



Mother India: A Political Biography of Indira Gandhi

By Pranay Gupte

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The story of a woman who personified the spirit of India tells of her fight for the independence of six hundred million people and of her unceasing efforts to promote disarmament and nonalignment. 12,500 first printing.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A bountiful mother figure to her legions of admirers, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) is unsparingly portrayed as an arrogant ruler enamored of her celebrity status and a key cause of her country's woes in this acerbic, compulsively readable political biography. According to Gupte, a columnist for International Newsweek who was born and raised in India, Gandhi substituted vague socialist "mantras" for concerted economic transformation and looked the other way when her close associates engaged in wholesale corruption. Her "paranoid attachment to power" is held responsible for the fissure in 1969 of her Congress Party, which led to the disintegration of secular, centralist politics in India. Blending lively firsthand reportage with astute political analysis, Gupte draws up a useful scorecard of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's missed opportunities for increasing productivity, distributing income and trimming a gargantuan bureaucracy. The book is also critical of Rajiv Gandhi's vacillating reign hobbled by corruption and maladministration. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Intended as both a political biography of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and a 20th-century history of India, this journalistic work falls dreadfully short of the mark on each point. The results encompass a biography lacking focus and analysis and a contemporary history possessing a few cobbled-together facts, many of which are dead wrong. Drifting through a poorly organized text are personal comments on the author's response to events, which contain little meaning or purpose. On too many occasions Gupte's few significant remarks on Indira's corruption or Rajiv's administrative shallowness are buried in tons of trivialities. Mother India is not recommended; readers will be better served by the crisp, focused, factual work of Inder Malhotra's *Indira Gandhi* (LJ 3/15/91).

- John F. Riddick, *Central Michigan Univ. Lib., Mt. Pleasant*

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From Kirkus Reviews

New York Times correspondent Gupte (Vengeance, 1985; The Crowded Earth, 1984, etc.) says here that Indira Gandhi is "hard to read." In fact, she is nearly invisible in this "political biography" that mostly reproduces, with all their organizational flaws, Gupte's previous articles on Gandhi--except perhaps for ten chapters depicting the slain Indian P.M. as selfish, inept, tyrannical, intellectually limited, and surrounded by sycophants. Born in 1917, daughter of Nehru, friend of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi grew up amidst economic privilege and political turmoil that marked her whole life. Married to a Parsi she met while studying at Oxford, Gandhi, mother of two children, began her political apprenticeship by helping her father after her mother's death; like most of her family, she spent time in jail for political opposition. Upon her father's death in 1964, she herself became India's P.M., winning the support of foreign "Titans" (the description here of her meeting with LBJ is charming)--but not native Indians. Rioting, urban and rural poverty, religious conflict, war with Pakistan, and corruption--of which she herself was convicted before she suspended the constitution and jailed the accusatory journalist--were, according to Gupte, symptoms of Gandhi's failure to carry on the Mahatma/Nehru vision of a secular, unified, democratic India. Her assassination in 1984, like her son's in 1991 (with which the book ends), seemed inevitable; and-- as Gupte points out in a sad concluding note--there is now no Indian leader of sufficient stature to replace the Gandhis. A major flaw of this high-minded book is its composition, a lumpy mix of the author's opinions and earlier pieces, gossip, and memories of Gandhi's friends. Similarly, the exposition is confusing, structured around

issues rather than its subject's life. A proper political biography of Gandhi is yet to be written. (Sixteen pages of photos--not seen.) -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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