



Ahimsa

Supriya Kelkar

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In 1942, when Mahatma Gandhi asks Indians to give one family member to the freedom movement, ten-year-old Anjali is devastated to think of her father risking his life for the freedom struggle.

But it turns out he isn't the one joining. Anjali's mother is. And with this change comes many more adjustments designed to improve their country and use "ahimsa"—non-violent resistance—to stand up to the British government. First the family must trade in their fine foreign-made clothes for homespun cotton, so Anjali has to give up her prettiest belongings. Then her mother decides to reach out to the Dalit community, the "untouchables" of society. Anjali is forced to get over her past prejudices as her family becomes increasingly involved in the movement.

When Anjali's mother is jailed, Anjali must step out of her comfort zone to take over her mother's work, ensuring that her little part of the independence movement is completed.

Inspired by her great-grandmother's experience working with Gandhi, New Visions Award winner Supriya Kelkar shines a light on the Indian freedom movement in this poignant debut.

Ahimsa Details

Date : Published August 5th 2018 by Scholastic (first published October 2017)

ISBN : 9789352755349

Author : Supriya Kelkar

Format : Hardcover 308 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade, Cultural, India, Fiction

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From Reader Review Ahimsa for online ebook

LitPick Student Book Reviews says

Ahimsa means nonviolence. That is the main motive for the Freedom Fighters of India. It's the 1940's and the Indians are under British occupation, and the Indians want them out. We follow a girl named Anjali and meet her as she is painting a giant black Q (Quit India) on the side of a British Officer's house. Anjali's mother used to work for a British Officer as a secretary, but she quit because she was tired of all the British decrees and that the officer wasn't helping Indians who were wrongly accused of crimes against the British.

Anjali's normal life is flipped upside down when her mother joins the freedom movement and burns all of their foreign-made clothes. They also start cleaning their own outhouse and be-friending the "untouchables," or the Dalit community. The untouchables are the people who get the most hate and prejudices because they clean toilets and are seen by others as unclean. Anjali befriends some of the Dalit kids. Her mother and some of the other freedom fighters try to integrate the Dalit children into Anjali's school, which ultimately causes problems for everyone involved.

Opinion:

I liked this book. It was a different kind of story from what I usually read, but that made it memorable. I liked the friendships in the book between people who had different backgrounds. There was some bullying to the main characters, and the violence between the Hindus and Muslims reminded me about what I've learned about the Egyptians and Romans and how they fought a lot. This book is a great introduction to cultural diversity, and it also taught me about India's history.

Reviewed by a LitPick student book reviewer, Age 9

Shaye Miller says

Ahimsa is the story of Anjali who, at the age of ten, discovers how privileged she is because of the caste system in India. She's never really questioned the "untouchables" of her society — there are simply people who you must never touch because they have always been the lowest of the low. They just are! Nevertheless, while making comparisons between the British control over India and the caste system within her own culture, Anjali finds herself willing to risk her very life to defend the helpless among her people and reinstate freedom for ALL. Written in such beautiful and descriptive language, Kelkar gives us a glimpse into the past so that we might better understand the connection to what we are currently facing TODAY. I read The Night Diary a few months before I read Ahimsa and they are great companion reads. Each provide a very different perspective of Partition, yet both are important for getting the full picture. For this and more #kidlit, #mglit, and #yalit book reviews, please visit my blog: The Miller Memo.

Elisabeth says

Ahimsa offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of the freedom movement in India in the 1940s. While I

knew a little about Indian history from movies like *Gandhi* and *Water*, it was interesting seeing it all from the perspective of 10-year-old Anjali. I think kids will really connect with her as she grapples with giving up the trappings of her privileged lifestyle and learns to embrace the movement.

A minor gripe of mine is that Kelkar refers to a Gandhi quote several times that is slightly inaccurate. Gandhi never actually said "Be the change you wish to see in the world." He said something similar when he said, "We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do." With the incredible attention to detail Kelkar uses in the rest of the book, this mistake rubbed me the wrong way every time it popped up.

*****EDIT 7/11/17: If you'll check the comments, Supriya Kelkar was kind enough to respond to my review and assure me that this has been revised for the final publication. Hooray for great editing and authors!!!!*

Highly recommended for kids who like reading about other countries and historical events, and adults will like this one too.

Kate Olson says

A stunning tale of social justice set in 1940s India, AHIMSA gives readers a glimpse into what the true meaning of non-violent resistance is. A required purchase for school libraries.

Thanks to the publisher and Edelweiss for the digital review copy of this title

This story has now become my absolute number one title to recommend about social justice and equality in any era, country, religion or race. Kelkar has done such a superb job of with this story that although it is set in 1940s India and deals with the caste system, English colonialism, and religious strife between Muslim and Hindu groups, the messages she conveys can be applied to virtually any other country and time period and still be applicable.

This story is a timeless choice for classroom use, as the events and messages can be compared to so many other situations and will make for rich discussion and analysis. Included in the book is a very thorough afterward by the author about the genesis of the novel as well as a general overview of the history of India and a glossary.

Highly recommended for grades 4-8, but also a rich enough title to use for cultural discussion in high school. Required purchase for school libraries, and highly recommended as a whole class read aloud.

Dilip Chauhan says

Rating - ???? 1/2

I borrowed this book from my friend because cover is absolutely beautiful ?

Review-

- Book is written in the perspective of 10 years old girl Anjali who's life changes when her family takes part in Indiana freedom fight.
- the book is written in very simple language and it's easy to understand without any hassle.
- all the characters in the book are so realistic, at point I thought I am reading a first hand account of some freedom fighter.
- book also puts light on the one of the biggest issue in Indian community. The difference between cast and how it has affected people.
- a well written book, our younger generation must read.
- narration and pace of the book is excellent. In no time I was finishing the book and oh I love it so much.
- simple but a profound read!

Mississippi Library Commission says

Inspired by her great-grandmother's role in the Indian freedom movement, Kelkar has delivered a five-star book for middle grade readers about an ordinary young girl, her family, and their surprising contribution to history. While many students will recognize Gandhi's name, they may not know much more about the 1940s in India. They'll be swept away by the Anjali's experiences with the caste system, the conflict between Muslim and Hindu, and the imperialist control of Great Britain. Anjali grows so much in this short little novel and students will be inspired by the thought that they, too, can make a difference in the world.

TheSkepticalReader says

Review originally posted on A Skeptical Reader.

Ahimsa is about a ten-year-old Anjali who's mother has just quit her job working under the British Raj for undisclosed reasons and a rising Independence movement is about to take her entire life by storm. It opens up with a black Q painted on the side of her mother's ex-boss's wall and it takes one into the journey of ahimsa—a practice of nonviolence towards all living things.

Anjali is a remarkable character, a child with flawed perceptions of the world who learns to emerge from her prejudices and disposition to make a difference. Children's fiction offers adults a very unique opportunity to settle into the mindset of a youth struggling to grasp the adult world and through Anjali's eyes, we see the struggles not only of a child but also of her country.

India is an incredibly dense region of mixed behaviors and cultures. It's land that's gone through hundreds of years of turmoil, integrating people from all walks of life. I cannot emphasize how *beautifully* Supriya Kelkar has managed to sketch all the nuances of Indian cultures into a children's book. There are several groups of caste, race, and religion that clash amongst each other and Kelkar explores them perfectly for readers of several ages to grasp.

Whilst reading it, I was having a conversation with a friend about caste and how hard it is to explain the caste system in India to any immigrant but coincidentally, right after that conversation, Kelkar presents a scene where Anjali is asked to examine her sisterly attachment to a Muslim boy, Irfan, when she refuses to even touch a member of her own religion, an Untouchable. Surprisingly, the author even paints Gandhi more realistically, illustrating the hypocrisy and racism of the Father of India himself. To do all of this in an adult novel would be an amazing feat but Kelkar manages to pull it off in a small children's book, assimilating Anjali's own limitations with it.

I wouldn't necessarily say this book is easily accessible to all children. There are words, terms, and subtleties that I think some readers in the West *might* have difficulty understanding. There is a note in the back of the book where Kelkar has laid out the context to a lot of the major events that occur in the novel so I'd definitely recommend reading that afterwards.

As for the writing, while I don't think it stands out in an extraordinary way, it does make for a very fast and absorbing read. My attention never once faltered so it's easily readable in one sitting. And even with the deeply political nature of the novel, Anjali remains a lively character I've come to cherish.

Lastly, I would like to thank the author for writing a novel like this. It made me cry but it also just made me incredibly happy and excited for the future generations because Ahimsa *exists*. It exists and it makes all the difference in the world.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

It's 1942 and while Britain and the rest of the world are engaged in WWII, in Bombay (today's Mumbai), the Quit India movement, whose goal is to rid India of British rule and gain independence, is begun with a speech by Mahatma Gandhi on August 8th. The very next day, August 9, 1942, Gandhi is arrested but it doesn't stop many from still having faith in the Quit India movement.

Gandhi, a practitioner of Ahimsa, or civil disobedience, had already asked that one member of every family become a freedom fighter for Indian independence. Anjali Joshi, 10, a member of the high born Brahmin caste, knew that some of the kids in her class had family members who were freedom fighters, but after Gandhi's speech, she is more than surprised to learn that her mother has also joined the fight. And one of the things her mother is focused on is attempting to make the lives of those considered to be untouchable better (Gandhi referred to the untouchable caste as Harijan, meaning children of God, but Anjali learns they consider that an insult and would rather be referred to as Dalit, meaning oppressed).

At first, Anjali isn't really too happy, especially when her mother makes her burn all of her beautiful foreign-made ghagra-cholis and replaces them with plainer khadi, a handwoven homespun cotton they spin themselves. She is particularly unhappy after her mother shows kindness towards the young Dalit boy, Mohan, who cleans their outhouse, causing him to run away, and then decides that Anjali and she will clean the outhouse themselves.

Slowly and reluctantly, however, Anjali begins to support her mother's attempts at being an activist. They begin attending freedom movement meetings together, and after visiting the basti where the Dalits live and get to know the people better, Anjali decides that it is unfair that the young Dalits are not able to go to school, too. They begin teaching the children in the basti, even finding help from a surprising a very surprising source. Soon, Anjali and her mother are working to make it possible for the kids to actually attend

the school that Anjali goes to, getting uniforms and tiffins all ready for them.

But the weekend before their first day of school, rioting breaks out between the Hindus and Muslims and schools are closed. Later, Anjali's best friend, Irfaan, a Muslim boy who is more like a brother to her than a friend, accuses her of writing anti-Muslim words on his father's store, ending their friendship, and worst of all, Anjali's mother is arrested on charges of helping to instigate the riots. While in prison and still practicing Ahimsa, or non-violence, her mother goes on a hunger strike, and although Anjali is afraid for her, she decides to carry on their work, even as she realizes she herself must unlearn the prejudices and superstitions that were so much a part of her life.

Ahimsa is a debut novel for Supriya Kelkar, based on the experiences of her great-grandmother, who had joined Gandhi's freedom movement so her husband could continue working, much the same way Anjali's mother did.

I found Ahimsa to be a very interesting novel about social injustice in 1940s India that covers quite a lot of historical and political ground, some of which may not be familiar to young American readers. But, Kelkar has taken great pains to make this important period in Indian history accessible, although at times she waxes a little on the didactic side when it comes to describing the political situation.

But one of the things I did like is that Kelkar has included a lot of interesting, personal details in her narrative descriptions, including what daily life was like, the kinds of clothing people wore, food they ate, games kids played, holidays celebrated as well as accounts of the living conditions of someone in the Brahmin class, of the basti where the Dalits live, and even a bit about how the members of the British Raj (rulers) lived. These are the kinds of details that often work to bring a story to life, and Ahimsa is not different.

The other thing I liked is the Kelkar has written flawed characters who learn from their mistakes. Anjali's mother is an enthusiastic freedom fighter, so enthusiastic that she can't see better alternatives to her actions, and sometimes not listening to the very people she is trying to help. For instance, burning the family's clothing in protest, following Gandhi's example, rather than giving them to the poor who really could have used them. Even Anjali is flawed, at first not really understanding what her country is going through, but slowly she becoming more enlightened, though at times no less feisty and headstrong, which can and does get her into trouble. Even Gandhi and some of his ideas are presented as somewhat flawed, as Anjali discovers the more involved she becomes in the Freedom Movement.

Ahimsa is a very readable novel and a nice introduction to the Freedom Movement in India. It is also a novel about trying to make a difference, about social injustice, and about resistance, and although these themes are put into the context of Indian history, they will certainly resonate with today's young readers.

Be sure to read the Author's Note for a detailed overview of this period in Indian history and the leaders involved in it. Kelkar has also included a list of books for Further Reading and a very helpful glossary.

Although it's for slightly older readers, pair Ahimsa with Padma Venkatraman's Climbing the Stairs for another view of India's fight for independence.

This book is recommended for readers age 10+

This book was purchased for my personal library

Ana Cob says

Great example on how books act as windows. I want to learn all about that time in Indian history.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC provided by Edelweiss Above the Treeline

In a small town in India in 1942, Anjali is worried that her mother has lost her job working for a British colonel, Brent. At the age of ten, her biggest worry is that there won't be enough money to buy a new dress for her for the holiday. It turns out that there are much bigger problems brewing. Anjali's mother has quit her job so that she can join the resistance to the British, which in her case means learning to spin and weave so that India isn't dependent on the British processing their cotton. Anjali has a friend, Irfaan, who is Muslim, and while the two of them never minded the religious difference, this also becomes a problem. Anjali's mother is upset with the way Untouchables, whom Ghandi started to call Harijans, are treated, and decides that she and Anjali will clean out their own outhouse instead of leaving it for Mohan. Mohan, of course, needs the work, but the discussion with him about what his people need gives them some insight. For one thing, the term he preferred was "Dalit". As the political situation in India becomes more and more serious, it's not enough for Anjali and her mother to give food and treats to the Dalit; they set up a school, and eventually, the mother is taken to jail for "inciting riots". While Anjali fears for her mother, she would like to see change in her society but realizes that it will be very difficult.

Strengths: I especially liked that the author based this on her grandmother's actions at this point in history. There are a lot of great details about what every day life was like, and good discussions about the Indian social structure and how it wasn't beneficial to the society as a whole. Anjali is a typical ten year old, who is more concerned with how things affect her. The inclusion of an older uncle who is opposed to the family's work in the resistance is a good one. This is a fascinating period of history that I wish more of my students knew about.

Weaknesses: There might be a lot of this that middle grade readers might not understand. Some more extensive notes on Indian history at this time would have been helpful. Also, I wish that Anjali had been a little older and had a better understanding of her society.

What I really think: I thought this was a great book, but it's not something my students are going to pick up without a bit of convincing. I have Bradbury's *A Moment Comes*, Sensai's *A Ticket to India* (which discusses Partition from a modern view point), and my favorite, Venkatraman's *Climbing the Stairs*, but my students are not interested in historical fiction as much as I would like them to be.

Pavitra (For The Love of Fictional Worlds) says

[Also Posted on For The Love of Fictional Worlds](#)

Disclaimer: A Physical Copy was provided via Scholastic India in exchange for an honest review. The Thoughts, opinions & feelings expressed in the review are therefore, my own.

Ahimsa is an enthralling look at the Quit India Movement or the Freedom Movement of the Indians

against the British Empire in the 1940s.

Told in the perspective of a 10 year old privileged Indian girl; Anjali – who is secure in the knowledge of being a Brahmin kid, who gets the best dresses and is the apple of her parent's eyes. Her best friend is Irrfan; a Muslim boy, and that makes okay for Islam doesn't really have a caste system.

Everything in her perfect world starts to splinter when her mother leaves her cushion-y job with Captain Brent in the British Army – and decides to join in the Freedom Movement. Her confusion at the world around is easy to understand and definitely empathize with, for all that she has always taken at face value, the world she has believed to be right; is now slowly proving themselves to be wrong. It was amazing to see how Anjali took everything she has been told and to connect it with the world that she is now living in.

I loved how the author shows the growth of character in Anjali – from believing what she has always been told; to deciding what is right for herself through her own experiences – her confusion, her reluctance was as real as it gets.

This book is a definite recommendation for any young kid or even teenager (*and I do believe, that some adults could also definitely use it!*) **to not only understand their legacy but also know that the path to be kind and humane isn't easy; but it is definitely worth every second of struggle.**

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Sarah Peddicord says

Ahimsa: Nonviolence. Anjali's world seems to be filled with aggression and violence as India struggles against the British government in 1942. The people are also struggling against each other. Graffiti, vandalism, riots, beatings and other forms of violence build throughout this story. Anjali's courage and hope for an equal, free country builds as well. This is a beautiful story about the power of small actions that lead to great change. I couldn't put Supriya Kelkar's debut novel down.

Heidi says

This is a fabulous written, powerfully told story about the independence movement in 1942 India. Anjali is shocked when she learns of her mother's intention to join Gandhiji's non-violent freedom movement. But as she gets involved in her mother's efforts to non-violently fight the British and help the Dalit (untouchable caste in the Hindu caste system) her courage grows and she starts to realize the importance of doing the right thing even when it's hard. Kelkar paints a vivid picture of the harm prejudice can do and the challenges that come with trying to bring change. One of my new favorites.

Danielle says

Complex and captivating, with a truly moving and emotional climax, this is a wonderful novel that will educate and inspire.

"even a small number of dedicated people can alter the course of history." (p. 195)

Mike says

I just have the one book to report on this time around. It's called *Ahimsa* by Supriya Kelkar, and it's a historical fiction children's novel about India in the 1940s. It tells the story of 10 year old Anjali, an Indian girl, who, with her family, works to help free India from British rule, as they occupy the country around this time. And while contentions between the British and the people of India rise high, other such contentions among the natives are also pretty heated. The book describes tensions between Hindus and Muslims as well as the people who fall into the different castes that India has. Caught in the conflict, Anjali risks losing those who are important to her; her best friend, who is Muslim, her mother who gets imprisoned for speaking out for what is right, and her friends and neighbors, many of whom frown down upon her when she makes continued efforts to bring in kids from the lowest caste, into her school. The story really helps bring the reader into Anjali's world and allows them to see her struggle for freedom, as well as that of her whole country.

Overall, I thought the story was well written and the author really brought to life each character, particularly the main character. You get a sense of what each character is about and see a bit of character development in some of them. For example, one of the antagonists, Captain Brent, a British officer, has several encounters with Anjali. When we first meet him, he is seen as an apathetic, hard nosed kind of man. Anjali strongly dislikes him in the beginning and the feeling is mutual of him towards her. But as you continue to read, Brent seems to have a change of heart. And while still not appearing to "like" Anjali or any of the people of India, towards the end of the book, you see that he begins to respect her, which is quite a rewarding thing to see from the reader's point of view. And thanks to some basic foreshadowing used by the author, you can see what events led up to this. And this, in turn, sort of helps solidify Anjali's maturity and growth; earning the respect of someone who initially thought very little of her.

So it is a nice story. I read it fairly quickly and was really drawn into the story. Historical fiction generally does this to me, particularly if it's about something that I am interested in, which I am in this case. I think the author could have carried it a bit further as I felt that it ended a bit abruptly. Another chapter or two or an epilogue would have been nice. But for a children's book, it wasn't bad. I give this one a 4 out of 5.
