

BOOK REVIEW

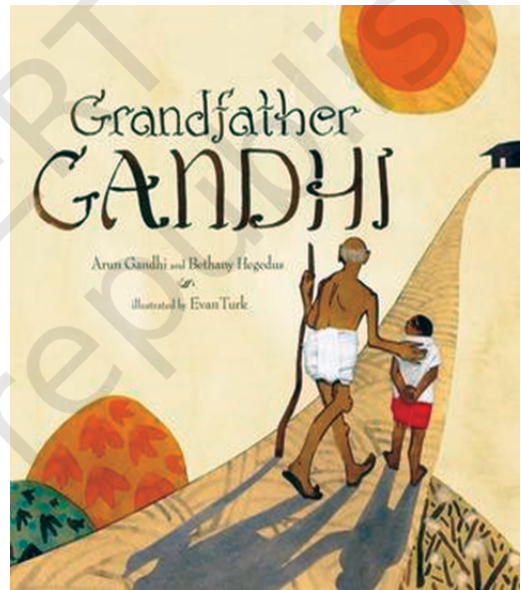
Grandfather Gandhi

Varada M. Nikalje*

Title of the Book	: <i>Grandfather Gandhi</i>
Author	: Arun Gandhi and Bethany Hegedus
Illustrator	: Evan Turk
Year	: 2010
Publisher	: Marshall Cavendish
Price	: ₹399.00

The book, co-authored by Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi, presents a vivid account of Gandhi through the eyes of the 12-year old narrator — Arun. Narrated in the first person, the author gives a glimpse of his grandfather's simple life at the Sevagram Ashram in Maharashtra, which was just the opposite of what it used to be in South Africa. The narrator also expresses the bond that he shares with his grandfather.

Written, primarily, for children, the book contains minimal text. The



language of the book is simple and lucid. It narrates how Arun travelled with his family from South Africa to the quiet village of Sevagram, where his grandfather lived simply in the company of his followers. Arun is told that it is considered to be an honour and privileged to live at the Ashram.

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Though happy about it, Arun frets as he has to share his grandfather with quite a number of people, all of whom clamouring for his time and attention. Further, Arun also worries about living up to the expectation attached with the name 'Gandhi'. The narrator goes on to describe his life at the Sevagram Ashram for two years and the time spent with his grandfather.

Arun is good at soccer and plays the game with boys in the village every day. But one day, a boy pushes him in the field and he gets hurt. Anger overwhelms Arun, and he, too, wants to retaliate. But the reverence of his family, particularly, grandfather, stops Arun, and he thinks, "How could he — a Gandhi — be so easy to anger?"

Arun reaches out to his wise and loving grandfather. Overwhelmed with embarrassment, he confides into him about the incident. Gandhi lovingly tells Arun that he, too, gets angry but uses it for the good. He says that anger is like "electricity: it can strike like lightening and split a tree in half, or it can be channelled, transformed and like a lamp, switched on to shed light in the world". The author's personal account carries a message of peace and shows how Gandhi's quiet anger went on to lead India to 'Freedom'.

Readers may relate Arun's experiences as narrated in the book to the ideals of peace, truth and non-violence, and that non-violence does not mean cowardice.

Bethany Hegedus, the co-author of the book, could not come to terms with the senseless 9/11 killings. One day she happened to attend a lecture by Arun Gandhi and felt a sense of solace. His speech moved her so much that she decided to co-author the book with him. In the 'Note from the Authors' section, Hegedus says, "The world we live in needs to heal — to heal from the wars that are fought, to the bullying epidemic, to mass killings by a lone gunman, to poverty, to hunger, and to issues that contribute to internal anger being outwardly expressed in violent actions." Gandhi's message never ages or grows old.

Illustrations are the highlight of this book. Which give a glimpse of Gandhi's life at the Sevagram Ashram. This picture book biography, thus, presents Gandhi as a loving grandfather and a revered figure across the world. Using the technique of mixed media, the illustrations are presented in watercolour, paper collage, cotton fabric, yarn, gouache, pencil and tin foil. The illustrations match the text, creating a captivating and vivid imagery, such as in this statement, "The tin bowls and utensils we used clanged, making a funny-sounding music."

While commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, one cannot stop pondering on his thoughts and ideals for the self and society. What then, is Gandhiji's vision? More importantly, how do

children perceive this vision? What is the understanding of children in India, as well as, other countries, on Gandhiji's concepts of non-violence, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and world peace?

Many books have been written on the life, teachings and works of Gandhi. They have appeared in almost all main languages of the world. On a parallel note, there have also been

questions about his ideals — their utility, suitability and whether they can be applied in today's context. This, of course, would depend largely on how we perceive his ideals. Children's literature can influence the thinking of impressionable minds to a large extent. Concepts like truth and non-violence are eternal. They never die. One only needs to discover the Gandhi within oneself.