

Movie receives 11 Oscar nominations

Gandhi — not the typical hero

by Gary Barker

Battalion staff

In a word, *Gandhi* is a moving film. But just as a word is grossly inadequate to sum up Sir Richard Attenborough's highly acclaimed epic, a three-hour movie is hardly sufficient to tell the story of a man as influential and inspirational as Mohandas K. Gandhi.

As the curtain closed, and the audience shuffled out, many seemed to be asking themselves: "Who is Gandhi and why haven't I heard more about him?" The movie seems to whet a historical appetite among an audience whose view of history is skewed toward so-called American "heroes."

But for most persons, *Gandhi* should provide a short course in the history they missed. The film covers the major events in the life of India's controversial Mahatma, or great soul, as his followers called him.

But while *Gandhi* is educational, it is not painful as learning sometimes can be. It is entertaining, always gripping — always thought-provoking — throughout its entire three hours and seven minutes.

And although it is not as creative or interpretative as some historical films, *Gandhi*'s life didn't need much creativity — his story largely speaks for itself.

The movie begins where *Gandhi*'s career began — in South Africa, where he became a successful lawyer, worked to end discrimination against Indians and instigated civil disobedience.

Returning to India as a hero, he began a long struggle to fight British rule and the animosity between India's Hindus and Muslims. The movie covers an impressive 56 years of *Gandhi*'s

79-year life, until his assassination in 1948.

The major theme throughout the film is violence — small-scale and large-scale — and *Gandhi*'s reaction to it. In the midst of bitter anger, he continued to preach non-violent activism and went on hunger strikes several times to protest his violent countrymen.

Gandhi's story is told in the movie on more of a societal level rather than a personal level; the two main characters in the movie are *Gandhi* and India's

zine photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White, is in no way believable as an interviewer. She acts as if she is taking pictures for her family album; it is likely that Bourke-White approached her subject with much more seriousness.

Sir John Gielgud, as Viceroy to India Lord Irwin, is his usual wonderful pompous self. Martin Sheen also is up to his standards as Walker, a Western journalist who reported *Gandhi*'s methods to the West.

Indian actress Rohini Hattangady, as *Gandhi*'s wife, is perhaps the best of the supporting cast. Several of the other supporting players — including Ian Charleson, Geraldine James and Roshan Seth as former Indian prime minister Pandit Nehru — are equally superb, but their roles are not well-developed.

One problem with the movie is that screenwriter John Briley and Director Attenborough (*A Bridge Too Far* and *Magic*) focus on the well-known events in *Gandhi*'s life rather than probing his past for some of the lesser known, but equally important, events.

In some cases the movie sanitizes *Gandhi*'s life by ignoring some of his quirks, including his dictatorial nature and his difficult struggle to remain celibate. Perhaps by neglecting these, Attenborough hoped to show the audience what they should remember *Gandhi* by — and indeed we should. But by including *Gandhi*'s imperfections, he would have made *Gandhi* seem more human and his triumph of spirit even more impressive.

But even with its flaws and lack of creativity, *Gandhi* is a lavishly filmed, forceful movie. To many, the idea of a three-hour movie about passive resist-

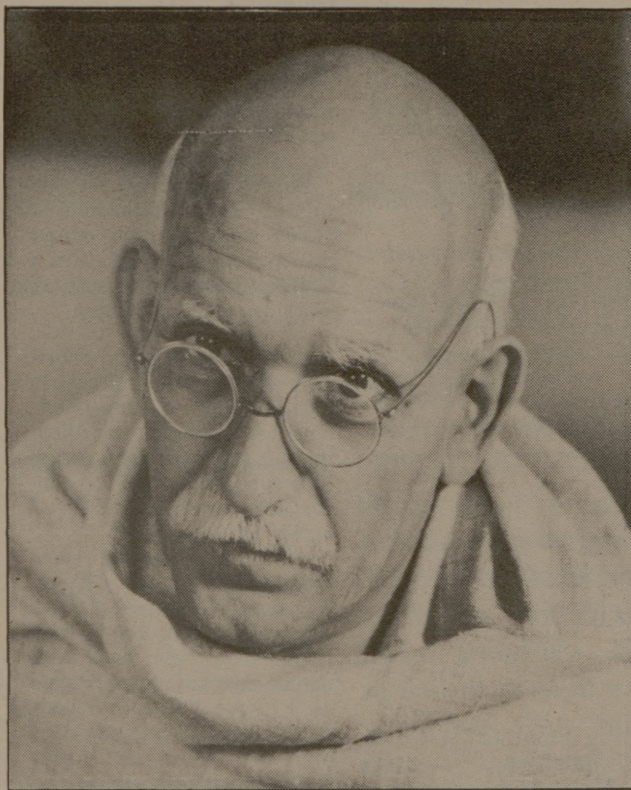
ances. Perhaps that is the only way to tell his story, since *Gandhi* often is called the "father" of a country of nearly 700 million.

To portray the populace, Attenborough gathered a giant cast of extras — some paid, most volunteers — estimated to number 1 million; about 300,000 were on hand just for the filming of *Gandhi*'s funeral procession. Attenborough excellently used these extras to portray mass emotion.

Playing opposite this giant mass is Ben Kingsley, the Indian-born, veteran British stage actor who plays *Gandhi*. From his deep, caring eyes, to his soft walk, to his slight half-naked body, Kingsley carries the drama where the script sometimes left off.

Although many of the supporting cast were given higher billing than Kingsley, most of their roles are slight.

Candice Bergen, as Life maga-



Ben Kingsley plays Mohandas K. Gandhi

ance may seem unappealing. Indeed, at times *Gandhi*'s means are terribly uncomfortable to an audience accustomed to the traditional American movie hero who fights back — the old 'eye for an eye' attitude.

But *Gandhi*'s logic is undeni-

able. "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind," he said.

We can only hope that those who see it will suspend their usual American chauvinism and pragmatism just long enough for the timeless logic to set in.



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