

## GANDHI

Preceded by a special filmed tribute by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, KG

In honour of Lord Attenborough Kt CBE, past President of BAFTA, we present a very special screening of *Gandhi*.

In 2007, BAFTA hosted a reunion of the cast and crew of *Gandhi* to celebrate the film's 25th year since its release. In a foreword for the event, Lord Attenborough wrote about the legacy of his film: "There is no question that, without our film, the awareness of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent philosophies and the subsequent widespread attention paid to his life and times would not have occurred. Even now, a whole new generation is learning about this extraordinary human being through DVD. So, hopefully, our movie does stand outside pure entertainment."

*Gandhi* has been chosen by BAFTA members as their favourite film by Lord Attenborough and it is the film that Lord Attenborough himself said he was most proud of. Released to international acclaim in 1982, the film garnered 16 BAFTA nominations, winning five; it also won eight Academy Awards.

It is a remarkable portrayal of one of the greatest historical figures of the 20th century and the fulfilment of one of Lord Attenborough's longest-held ambitions.

This screening is a tribute to Lord Attenborough, an outstanding talent in the history of BAFTA and of British film. We salute our greatest hero.

RELEASE YEAR: 1982

RUNTIME: 191 mins

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER:

Richard Attenborough

SCREENWRITER: John Briley



The New York Times published a number of articles on the making of *Gandhi*, prior to its release. Here, in an edited version of an article by Barbara Crossette on 28 November 1982, Lord Attenborough describes some of the challenges he faced during the making of this epic masterpiece.

**G**andhi is the story of a complex man, a wise and wily politician who maneuvered India to independence from imperial Britain while living the nonviolent, austere, communal life that was his impossible vision for all Indian society. It is a film that moves chronologically, episodically, from an unknown young barrister's catalytic collision with racial and cultural bigotry in turn-of-the-century South Africa to the 1948 assassination in a Delhi garden of the man the world had come to know as the Mahatma – the 'Great Soul.'

The story of Gandhi is also the story of more than half a century in the history

of India – vast, tumultuous, squalid, glorious, seductive India. These are stories so close to the national nerve that no Indian feature filmmaker has tried to tell them.

"Of course it's a cheek, it's an impudence to tell 50, 60, 70 years of history in three hours," Mr. Attenborough said recently in one of a series of conversations about the making of *Gandhi*. "And the temptations of filming in India are simply dreadful," he said, explaining the deliberation with which he curbed the camera's tendency to linger over the touristic vistas that appear as backdrop at every turn in that physically spectacular country. "The only kind of epics that work," he said, "are intimate epics."

"I work as an actor works," he said, "to involve an audience by engaging their emotions, to interest them in the story you are putting before them. This film is old-fashioned in its shooting. It is a narrative film. I have no interest in



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being remembered as a great creative filmmaker. I want to be remembered as a storyteller.

“Overriding all judgments must be, and always will be, the need to establish the acceptability and credibility – the humanity – of the leading character,” he went on. “The great Paul Muni and Charles Laughton biographies worked, even if in a superficial way, because of the credibility of the central figure. And in Peter O’Toole’s *Lawrence of Arabia*, however enormous the Arabic scale was, you were captivated by the person.”

*Gandhi* has haunted 20 of Mr. Attenborough’s most productive years, years during which he directed *Oh, What a Lovely War*, *A Bridge Too Far* and *Young Winston*. Since that winter day in 1962 when he sat down in St. Moritz to read Louis Fischer’s biography of Gandhi – a book that had been pressed on him by Motilal Kothari, an Indian living in London who had made it his life’s goal to persuade someone to make a film about the Mahatma and to whom, in part, this film is dedicated – Mr. Attenborough has lived with Gandhi the legend and *Gandhi* the film as a kind of backdrop to his distinguished acting and directing career. When hopes of finding a backer were high, he turned down parts to clear the way for work on the film – work that never did begin until 1980. When the project touched bottom again and again, he accepted acting roles to help pay the

bill. The would-be film became so much a part of him that Mr. Attenborough’s just completed book about it – *In Search of Gandhi*, to be published in February in the United States by New Century – is, sometimes consciously, sometimes perhaps not, less a filmmaking epic and more the autobiography of a stubborn, resilient man.

The obstacles he met were formidable, from the movie industry belief that ‘nobody is interested in a picture about a man dressed up in a sheet’ to the monumental obfuscations of India’s bureaucracy and the sensitivities of the inheritors of the Gandhi legend.

His first task was to go to India and win the approval of Prime Minister Nehru. Their first meeting, in 1963, was arranged by Lord Mountbatten, Britain’s last Viceroy of India and a friend of Nehru. “I had never been to India and knew nothing about it until I read that Fischer biography,” Mr. Attenborough said. “I suppose during this 20-year period I have now spent more than two years of my life there, making 25 or 30 trips.”

The approval of Nehru secured, Mr. Attenborough began to read the hundreds of volumes of biographies and collected works of the Mahatma. “In a year or two there was an awful lot in my pea brain,” he said. “The actual fundamental shape of the movie, and the selection of the principal highlights of

his life were already fixed in my mind by 1963 or ’64. Strangely, although much of the emphasis, the nuance, the filling out has happened since then, the actual story line has always remained the same.”

Mr. Attenborough’s script finally became a film through the backing of Goldcrest Film International, a London company whose principal stockholder is the Pearson Longman publishing group. Goldcrest had also backed *Chariots of Fire*. Funds also came from a New York company called International Film Investors, and from India’s National Film Development Corporation, which raised about a third of the film’s budget through private and public investors within India.

The casting of a film about Gandhi had raised problems throughout Mr. Attenborough’s years of searching for a backer, since many Western producers insisted on a big-name Western star in the title role. Mr. Attenborough said he believed such a course of action would have been “totally wrong.” He was determined to people his film with characters that would be both realistic to an Indian audience and comprehensible to a Western one. When the film finally took shape, he was fortunate to find exactly the blend of Indian and Western qualities he needed in Ben Kingsley, an actor for 15 years with Britain’s Royal Shakespeare Company. Mr. Kingsley’s father’s family came from the same area in India’s Gujarat state where Gandhi was born. Slimmed down and stripped of his hair, Mr. Kingsley looked so remarkably like Gandhi that Indian onlookers were startled more than once during the shooting of the film, which was made (except for a few English sequences) entirely in India.

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*A 20-Year Struggle Puts Gandhi on Screen,*  
by Barbara Crossette, *The New York Times*,  
November 28, 1982



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*Gandhi* was voted by BAFTA members across the UK and USA as their favourite Richard Attenborough film. It is being screened by BAFTA across multiple locations, in the same week, in honour of his outstanding contribution to film.