

**REVIEW**  
**on**  
**THE UN-GANDHIAN GANDHI**  
**The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma**  
**(CLAUDE MARKOVITS)**

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**Dr.Sarita Singh**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, SNG PG College, Unnao-209801, India

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Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.....

(Mahatma Gandhi)

**Abstract**

A historian of modern India Claude Markovits explores in Un-Gandhian Gandhi the multi-facets of the icon Mahatma Gandhi. He holds the hands of readers to board on the journey from India to south to unravel the mysteries of Gandhi's personal life and career. Markovits claims to evaluate Gandhi's image that created in the west from the 1920s onwards. This narrates the tale of disjunctions and contradictions between the early and later Gandhian approaches as an apostle of non-violence and as a politician man of India separately. This particular paradoxical representation spells bound everyone mouth opened and compels to share one's thoughts.

**Keywords:** Ungandhian, icon, assassin, discontentment, hagiography.

Though there have been many books on Gandhi but this book **The Un-Gandhian Gandhi** shows a different approach of the French author Claude Markovits on Indian National hero Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi. Markovits entitled the book very paradoxically calling Gandhi un-Gandhian He is such the author who dares to exhibit in his book something different about the historical legend Mahatma Gandhi in comparison to others'. The book is divided into two main chapters: **I. Perceptions of Gandhi** and **II. Gandhi in History**. The entire text throws new light on Gandhi by looking simultaneously at his legend and career. Dealing with the first chapter the author ensures the readers, on the one hand, to give them the private and public accounts of Gandhi but on the other hand, he also attempts to show the posthumous influence of Mahatma on the nation. The book re-examines the Gandhian legend as an international icon through the varied texts and images both in India and Western world. Markovits also analyses the official image of Mahatma which is proposed to worshipful crowds is that of a

holy man, the upholder of a religion which is at the same time universal and Indian rooted. He is a perfect and infallible leader who inspired the masses. Giving the general introduction of the images of Gandhi, Markovits stresses the impoverishment in the representations of the Mahatma after his death.

The second chapter of the book shows the contribution of South Africa in the life of Gandhi and many concerning areas of him in his real emergence as a National Leader in India. Markovits argues that Gandhi's personality fully blossomed in South Africa in a way he could probably have had he stayed on in Rajkot. Thus Gandhi's professional role was influenced by his long and most critical phase of maturation in South Africa. It was a turning point of his life. More fundamentally, the shift from South Africa to India proves a noticeable change in Gandhi's political perspective and language. The later Indian career of Gandhi was the result of his own radical reinvention. The author emphasises that the transformation into an icon that has caused his unusual longevity. He also adds that so many hagiographies, documentary biographies, literary biographies and interpretive biographies were written on Gandhi but Gandhi did not shape any frame for himself except the masterwork *Autobiography*. As Gandhi declared about his personal sketch that what he was going to write which was purely of a western genre, it was only a series of 'experiments with truth'. Markovits assesses Mahatma's personality

and explores into the book that he hadn't any ideology on which he could built the edifice of his thoughts.

After evaluating, most probably, every single aspect of Gandhi's life, the author develops the view that Gandhi can be continuously reinvented according to the needs and fashions of the times. He has been esteemed for decades as an apostle of peace and as a great ancestral figure of ecology and alternative moments. The iconic incarnation of Gandhi is a man of God whom a bullet of his assassin could transform into a martyr. According to the facts and evidences, Markovits says, Gandhi was totally different. He was a man tormented by the sensuality till the end of his life, had an unquenchable thirst for life and also had an enormous capacity for work.

The book reveals Gandhi's message of love and brotherhood that is lost somewhere amidst the various interventions. What, actually, Gandhi demands is that everybody should try to discover the source of violence in him and keep himself aside in blaming any institution or system. Whenever he finds himself able to identify the source, the remedy he will find. In the last chapters of the book Markovits seems to say that Gandhi always carries a message of hope for the welfare of mankind. He agrees with the optimistic views of Einstein that the future generations would hardly believe that there was such a man made of flesh and blood, had walked on the earth.

At its soul, the book is very striking and a good attempt by the author

Claude Markovits. Recently the term *Un-Gandhian* has been used for the social activist Anna Hazare in an article entitled *Myth about the methods used by Anna Hazare* (Monday, August 29, 2011) posted by Saddle- Bag at 11:55 AM. Critics of today called Anna's way 'Ungandhian' to censure him and the movement against corruption. They say Gandhiji never used coercive method to impose his decision on government and his struggle was mainly against the imperialistic British government. And his idea of *fasting* was punishing *thyself* due to the discontentment, once the people suffered. They say Anna has deviated from this ideology of fasting and its very essence because he is using it as an instrument to pressurize government. But the analysis of this whole Ungandhian argument, critics give the explanation, is

illogical because, first Anna Hazare never proclaimed that he is Gandhi, it is media who is carving Gandhi out of him, and second how does it matter because most important part of any movement is its motive, intent. So it is time for people to realize that though the movement is unconstitutional or Ungandhian, as portrayed by few sections, its motive to curtail corruption is what makes it right.

So, in the last it can be viewed that the book *Un-Gandhian Gandhi* seems purely Gandhian in its essence.

#### Reference

Claude Markovits, "The UnGandhian Gandhi: The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma" Anthem Press, 2004.

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