few men in their lifetime aroused stronger emotions or touched
deeper chords of humanity than Gandhi did. ‘Generations to come,
it may be,’ wrote Einstein of Gandhi in July 1944, ‘will scarcely
believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon
this earth’. While millions venerated Gandhi as the Mahatma, the
great soul, his political opponents saw in him only an astute
politician. Not until 1946–7 (when the transfer of power enabled
them in their minds to disengage Mr Gandhi the man from Mr
Gandhi the arch-rebel) were the British able to see him in a
gentler light. And it was his tragic death which finally convinced
his Pakistani detractors that his humanity encompassed and trans-
cended his loyalty to Hinduism.

It is not easy to write the life-story of a man who made such a
strong impact on his contemporaries. Yet it is important that the
image of Gandhi does not become that of a divinity in the Hindu
pantheon, but remains that of a man who schooled himself in
self-discipline, who made of his life a continual process of growth,
who shaped his environment as much as he was shaped by it, and
who tenaciously adhered to certain values to which civilized
humanity pays lip-service while flouting them in practice.

Though the arrangement of this biography is necessarily
chronological, I have attempted, at appropriate points, to analyse
Gandhi’s attitude to important issues. The background of Indian
nationalism, the Indian political scene when Gandhi returned from
South Africa, his religious evolution, the transformation in his
mode of life and acquisition of new values, his ethics, economics,
and political movements, his attitude to war, and untouchability—
all these have been treated in separate chapters. This combination
of the chronological and the analytical methods has facilitated the
discussion in a single volume of Gandhi’s long and many-sided
life in some detail, and the correlation of the story of his life with
the evolution of his ideas. Gandhi was no theorist; his principles
evolved in response to his own needs, and the environment in
which he found himself. In fact, it is as difficult to assess the events
of his life without understanding the ideas which inspired him,
as it is to interpret his ideas on religion, morals, politics, or
economics without reference to the context of his own life.

I know how hard it is for one who has lived through the last
forty years, to be completely objective about the events of which
Gandhi was the centre, but in assessing and reassessing events and
personalities, it has been my endeavour to understand and to
interpret in the historical perspective, rather than to uphold or to
condemn. How far I have succeeded in this endeavour it is for
the reader to judge.

I am grateful to the Government of India and the Director of
the National Archives for permission to examine and use material
from contemporary records which have enabled me, I believe,
to present for the first time, a two-dimensional story of Gandhi’s
relations with the government. Any account of Gandhi’s struggles
which is wholly, or even largely based on official sources is,
however, apt to be lopsided. I have therefore used these sources
only to illuminate some of the obscurer spots, and to see events
in their proper perspective.

The material for a biography of Gandhi is enormous. It is no
easy task to try to sum up his long, rich and varied life in a single
volume. I owe a heavy debt of gratitude to authors of numerous
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B. R. Nanda.