



Mahatma Gandhi and His Assassin

Koenraad Elst

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Language: English

Pages: 273

Foreword

Historical writing and political purposes are usually inseparable, but a measure of institutional plurality can allow some genuine space for alternative perspectives. Unfortunately, post-independence Indian historical writing came to be dominated by a monolithic political project of progressivism that eventually lost sight of verifiable basic truths. This genre of Indian history and the social sciences more generally reached a nadir when even its own Leftist protagonists ceased to believe in their own apparent goal of promoting social and economic justice. It descended into crass, self-serving political activism and a determination to censor dissenting views challenging their own institutional privileges and intellectual exclusivity. One of the ideological certainties embraced by this coterie of historians has been the imputation of mythical status to an alleged threat of Hindu extremism and its unforgivable complicity in assassinating Mahatma Gandhi.

Historian Dr. Koenraad Elst has entered this crucial debate on the murder of the Mahatma with a skilful commentary on the speech of his assassin, Nathuram Godse, to the court that sentenced him to death, the verdict he preferred to imprisonment. Dr. Elst takes seriously Nathuram Godse's extensive critique of India's independence struggle, particularly Mahatma Gandhi's role in it and its aftermath, but he points out factual errors and exaggerations. He begins with a felicitous excursion into the antecedent context of the Chitpavan community to which Nathuram Godse belonged and its important role in the history of Maharashtra as well as modern India. The elucidation of Godse's political testament becomes the methodology adopted by Dr. Elst to engage in a wide ra

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