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Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie. *Gandhi's Prisoner?: The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal.* Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2005. 419 pp. $27.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7957-0176-4.

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Mohandas K. Gandhi died almost sixty years ago. The fascination with him continues even though he and others have written voluminously about every aspect of his life. Approximately thirty books are published on Gandhi annually. *Gandhi's Prisoner?* is ostensibly a biography of Gandhi's second son Manilal (1891-1956). At the core of the book, however, is the relationship of Gandhi, a universal figure, with his sons Manilal, Harilal (1888-1948), Ramdas (1897-1969), and Devdas (1900-1957), and the different ways in which they reacted to being the children of a Mahatma. The book's title is taken from a letter that Gandhi wrote to Manilal in 1918, asking him to consider him a "friend" rather than as his "prisoner." The question mark was added because opinions of Gandhi the family man range from those who feel his autocratic control ruined the lives of his sons, to those who consider him above criticism. This study is underpinned by a second important objective. Many names spring to mind when the politics of this era are discussed: Yusuf Dadoo, H. A. Naicker, George Poonen, Ismail Meer. Manilal is rarely mentioned in this august company and this biography seeks to restore a more prominent role for him in South African politics from the 1920s to the 1950s. Existing work, Dhupelia-Mesthrie asserts, "hardly does justice to Manilal's role.... As we celebrate our country's ten years of democracy and the heroes and heroines of the long preceding struggle, Manilal's name should now also come to the fore" (p. 23).

Dhupelia-Mesthrie has excellent credentials. She is Manilal's granddaughter and Gandhi's great-granddaughter, and an Associate Professor of History at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. This accomplished historian has authored or edited *Not Slave, Not Free* (1992), *From Canefields to Freedom : a Chronicle of Indian South African Life* (2000); and *Sita: Memoirs of Sita Gandhi* (2003). In addition, her doctoral dissertation focused on the role of the Indian Agent in South Africa from the 1920s to 1940s. This knowledge is skillfully utilized to produce a comprehensive biography, set against the backdrop of important political developments in South Africa and India.

Manilal, born in Porbandar in 1891, joined his father in South Africa as a young child when Gandhi delayed his return to India. Gandhi comes across as a harsh patriarch at times, who sought to impose his philosophy of life on his descendents. En-route to South Africa the boys had to wear shoes and eat with knives and forks. Though unhappy, "they learnt to comply. This was the first of many lifestyle changes they would encounter; in Africa their father would impose many more" (p. 36). When Manilal was ten and forgot his glasses at home, Gandhi exhorted "we can't afford to forget such things, can we?-" and made him walk back five miles to retrieve them. In 1901, Gandhi's wife Kasturbai, Manilal, and Harialal were made to hand back gifts from the local community when they were returning to India. An irate Kasturbai burst out that the boys "were dancing to Gandhi's tune" and that the imposition of his view of life "was turning them into *sadhus* (ascetics)" (p. 43). When Manilal sent a photograph of himself to Gandhi in 1912, he was censured for his dress: "It does not please me. It does not go with our way of living to dress like a fastidious Englishman. It would be even better if you made it a rule to wear the Indian-style cap" (p. 102). Gandhi punished himself by fasting for seven days when Manilal was caught kissing a teenage girl at Phoenix, the place of Gandhi's residence, north of Durban. As penance, Manilal promised not to marry until Gandhi freed him from this promise (p. 109). Manilal's actions were always tempered by the fact that Gandhi would punish himself through fasting when displeased with his actions. Whether Gandhi's austere disciplinary measures, strict regulations, and continuous attempt to control Manilal's life, even from India, can be construed as parental love in the traditional sense, or as extreme, is for the reader to decide.

Gandhi's punishments were public knowledge. His family learned that "there was no privacy in their lives; they were linked to a bigger community and all deeds were public" (p. 109). Harilal remarked to Gandhi later in

life that instead of "reprimanding us publicly–we would have preferred if you caned us privately" (p. 109). Little pleasures were forbidden. Manilal was not allowed to learn to play the piano. He was refused permission to go up Table Mountain when he and Gandhi visited Cape Town shortly after being released from prison: "What is there so remarkable to see in Table Mountain? When you go home to India you can go up to the Himalayas which contain thousands of Table Mountains." Thus, "freed from prison, Manilal was still his father's prisoner" (p. 119). After they returned to India, Manilal gave financial assistance to his brother Harilal. When Gandhi found out, he punished Manilal by sending him to Madras virtually penniless and with instructions to return only when he had earned back the money he had given Harilal. He was warned not to use Gandhi's name to secure a job. Manilal sobbed years later when he recalled his struggles in Madras (p. 140). It is not surprising that when Manilal told tales of his childhood to his children "what he remembers were not fun and games but lessons in discipline" (p. 57). Gandhi was "stern, disciplinarian and driven by an ideal to mould Manilal in his own image" (p. 83). Gandhi insisted his actions were for Manilal's own good: "like a physician, I must make you swallow bitter draughts" (p. 119) and did not consider the measures "cruel" because he was acting "in your interest" (p. 83). Manilal spent time with the great Indian poet Rabidranath Tagore when he returned to India in 1914. Tagore observed that Gandhi's boys were "far too austere. They have a discipline where they should have ideals." He would have preferred it if they were not "so completely nice" (p. 136).

Gandhi cast a long shadow over Manilal's life as he sought to control every aspect of it. This was most blatant with regard to education. Gandhi educated his sons at home because he had little faith in formal education. As Gandhi developed into an advocate of *satyagraha* ("passive resistance") and his vision was transformed into a way of life, he established community living at Phoenix Settlement in 1904 and Tolstoy Farm (Gandhi's later residence near Johannesburg) in 1910. Determined to spare his sons the "mistakes" he had made, Gandhi made Manilal spend endless hours doing manual labor like farming, carpentry, cooking, and operating machines to develop character and humility. Gandhi believed that this was the most effective way to train for life, at the core of which were human relationships. For Gandhi education was about "knowledge of duty" rather than "knowledge of letters" (p. 79). Manilal, however, was anxious to study; yet when Gandhi had the opportunity to send one of his sons to Britain on a scholarship, he sent a nephew. Manilal felt "a sense of loss and lack of accomplishment" (p. 73) and was "troubled by a gnawing dissatisfaction" because of his lack of formal education (p. 75). This thwarting of Manilal's ambition of a good education resulted in him being "constantly bent over his books, the desire to study always foremost. A feeling of inferiority had taken root and was set to grow" (p. 132).

Responsibility was thrust on Manilal from a young age. With Gandhi spending long periods in prison and elder brother Hiralal preoccupied, Manilal was the "man of the house." His tasks, Gandhi reminded him in 1909, included being guardian of younger brothers Ramdas and Devadas, "looking after aunt Chanchi, nursing mother, and cheerfully bearing her ill temper" (p. 80). Gandhi wrote regularly to Manilal from jail, instructing him on what to read, work to do, and how to take care of the family. Manilal's political training began at the age of seventeen. Gandhi involved him in the *satyagraha* struggle between 1910 and 1913 to give him a "sense of purpose" and "calm his restless mind" (p. 85). Manilal served four prison sentences ranging from ten days to three months during this period. He was not a "passive puppet," Dhupelia-Mesthrie contends. Having helped edit *Indian Opinion*, he understood the issues and participated out of conviction (p. 89). Manilal returned to India in 1914 and helped establish Gandhi's ashram in Ahmedabad. Phoenix Settlement and the printing of *Indian Opinion* were entrusted to Albert West, Gandhi's British devotee. West informed Gandhi in 1918 that the paper's future was in jeopardy because Pragji Desai, who had edited the Gujarati section, had returned to India. Gandhi asked for a volunteer and Manilal returned to South Africa in 1918 at the age of 26. This was the making of Manilal. He replaced West as editor in 1920, a position he held until his death in 1956: "he saved the paper and the paper saved him, for here he found a purpose in life" (p. 156). As Manilal gained in confidence, he began writing his own editorials, gave greater coverage to African issues, covered the anti-imperial struggle in India, and reported vigilantly on anti-Indianism in South Africa. Manilal remained in South Africa until his death. It is not clear whether this was out of choice or duty to Gandhi. He visited India every three years and that is where his heart seemed to be: "The story of the survival of *Indian Opinion* was complicated by the desire of both Manilal and [his wife] Sushila to be with family and in India. [But] as Gandhi advised, they had to place dharma (duty) over desire" and their *dharma* was the continuation of Gandhi's legacy at Phoenix" (p. 251). Manilal also wanted to move from Phoenix but Gandhi refused to sanction this.

Gandhi's influential hand was also evident in Manilal's decision to marry. He had wanted to marry Fatima Gool, a Muslim from the Cape, but Gandhi objected because she was not Hindu: "it will be like putting two swords in one sheath" (p. 175). This seems anomalous considering that Gandhi had brought up his children to believe all religions equal. However, the boys were "shaped primarily by Hinduism" even though Gandhi respected all religions (p. 40). Gandhi was concerned about the impact the marriage would have on Hindu-Muslim relations in India. He warned Manilal that if he proceeded with the marriage he would have to stop editing *Indian Opinion* and would not be able to return to India. Gandhi advised Manilal to get over the "infatuation" and "delusions" of love: "our love is between brother and sister. Whereas here the main urge is carnal pleasure" (p. 176). Whatever Manilal might have felt, "in the end, though, he could not forget whose son he was. He did not have the courage to face the consequences of defiance; there really was no future without his father's blessing" (p. 176). Gandhi implored Manilal to remain celibate, but on this issue Manilal disagreed with his father and married in 1927, at the age of thirty-four. However, his wife was chosen by Gandhi. She was nineteen-year-old Sushila Mashruwala, also of the bania caste and daughter of a wealthy property-owner and fervent Gandhi supporter (p. 183). Gandhi therefore failed to impose his views on sex and marriage on his family. However, in the book, Gandhi's views on these matters and his family's disregard of them are not critically explored. We learn little about family debates on sex and marriage, except that Gandhi was very fond of his grandchildren.

Manilal was intimately involved in the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). From 1920 onward, he was a member of the NIC Committee and attended South African Indian Congress (SAIC) conferences as its representative. In India in 1930 he participated in salt marches and spent nine months in prison. This raised his political profile and he returned to South Africa a hero. The experience radicalized him and put him on a path of conflict with old friends like Sorabjee Rustomjee who remained wedded to the politics of compromise. Manilal conceded he had been wrong in placing faith in moderate politics. When the Indian and South African governments met in 1932 to discuss a colonization scheme for Indians, Manilal called it "nothing but a scrap of paper" (p. 219). Frustrated with NIC conservatism, he joined Albert Christopher in forming the Colonial Born and Settlers Indian Association in 1934. Manilal, once the mouthpiece of Congress, criticized the organization stridently. He referred to its leaders as "puppets dancing to the tune of the Agent" who were interested in nothing more than "tea parties" for persons in authority (p. 226). Manilal supported campaigns by young radicals like Dr. Yusuf Dadoo in the Transvaal and Dr. G. M. Naicker in Natal. He was close to Dadoo, a Muslim and communist, but a staunch supporter of Nehru, Gandhi, and *satyagraha* (p. 253). Manilal did not support communism but emphasized common objectives. While he supported African resistance, Manilal, unlike Dadoo, was only prepared to collaborate where there was "a possibility of action" (p. 260). He participated in the 1946 passive resistance struggle against segregation, spending 23 days in jail. As far as India was concerned Manilal, through *Indian Opinion*, supported Gandhi and the Indian National Congress and vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan.

Manilal seemed to emerge from Gandhi's shadow after his father's death: "Had Gandhi been alive, Manilal would have been in the background. Now he spread his father's message about the importance of fast and prayer" (p. 338). During 1948 he attended an Asian conference in Delhi and visited London, Europe, and the United States. In the United States, he sat in at a General Assembly session of the United Nations, met with Louis Fischer who was writing Gandhi's biography, and with Albert Einstein and numerous activist church groups. Reverend Donald Harrington of New York was "impressed with his immense spirituality and saintly qualities" (p. 337). Manilal also attended the World Pacifist Conference in India in 1949. He made a good impression on all he met, according to Dhupelia-Mesthrie, because "he had a good understanding of his father's philosophy and spoke in such a calm, convincing and humble way, that he drew people to him and was accorded special reverence. This was the other side of the coin of being a descendent of Gandhi" (p. 337). However, while he had a "good understanding of his father's philosophy," did he truly believe in it?

As apartheid gathered momentum in South Africa, Manilal advocated *satyagraha* as a means of resistance. Anger should not form the basis of resistance, he insisted. Whites should be won over through "love" and "self-suffering." His weapon of choice was "spiritual armaments" (p. 344). Manilal's pronouncements and publicly announced fasts did not have the same effect as Gandhi. He was not Gandhi and the National Party (NP) was not the British government. Manilal lacked the moral authority of his father and became increasingly isolated. One activist said that Manilal "did not understand the new Africa. So that when the resistance movement came, he was genuinely doubtful about the African's capacity to make a success of that weapon" (p. 349). Manilal's

distrust of communists "obscured" his vision and kept him out of the mainstream of resistance. He disparaged communists for their beliefs and "predilection for parties, drink, and women," things that had to be avoided to become a "person with inner discipline. All material things must be made secondary to spiritual values" (p. 343). Manilal was ridiculed within the NIC for his views: his "penchant for individual activity and moralizing brought him little appreciation" (p. 354). As the rest of the country moved towards joint resistance, Manilal campaigned individually against petty apartheid laws. He had reservations about the Defiance Campaign of 1952 because he believed it would turn violent. He did, however, cover the campaign in *Indian Opinion* and fasted to show solidarity with resisters (p. 352).

Manilal eventually joined the campaign with a group of liberals under Patrick Duncan, son of a cabinet minister, who led resisters into the African location of Germiston in December 1952. They were arrested and Manilal, aged 61, served 38 days of a 50-day prison sentence. Manilal's new political circle came to include liberals like Alan Paton and Julius Lewin, a law professor at the University of Witwatersrand. Manilal, who had resisted Indo-European Councils and White liberals in the 1920s, converted to Liberal Party politics. This became his new political home and he formally became a member of the Liberal Party in 1954. The party's members were united by opposition to the NP and communism. Regular contributions to *Indian Opinion* by liberals like Jordan Ngubane, Homer Jack, and Christopher Gell widened the gap between Manilal and the Congress Alliance. One of Manilal's last public acts was to attend the Congress of the People in June 1955, where the Freedom Charter was adopted. He suffered a stroke in November 1955 and died on 5 April 1956.

Manilal's biography is an absorbing read. It examines Gandhi's complex relationship with his sons, who reacted differently. Harilal and Manilal represent opposite extremes. Harilal opposed Gandhi's asceticism, revolted against him, and became an alcoholic. He refused to "do things to please Gandhi than out of a genuine commitment to his ideals" (p. 73). Manilal remained loyal. Was he the true heir to Gandhi's spiritual and political legacy? Manilal displayed many characteristics of Gandhi. Like Gandhi, he shared in domestic chores without a sexual division of labor, valued discipline, and his affection towards his children was "always tempered with restraint" (p. 286). Does Dhupelia-Mesthrie resolve the dilemma that she posed regarding Manilal: was he his own man, or was he simply struggling to live up to the expectations of his father whose shoes he could never fill? Gandhi's influence on Manilal was considerable: "it was always his father who controlled, guided and advised" (p. 291). Was Manilal's compliance due to Gandhi's strong personality or his approval of Gandhi's ideals?- The *Collected Works* of Gandhi contain some letters in which Manilal seeks advice from his father, leading observers to suggest that he was weak and relied heavily on Gandhi's counsel. Dhupelia-Mesthrie writes that Manilal's daughter Sita, who was the author's mother, son Arun, and younger daughter Ela, used words like "captive," "trapped," and "enslaved" to discuss Manilal's relationship with Gandhi. Arun maintains that Manilal was "totally subservient" and did not have any "desire of his own other than what Bapu (Gandhi) had chalked out for him" (p. 24). This study shows that Manilal mostly accepted, willingly or grudgingly, Gandhi's "advices." While Dhupelia-Mesthrie states in the introduction that she "seeks primarily to understand rather than judge," she does form a firm opinion, contending that Manilal had a genuine commitment to Gandhi's philosophy. For her, Manilal was not a "psychological prisoner with no personality of his own" (p. 399), but a man with strong views on many subjects. He propagated Gandhian philosophy not because "he was imprisoned by his father's ideals, but because he was a fervent "disciple" of "simple living, high thinking and passive resistance to injustice" (p. 400). The author is generous in her praise and admiration: "Manilal could not consider any life other than one of service" (p. 251); "He knew absolutely no fear when faced with injustice. The jails and police of the South African state held no terror for him; neither did the prospect of death in defence of a just cause" (p. 26).

For whom is Manilal's story important? For whom is it important to restore his reputation? The author? The Gandhi family? South African history? Readers? The author provides a clue in the introduction when she writes that her mother Sita "created such a vivid picture of him in my mind, that my heart found a place for a person I never knew. It was her particular wish that his biography be written. She felt that he had not received recognition for his role on Phoenix, and his thirty-six years as editor of *Indian Opinion.* I still remember her great disappointment in 1970 at the Gandhi birth centenary celebrations at Phoenix, when Manilal was not mentioned" (p. 22). While Manilal is given a personality of his own in the book, it is unfortunate for the reader that this relationship is seen primarily from Gandhi's perspective, as only a few of Manilal's letters to Gandhi exist. We gauge Manilal's attitude through his demonstration of fondness for Gandhi. In fact, the most poignant part of the biography is the description of the fifteen months that Manilal spent

in India when negotiations for independence were reaching their conclusion. He was totally devoted to Gandhi. Sita wrote that her father "sat at his (Gandhi's) feet and helped him with his massage and bath and just sat by him and saw to it that his every need was supplied ... I felt that had he had his own way he would have spent every minute of his life with him" (p. 293). Aside from such expressions of warmth, there are few direct references in personal letters to ascertain Manilal's deepest and private thoughts.

How are we to judge Manilal politically? Unlike Gandhi, he achieved few tangible results in the struggle against apartheid. His name is rarely mentioned when the pantheons of anti-apartheid activists are discussed, even though he spent close to fourteen years in prisons in South Africa and India. Gandhi's credo of non-violence, which Manilal embraced, left him increasingly in the political wilderness because he was unsure how to react as the Congress Alliance moved towards confrontation with the apartheid government. He became sidelined from the anti-apartheid movement of which he should have been an integral part because of this and his revulsion for communism. It is ironic that his last home was the Liberal Party, which accepted partial segregation. Manilal's changing political affiliations caused his critics to refer to him as "Manilal the Jeckyl and Manilal the Hyde" (p. 226). Unfortunately for Manilal, his political vacillation took place in a context where strong personalities like Yusuf Dadoo, Ismail Meer, even the moderate A. I. Kajee and Albert Christopher, carried the day. Manilal was caught between non-violence and having a say in South African politics. His failure to adapt to changes within the Congress movement has taken some of the shine off his contribution. Manilal's anti-communism was an obsession but this study does not adequately explain why. While the ANC and Indian radicals adapted to working with communists, and even Gandhi was politically flexible, Manilal's intransigence left him out of the political loop. Dhupelia-Mesthrie attempts to correct this by suggesting that Manilal would have reverted to Congress politics had he not suffered a stroke. His publishing of the Freedom Charter is cited as support for the ideals of the Charter and Congress politics. Manilal, however, published many views with which he did not agree. The author seems, at times, to be caught between two stools, being a professional historian on the one hand and granddaughter of Manilal on the other. She states that in addition to the general problems with writing biography– "how to phrase what must be told, how to force the seals, twist back the locks, burgle the cabinet of the soul"–she had to "take care to consider the feelings of my family" (p. 27). Although she qualifies this by stating that "there has been no censorship," this raises the broader historiographical question of objectivity when one is so close to the subject.

Gandhi's Prisoner? is an absorbing study of the personal and political lives of Mahatma and Manilal Gandhi, as well as the Phoenix Settlement and *Indian Opinion* after Gandhi left South Africa. It also provides an excellent and detailed outline of political developments in South Africa and India during these decades. The book is rich in detail and we must be thankful that the author had access to new materials, including unpublished papers, private family letters, and interviews with family and friends. This, together with a careful reading of *Indian Opinion*, has resulted in a meticulously researched biography which offers many new insights into Gandhi the family man and his relationship with his family. We come to appreciate Manilal the man and politician independently of his father. He played an important role during the middle decades of the twentieth century, particularly when he used *Indian Opinion* to highlight injustices and promote Gandhian ideals and politics. As a father and family man, he was kind, genteel, and hospitable, certainly ahead of his time on issues of gender: "he worked in the garden and shared household chores. There was no sexual division of labour ... There was no task too lowly to perform" (p. 284). A large number of the splendid eighty-eight black-and-white photographs are from private collections and add considerable value. This book is beautifully narrated, and obligatory reading for anyone interested in Gandhi and his family, the story of Indians in South Africa, or even the story of racial segregation in South Africa. It opens new debates relevant to post-apartheid South Africa, in particular the relationship of Indians and Africans. Contemporary discussion of this sensitive issue is always framed with reference to Gandhi, and many South Africans of Indian origin may be tempted to ask: are we not all Gandhi's Prisoners?

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