International relations. And for the contents, the course of events start from political assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and after effects of partition, India's very first and world's largest general election with universal adult franchise to the events till the year 2008. He keeps the linear narrative in check with its socio-cultural-economic impacts inside and outside the country. From Nehru's decentralized and austere (open for debate) cabinet, who considered Indian Independence as part of a wider Asian insurgence to Indira and centralized nepotism that followed, From patriotic opposition movements of JP to vote and religion based modern nationalism, From the various secessionist movements and foreign prediction of balkanization to the

force of unity in diversity, From the displaced disposed underprivileged to the growing 'body shopped' upper middle class; Guha takes readers through the mights, ignominies and challenges that rocked World's largest multi-ethnic democracy.

With India's sheer monstrosity in size, population and prevailing political ideologies(Left Right ideologies from socialism to communism to communalism), Its extremely difficult to consolidate the information in a presentable manner, not to mention the much needed escape from the moral bias towards the winning side. And there is always some information that have to be omitted, either by ruling it out as futile to the general course or to slice down the pages. For every event he has tried to get the multi-facets of the issue, from seemingly protagonist to the seemingly antagonist and finally a third person with neutral sentiment, in and outside the country.

Guha shifts from history to historically informed journalism towards the recent years of Indian history, which is still unfolding; yet, his search to find the first domino that set the contraption of events into motion, prevails the narrative. My feelings while reading, If recorded would give a sine wave with crest and troughs of intersecting pride and shame. India has the worlds most progressive democracy and constitution, and though mostly on paper, it protects and keep the nation in check more or less(more more I must say) within the founding principles. I cannot imagine how our nation would have been built or on what principles, If it was in remote antiquity than the progressive past it actually been framed. Things and leaders seem to be going more backward and internally disturbed as time advances, giving a temporal anomaly in terms of the direction of growth- a term reduced into infrastructures and currency these days. As much as it made me happy and proud while reading through the birth of nation, war victories, scientific progresses, goodwill will with neighbors and world ; It pained me to read through history of *Kashmir*, Sikh pogrom *Babri Masjid demolition*, *Gujarat riots* and the likes. I had to occasionally put the book down and take time off, and even have some casual talks with friends for obtaining a sense of present, and to process the things I used ignore casually. And that is something this reader least expected from a history book.

In a world of demagogues and blind followers too eager to hagiograph their leaders in approbation, it is essential to have some predisposition towards actual history. And in this work of majestic proportion, *Ramachandra Guha* seems to have found a fine balance between *Said's* in famous 'Orientalism' and nationalistic bias that readers would suspect from authors identity.

Tamara says

It's a slightly strange genre, these giant histories of the present. Comparing to the other two i've read - *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* and *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* - this one takes the cake for sheer human scope: India just has more people than either Europe or Africa. This kind of thing is inevitably always only a skimming of the surface, even if it is 900 pages long. The point would have to be to find some shape to that surface, some grasping towards a unified theory of the thing.

Guha, however, has the benefit here of working with a continent-sized place which is a single country, so theres an order of magnitude more detail about Indian political history than about any single government in Europe or Africa. This is also kind of the book's downfall though. A political history of modern Indian is - seemingly inevitably - focused on the Congress Party. The Party is inevitably focused on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Despite the massive scope, the book feels a little thin at times. The cast of characters, so to speak, remains relatively limited.

Figures like Ambedkar or Vajpayee show up...kind of around the edges. I think - as someone totally

unfamiliar with the issues - I would have appreciated more of a follow through of those ideologies and political currents, understanding more of how they interacted with and influenced rule, than another political shenanigan pulled off by Nehru et al. There's just so much here that merely summing it all up is too much information already, but I still felt that something of the grand shape of things, even on the most superficial level, was still out of my sight. Regionalism, communalism, populism, language, caste, religion...they're all brought up and addressed often, but always circling around the straightforward linear narrative.

As a total aside, in a chapter about entertainment at the end, he mentions that the Independence movement always had a puritanical streak (and that Gandhi apparently never saw a movie all the way through!) That's fascinating to me. What happened to that? Where did it meet Indian society? How do these things carry through? Not that there isn't a solid effort to get at social history- there is, as well as technological, cultural and economic. All of it is fascinating and none of it is quite enough.

Maybe it's because I couldn't help comparing it to Israel at times. The scale is so ridiculously different, and yet there are familiar beats to the broad outline. The dates kind of line up (independence in 47/8, strong socialist centralization, first time opposition taking power in 1977, shifts into capitalism in the 90's along with rises of identity politics and hardening of sectarian positions, etc.) and of course the usual questions of religion, communalism, democracy, identity, etc as issues. On the one hand, it kind of makes me feel a little more normal, to think that this is just the way these things play out. On the other hand, it's probably not a very good comparison and sent me looking for patterns that might not exist.

If there is a connecting thread that he attempts to follow through, it's the question of democracy on this vast - and varied - a scale. It's amazing to see some of the disdain the very notion of democracy in India was held in at the beginning. Could this many people, unconnected, uneducated, make meaningful political decisions? It jumped out at me, the occasional mentions of groups of people mired in poverty, still, as the years go by, into the 21st century, and I wonder if everything just went over them or if it mattered there. Well, they end up voting for populists and demagogues and sons-of and movie stars. So, they're pretty normal, really. I think the ultimate conclusion, despite Guha's final fairly complex and not unpessimistic assessment of the state of Indian democracy, is that it really, really matters.

Very recommended, even if it mostly raised more questions than it answered, for me.

Gorab Jain says

4+

I was least interested/aware about Indian politics before picking this book.

Now, I want to explore so much more. Such is the way IAG draws you in.

Not just politics, albeit formation of India. Starting from drawing the constitution to uniting the states, origin and ideologies of emerging political parties....

Insights about partition, roots of Kashmir issue, Tibet, relations with Pak and China, picking a national language, Hindu Act, reservations, Naxalites, Maoists, Mizoram and Nagaland revolts...

In spite of India being centre stage, felt this book was about two protagonists - Nehru and Indira.

And many parts didn't feel like history, rather current events and future predictions :)

Why not 5?

1. Diplomatic. Highly diplomatic stance on many issues. Quite understandable, but would have loved it more if it was not.
2. Editing could have been crispier. Especially in the last part. Last 3 chapters were like gossiping with a friend. Slightly disappointed.

Loved reading this gem. Thanks Aparna for reco and Arpit for BR and insightful discussions.

Overall: Thank you so much Guha ji for infusing this knowledge about my country. I have become a fan and will follow more works by you.

M says

An excellent, thorough history of modern India, post-independence.

The first half, covering the decades under PM Nehru and the drafting of the Indian Constitution, is really inspiring. Nehru was an idealist who believed in social change; he worked with B.R. Ambedkar, an Untouchable who was the primary draftsman of the constitution, to keep India as a secular state and to overturn the caste system. Nehru also worked to protect minority groups such as women and Muslims, to create an economic and social system that would enable the poor and underprivileged to improve their circumstances, and to create a truly democratic and united country. He and his home minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, were able to merge diverse people of many languages, religions, and cultures into one democratic nation.

In the second half, things begin to crumble. It is ironic that Nehru's own daughter, Indira Gandhi, was able to unravel much of his accomplishments. After her dictatorial reign as PM, India was ensconced in cronyism, nepotism, and identity politics that still plague it today. India now has many political parties, but they focus on simply furthering one group's agenda, based on their caste, religion, province, or otherwise. It is said that in India one doesn't cast a vote, one votes their caste. (My husband says Indians love their pithy puns, but he's one to talk.)

Idealism and visionary thinking have been eroded with corruption and single-minded politics. Rather than taking grievances to the courts, or to the paralyzed government system, citizens take to the streets in riots that quickly turn violent. There have been cases where the government has stood by, or even encouraged, mob violence against a particular minority group.

Still, India remains a democracy, and for that we must give it credit. One of Guha's central themes is how it has survived as such.

Recently a man named Anna Hazare has been in the Indian news. He has been fasting and attracting many followers with his call for the Parliament to pass his proposed anti-corruption bill. He had enough support that Parliament is currently in the process of passing his bill calling for stricter watchdogs on the government. Obviously, such a bill is clearly needed; on the other hand, when will Indians learn to rely on the courts rather than showmanship and mob rioting for desired change? And when will the institutions become something the citizens *can* rely on?

Katrin says

Having finally finished this massive book, I feel I know much more about India now. Some parts are a little boring, but mostly it is hugely interesting to witness the biggest democracy on earth unfold after 1949. One is left with the feeling that it is a true miracle that India is still relatively stable, has not sunk into civil war and chaos and is still a democracy, for all its problems. The book details the huge effort and labour it took to transform a colonized state (and a very large one!) into a real democracy. Which political model to choose? How to incorporate all the small kingdoms? How to form a government, how to write a constitution? How to distribute millions of ballot boxes to rural areas? How to divide the country into districts? How to please everyone? It is fascinating to see how much of all this depended on few people, most notably Jawaharlal Nehru, an amazing politician, which I hadn't known before. All the economic considerations and plans were also new to me, as were details of Indira Gandhi's and Rajiv Gandhi's governments. There is too little emphasis on popular, everyday culture for my taste, but at least there is a chapter on the Indian film industry.

Vipassana says

In 1959, the Atlantic Monthly pitied India for having a democracy, when it might be better off as a military dictatorship. In 1999, the same magazine thought this very democracy had been India's saving grace.

It has often been said that India is a young nation, and a diverse one. We Indians have been told this in school and swallowed it without a question. On reading India after Gandhi, the depth of those adjectives sink in.

Hadrian says

Sweeping history of India from its independence in 1947 to the early 2000s.

While Guha covers a broad range of topics (He even includes an affectionate chapter on contemporary film and music), and tends to shy away from a formal argument as seen in a more formal academic work, his thesis would be on the continuing endurance of democracy in India. After the colonial period, India was poor, composed of some three hundred million people, with a literacy rate of 12%, with five hundred different polities - and yet it formed a functional democracy out of all this. Guha is quick to praise the free press, an independent judiciary, the military remaining under civilian control, and the establishment of a wide range of political parties. Except for a 21-month period of dictatorial rule in the late 1970s called "The Emergency", the transitions of power have been relatively peaceful.

That said, the Republic is not without its problems. The bureaucracy is slow and corrupt. Policies are confused and not always effective. The government has not always served as a fair mediator between religious factions. At its worst, it is complicit in mass violence, such as the rioting in Gujarat in 2002. It has not upheld minority rights. It has not done enough for the lower castes.

E pur si muove. Guha marvels about how the state was even formed, despite the immense traumas of first the colonial period, then the Partition in 1947, a state was somehow forged out of that and did not immediately dissolve into war. A constitution was established by 1950. The first elections were held in 1952, with some one hundred seven million voters.

Guha takes a generally positive look upon the founders of Indian democracy, but he lauds Jawaharlal Nehru most of all. There is much he can be credited with - first, preventing a breakdown in civil-military relations, second, his attempts to guarantee linguistic minorities - a truly democratic concession, despite his initial misgivings. He at least attempted to foster Hindu-Muslim unity, even though all of his successors continue to struggle with the same dilemmas. One of his greatest faults was a neglect of military preparedness, which led to the humiliating war with China in 1962 over the Himalayan border.

The last chapter ends on a moment of hope. Guha, as a private citizen, is often frustrated with India. As a historian, he feels a sense of admiration and quiet optimism towards its future.

obh says

"India is no longer a constitutional democracy but a populist one", this is one of the hard hitting ideas which this book puts forward. No doubt such a commentary has not been written about India after its independence. Detailed and lucid this book is a treat to all those who are interested in the "idea of India". You will never be bored with this book.

With all the surprises, the setbacks and, the pandemonium that is associated with Indian's freedom, we can surely say that democracy has not lost in India. It has become weak, but not lost. I can only hope that India becomes more secular, with poverty less pervasive and "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high".

The biggest challenge to our democracy comes from within, in the form of corruption. Many tend to believe that ills like overpopulation, illiteracy, etc. are the bane of the Indian society. I tend to think it's corruption. Last year we saw mass movements by groups led by apolitical people unified against corruption. We saw a union minister going to jail, the CM of a state resigning and many such events. But in a state where majority of the employees are corrupt all this is like a drop in the ocean. The Lokayukta bill (Ombudsman law) has not seen the day of light, since first being introduced many decades ago. Majority of politicians across party lines are conjoined to this evil of corruption. The government portrays itself as the saviour of the common man, only to forget its own manifesto once voted to power.

Corruption is the evil, the virus, which kills everything and the society as a whole disintegrates. An analogy can be drawn with the AIDS virus, which does not kill, but renders the immune system too weak to defend against anything else. I have met people who talk about the old days of glory, when public servants were honest and politicians more austere. **Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.** Predictions are thick and fast to come, I won't predict, only hope that my country becomes what the founding fathers of freedom wanted it to, and take back its rightful place in history.

Ashish Iyer says

Unfortunately the book is extremely underwhelming for those who have more than passing interest in political history of India. It is consistently biased in favor of a Nehruvian/Congress/Leftist-Marxist viewpoint. Guha's hero-worship of Nehru, a leader with many flaws, is also less than neutral. He also sweeps under the floor the history of corruption in India since independence. Mr. Guha is partial toward First Prime minister Mr. Nehru and never criticize him at any moment and more over this writer is trying to save Nehru from any such side. Nehru is venerated like a god by writer. You will find half of book dedicated to nehru and as a fan on Nehru writer give his super human abilities of solving everything.

All the events described will be in and around congress and its activists. I think historians shouldn't do such

kind of things. Glorification of INC is the main propaganda of this book and hence lacks a balanced view needed for any keen history student. They should describe the events in an unbiased manner and leave the opinion to readers. Instead, in the whole book you find the authors opinion on how congress struggle or manage India. Few great people are just mentioned by name in some incidences and not about their contribution. Even state parties also contributed towards India.

Since Mr Guha has dedicated a large chunk of the book to the political lives of Indira Gandhi and Nehru, I would've like to have been informed more of the implications of their policy decisions (he does touch on some) and also their failings -Nehru's in particular. Not saying that I think Nehru was a failure, but Id have liked to have heard a mock debate between the pro and anti Nehru factions as well as the pro and anti Gandhi factions. There was no defense of these giants of the country (which makes sense since there were no real criticisms presented in the book). Even if the author felt no criticism was warranted, he could have addressed the criticisms of other writers/ thinkers. This is the least he could have done for Nehru (who he obviously admires).

No time devoted to the financial world and the industrial world and the world of the Indian scams! Ambani the entrepreneur and rule-breaker, Harshad Mehta, the fodder scam etc barely get a mention!

No mention of indigenous Indian governmental scheme's for the various reforms. There are some big holes in the book. Even details on wars was not properly mentioned.

The chapters on PV Narasimha Rao, Vajpayee primarily deal with Secularism issues totally ignoring the strides India made in Economy, Foreign policy, Defense etc during their era. Millions of Indians including me owe our jobs to PVN's economic policies. If India has finally emerged as a force to reckon with, it is primarily due to the economic policies of PVN and Vajpayee governments. It is truly astonishing that the impact the new policies have had on lifting millions of Indians out of poverty over the last two decades is not given the importance it deserves in the book. Even foreign economists like Robert Shiller who called PVN India's Deng Xio Peng. The author buries the legacy of PVN and Vajpayee in the issue of secularism.

There are so many things to point out but i don't have that much time to mentioned all that here. These kind of books set bad precedent. Even you can see this book have high ratings.

As another reviewer has said, one should remind Guha the words of the great historian R C Majumdar, who reiterated that "The aim of history is to solely tell the truth, by conscientious finding it out without any respect for individual or communities". But 'India after Gandhi' is dishonest history: there is no objectivity and Guha seems more interested to propagandize his readers than to present a neutral book.

Read it to know one side of the coin. No one book or may be any at all will ever completely articulate the other side of the coin. Even an extremely biased and opinionated book like this cannot spin it well to lead the readers to the authors point of view.

Highly disappointed.

I don't want to recommend it.

Bob Foulkes says

Just before a 3 week trip to India, I asked an acquaintance for the best book to read to help me gain perspective on this incredible country. India after Ghandi was his instantaneous recommendation. This is the perfect travelling companion for anyone who wishes to understand this great country. India has 1.2 billion

people, 22 official languages, a mixture of religions including the second largest Muslim population making up 20% of its society and yet is one of the most successful secular democracies in the world. It is a complex country and the book helps us understand that complexity. It is a tough read but a perfect foundation for anyone who wants to both experience India and try to understand it.

Andrew says

India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy, by Ramachandra Guha, is a deep and fascinating examination of the world's most populous democracy from the death of Gandhi to 2008. The book begins by examining the fracturing of the Indian National Congress, with Pakistan and India splitting into two nation states. This led to a massive influx of internal refugee movements, and widespread violence between Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities. It is estimated more than one million people died in this communal violence throughout India and Pakistan.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated during this split by a Hindu extremist. Gandhi sorely wished to see India and Pakistan unite as one nation, but his wish was ultimately dashed. His successor in the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru strove to keep Gandhi's vision going. Nehru was an extremely adept politician, and one of the most widely respected characters in post-independence India. What he inherited were some issues, however. The British had left, but a collection of over 500 Princely States in India remained. It was the Indian governments goal to incorporate these states (and Pakistan's too).

Many of these states were small collections of villages, but some were massive, and yearned for independence. Hyderabad was a large state in south central India. It had long existed as a vassal to the Mughal Empire, and this treaty was inherited by the British Raj. After independence, the Maharaja of Hyderabad sought to keep his state independent. He set up armed forces to try and resist Indian occupation, and sought international support for his cause. India sent in thousands of troops and annexed Hyderabad soon after independence. Travancore was another valuable Princely state. Situated on the Indian coast, it had an efficient government, contained resources to construct nuclear devices, and had the backing of the British. The leader of Travancore also sought independence, but was attacked by Indian nationalists, and in hospital, gave his approval to join India. Kashmir, however, was the sore spot. Kashmir was a strategically important state touching Himalaya mountains. It was largely Muslim, but its ruling class were anti-Pakistan for political reasons. During the trouble of Partition and the subsequent refugee crisis, Kashmir was a bastion of stability. All this changed when tribal groups from Pakistan entered Kashmir to try and force its annexation to Pakistan. India retaliated with troops of its own, and general conflict began. When the dust settled, the area was split between Pakistan and India - the situation that largely exists today. This conflict has yet to be resolved, at the time of writing.

Nehru's India was chaotic, and many predicted it would fall to military rule after his death. The internal situation in India was fractured, due to the multitude of religious, ethnic, cultural, language, caste groups, ideologies and so on. The system of regional states within India was difficult, as many individual groups vied for their own independent states. Tribal groups in eastern India, like the Naga and Mizo fought pitched insurgencies (the Naga) for independence, or created political groups to try and create their own states (Jharkand, Mizoram etc.). Gujarati speakers did not want the city of Bombay to join the state of Maharashtra. Sikhs in the Punjab region also wanted their own state. The language of India was also contentious. What should be the language of the political centre and its courts? Some in the southern states cried foul when Hindi was proposed, and wanted the main language to remain English. On top of this, the complex caste system of India created situations of intolerance and favouritism. Those from the untouchable Caste struggled to find employment, and were discriminated against in every day life. Tensions existed between various castes and often flared up into violence. Hindu extremism, characterized by the RSS party,

sought to end Indian secularism and create a Hindu state. This too resulted in violence between Hindu and Muslim communities.

Nehru balanced all of these issues fairly well, while keeping India on its democratic course. Nehru had little real political challengers during his tenure, as he was Gandhi's chosen successor. Nehru's Congress Party dominated India's political sphere for his 15 years in office. He deftly sidestepped challengers, and was able to hold his own during periods of strife and conflict. He fought hard to keep India from succumbing to Communalism on one hand, and Communism on the other. He faced challenges from Hindu Nationalists. He supported state-led developmentalism, moving toward a more Soviet style economy. This had mixed results in India for a number of reasons, but did successfully start India down the road to Industrialization.

Nehru's foreign policy situation was also tricky. Originally, Nehru sought warm ties with China, but these ties soured over territorial disputes in the Himalaya's, resulting in war between India and China in the 1960's, which led to the loss of territory in both Eastern India and in Kashmir. China then sought relations with Pakistan. India also had frosty relations with the United States. On the surface, India and the US have much in common. Both are large and successful democracies. Both secularist. However, India's experiments with socialist economics and policies, and the USA's prioritization of relations with Pakistan, and subsequent arms deals soured all attempts. India turned to the Soviet block for support. The falling out between China and the USSR was a key moment for India to modernize its economy and armed forces, and India and the USSR signed treaties of cooperation and friendship. Even still, Nehru sought a middle road, and promoted non-alignment in Asia.

Nehru passed away during the Sino-Indian conflict, and was succeeded briefly by another Prime Minister, who also died soon after. His daughter, Indira Gandhi, succeeded to lead the Congress, and would dominate Indian politics for the next 16 years. She saw the annexation of Goa from Portugal, the incorporation of French remnants on the Indian subcontinent, the incorporation of Sikkim, but most importantly, a smashing victory over Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan rose up in revolt against West Pakistan. The Bengali's of East Pakistan did not have political representation, and were long abused by Islamabad. India supported Bengali independence with a direct invasion, and helped proclaim the independence of Bangladesh after a brief occupation. These victories were strategically used by Gandhi to stay in power.

Indira Gandhi's political and economic moves were more autocratic than her fathers. Gandhi supported a centralization of economics, and derided free trade or liberalization. She sought closer ties still with the Soviets, and helped build up the armed forces of India to become a regional player, and a direct challenge to China. On the political front, she struggled with political representation, and after protests and communal violence erupted throughout the nation, she proclaimed a state of emergency, jailing all political opponents and stifling the press. This state of emergency led to an easing of economic and social tensions, but was deeply unpopular for obvious reasons. Indira seemed set to create a dictatorship in India, and had been promoting her son, Sanjay Gandhi, as her successor. Thankfully, after a year of emergency rule, she suddenly released all political prisoners, and held fresh elections, which she lost to a coalition of Hindu nationalist parties, regional parties, and a defection of older Congress politicians.

This coalition would only last three years in power, as it succumbed to internal political tensions, and Indira Gandhi was reelected to power once more. This time in office saw her son Sanjay die in a plane accident, and she promoted her other son Rajiv Gandhi. However, she moved away from her authoritarian past, as she required coalition support to ensure an electoral majority. She chose the communists as a political partner - this cementing her state-run economic ideals. She also went on a charm offensive in the west to promote India's image. During this time, ethnic and religious tensions again flared, resulting in conflicts across the country, and violent communal violence. The worst hit Punjab, the Sikh region of India, where tensions between Sikhs and Hindus - unheard of in the past, flared into extreme violence. An armed uprising of Sikhs looking for political autonomy/independence for their state, was violently put down. In retaliation, two of Gandhi's Sikh bodyguard assassinated her.

Her son, Rajiv, was next in line. He saw to an opening of the Indian economy, movement toward liberalization of trade and economics, and to soothe tensions between India's communities. He successfully ended the Sikh insurrection, and the issues with the Mizo and Naga tribes. He sent troops overseas to Sri Lanka to assist that governments conflict with Tamil rebels. He also saw India move toward a more Parliamentary style democracy, with frequent elections, coalition politics and a strengthening of democratic practices - which led to his electoral defeat. In the subsequent election campaign, Rajiv was assassinated by a Tamil extremist.

The time after Rajiv is a blur of names and figures. The BJP (as of writing the ruling party in India) took prominence as a collective of Hindu nationalist parties. This party successfully competed with Congress in elections post Rajiv - by this time the Congress had split many times under the Gandhi/Neru political clan. This period (1980's forward) saw many wonderful things happen in India, and many terrible ones too. Literacy, economic well being, women's rights, caste rights, and so on increased markedly. The Indian economy began to open up to more neo-liberal policies, moving away from its experiments in socialism and centralized economic planning. This led to both an increase in GDP per capita and average income, and saw a massive shift in poverty levels toward the middle class. It also saw rising tensions between minority groups, unequal distribution of income, massive environmental damage (ie. Bhopal disaster) and so on.

I won't go on any further. But what did I think of the book? India After Gandhi was highly engaging, and offered a deeply analytical look at India's history. It maps the political, internal and external pressures the Indian state has faced during its history. Ethnic tensions and violence continue to be the norm in this massive and varied state, but India continues to be a democracy - defying many Western analysis throughout history. It is slowly building itself to be a powerhouse economy, and is widely thought to be on its way to Great Power status in the future. India is a nation that is not often written about in Western literature, and is often overshadowed by China's economic dominance. Even so, is is with great pride that India remains a stable democracy. It suffers from internal strife, poverty, nepotism (as clearly shown above), corruption and environmental degradation. However, it has strong democratic institutions, and is making great strides in all its endeavors. Guha's book examines all aspects of this nation with a critical eye, offering facts and analysis, and avoids glowing prose in favour of realistic analysis. Highly recommended for those looking to read about India and its incredible journey from colony to colossus.

Viplove says

Never has history been told in such colour and with such emotion. Rightly deserves to be called Guha's *masterpiece*.

A book that takes you through the fight of a young nation against the veritable elements threatening secularism, its dangerous but nevertheless great gamble with democracy, its idealist argument against the more realist one for alignment, its parenthood falling from that of great men of integrity to mortals with vanity, and the rise of populism on the price of constitutional democracy. Selflessness and foresight of some, pettiness and fanaticism of some more, revolts for secession, linguist processions, theocratic and socialist movements, poverty and hunger, rights of minorities, even the strange cinema and much more, all find their due description in one volume.

With every other statement referenced, one wonders the pain undergone and diligence shown with every book or magazine the author refers, each document that he dusted and each letter that he unearthed.

The unnatural idea of an Indian Nation opening the book, and the appreciation of that *strange* idea being successfully conceived and perpetuated ending it, is sure to fill every democrat's heart with admiration for India, and every nationalist's eyes with tears.

Ted says

Speaking of India the nation state, one must insist that its future lies not in the hands of God but in the mundane works of men. So long as the constitution is not amended beyond recognition, so long as elections are held regularly and fairly and the ethos of secularism broadly prevails, so long as citizens can speak and write in the language of their choosing, so long as there is an integrated market and a moderately efficient civil service and army, and – lest I forget – so long as Hindi films are watched and their songs sung, India will survive.

Guha's closing words

Acknowledgements/thanks

I first want to thank my many Indian friends who, actively or passively, have recommended this book to me. The first two wrote glowing reviews of the book, and all the others rated it highly.

Lit Bug; Sujeet; Riku Sayuj; Praj; Megha; Aniruddh; Sai Kishore; Dhandayutha; Sumirti Singaravel; Rohan; Santhosh. *Thanks to you all!*

short review

June 2015. I read the Prologue tonight, with increasing astonishment. What the author wrote about in the Prologue was the attitude that the West had about India's Independence: that they wouldn't be able to govern themselves, that there were too many divisions in the country, that it couldn't possibly survive as a single country (the diversities in the country - caste, class, religion, language - were so immense, people were writing (in the 40s and 50s and later) that it was less likely to survive than would be Europe if Europe became a single country). And on top of that it couldn't possibly survive, even in pieces, as a democratic nation or nations, because of its incredible poverty.

So here we are six decades later (when the book was written), India still a single country, with democratic institutions, and yes still with a host of divisions and problems, but perhaps the single most astounding experiment in democracy that the world has seen.

As I read these fifteen pages it was as if blinders were falling off my eyes, I had never considered these things before. I was just overwhelmed by how this author, who writes extremely well, is setting out to make a narrative of the history of these years in India, to suggest what the underlying things were that made this so improbable thing come about. I suddenly understand that there is some sort of “miracle” involved in this country's post-colonial history.

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December 2016. And now, 18 months later, I've read the last word of this fascinating book. “*Eighteen months?*”, you say. Well, I've struggled to read probably 60 other books during those eighteen months. But whenever I picked up his book to read another chapter or two, there was no struggle involved, rather pure pleasure.

And when finally done, having read the Acknowledgments, read (or scanned) every one of the hundreds of

endnotes occupying over ninety pages (during the read), I thought this must be close to the best history book I'd ever read.

longer review

The book

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Following the Table of Contents Guha presents a Cast of Principal Characters. The list: (view spoiler)

ACRONYMS & NICKNAMES

Here's a list of acronyms, in some cases nicknames, Guha sometimes uses, made by referencing the

Index.(view spoiler)

Reading hints

- 1) The term “communalism” is much used. For American readers, I believe a good equivalent would be “parochialism”.
- 2) Before reading a chapter, scan the end-notes for it. For those that look interesting, find them and circle them in the text. Then keep a second book mark back in the notes section.
- 3) There are two fine maps in the Epilogue, pp. 752 and 754.

SECTIONS

The first four parts of the book (the “history” so-called by Guha) have been placed here:
<https://www.goodreads.com/story/show/...>

PART V : A HISTORY OF EVENTS

(view spoiler)

The author

Ramachandra Guha (1958-) is an Indian historian and writer whose research interests include environmental, social, political and cricket history. For the year 2011–2012, he held a visiting position at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

He was appointed to BCCI's panel of administrators by the Supreme Court of India on 30 January 2017.

Guha was born at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh. He graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi with a Bachelor's in Economics in 1977 and completed his Master's in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics.

Between 1985 and 2000, he taught at UC-Berkeley, Yale, Stanford, the University of Oslo University, and the Indian Institute of Science.

Guha then moved to Bangalore, and began writing full-time. He served as Sundaraja Visiting Professor in the Humanities at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, in 2003.

Guha, not yet sixty, continues writing, books, articles, tweets – you name it. His web site is <http://ramachandraguha.in/> - an interesting site where articles and essays by Guha are posted in five categories: History, Politics and current affairs, Biography, Culture, and “Longer essays”. Recent posts are mostly from The Telegraph and the Hindustan Times. The longer essays appear to come from a variety of sources, such as The Hindu, the New Republic, and Economic and Political Weekly. The site has archives going back to 2002, and a search engine.

From what I've read in this book and on his web site, Guha, though certainly a realist, exudes optimism about India. He loves the country, has claimed, very possibly correctly, that it's the “most interesting” country in the world, and seems enthusiastically surprised and genuinely proud that India since Independence has time and again proved the Western doomsayers wrong about the impossibility of India's continuous march down the path they chose decades ago: of being a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious (though sectarian), and multi-linguistic state – the world's largest democracy.

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Previous review: The Really Big One

Random review: Looking for Mr. Goodbar

Next review: Memoirs of U.S. Grant

Previous library review: Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid

Next library review: The Soccer War