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What made a young engineer in the U.S. Merchant Marine decide to change the course of his career and take up the study of Indian history? The answer lies in one of those unexpected experiences that become transformational moments.

At 20, Stanley Wolpert landed in Mumbai on a sightseeing trip in February 1948, 13 days after Mohandas K. Gandhi had been

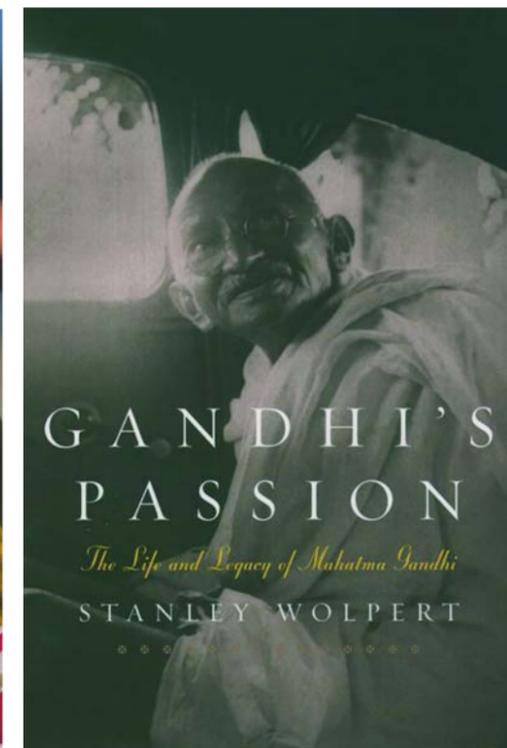
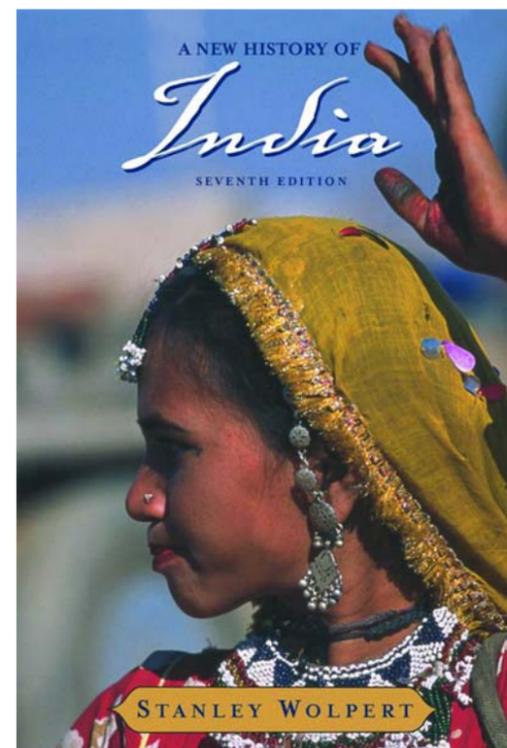
been studying it ever since,” says Wolpert, professor emeritus of history at the University of California, Los Angeles. His first book on Gandhi was a fictionalized account of the assassination, *Nine Hours to Rama*, published in 1962.

Specializing in modern India and Pakistan, Wolpert is one of the most widely-read chroniclers of subcontinental history. On a trip to New Delhi, Wolpert spoke about his recent book,

ance to change. “You know the Luddites who opposed the Industrial Revolution [in England] fought very hard...and there were some people who thought that globalization could be turned back. But I don’t think that’s a large percentage of the American population. I hope that people who have lost their jobs will be able to find new jobs so that they can lead a productive and good life.”

A longstanding observer of the Kashmir dispute, Wolpert says he would love to see a resolution in his lifetime. His next book is tentatively titled “India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?” and

Stanley Wolpert’s books are available at the American Library in New Delhi, Calcutta and Chennai.



Stanley Wolpert

Tracking Indian History

By DEEPANJALI KAKATI

assassinated. As Wolpert stepped ashore he found himself surrounded by millions of mourners, clad in white, heading to Chowpatty Beach to witness the immersion of Gandhi’s ashes.

“I was amazed by the numbers and how moved they were. I couldn’t imagine why anyone would want to kill the father of this nation,” says Wolpert. His interest was piqued as he saw thousands of people swimming after the glistening white ship bearing the urn, hoping to touch Gandhi’s ashes before they were swallowed by the sea.

But what really got him interested was the fact that Gandhi was killed by a man of the same faith. “I wanted to study that assassination, then Indian history, and I have

Shameful Flight, detailing the end of British colonial rule. He highlighted less well-known aspects of India’s freedom struggle, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s insistence to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that India be made a free country.

Wolpert thinks that “most Americans have come to more and more appreciate the importance of India, especially because whenever they need a solution to a problem like their air travel or they have to fix their machinery they usually put in a call which is answered by someone in Bangalore or Pune.”

Asked about any backlash against the outsourcing of jobs from America to India, he replies that there has always been resist-

Wolpert hopes it will be published within three years.

While he is enthusiastic about the opening of more access points and bus services between India and Pakistan, Wolpert says there should be

“more exchange of ideas as well as goods and services, and that will gradually lead to the realization or a reminder that they are really the same people.”

Adding that a resolution is in the offing, Wolpert says, “I think that will happen, not this year, perhaps not next year, but I would hope before the end of this decade, if that’s not too optimistic.”

Wolpert’s 58-year association with the subcontinent has produced more than 20 books, beginning with his University

of Pennsylvania PhD dissertation on Indian freedom fighters Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The comparative biography was published in 1962 as *Tilak and Gokhale*.

“Every book I’ve tackled has initially posed uniquely formidable challenges, though I generally come to feel at home with my subject after five years. Perhaps my first scholarly work, *Tilak and Gokhale* seemed most difficult since it was the first,” says Wolpert.

His oeuvre includes critically acclaimed books on the history of India, the British Raj, confrontation in South Asia and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, as well as biographies of national figures—the controversial *Nehru: A Tryst*

with Destiny, *Jinnah of Pakistan* and *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*.

Of all his books, Wolpert told *UCLA Today*, it is the *Encyclopedia of India* that is “the greatest event of my research life.” About 200 experts worldwide contributed to the four-volume opus that took Wolpert five years to edit and partly write.

The author of *Gandhi’s Passion* finds the renewed interest in Gandhian principles, post *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, not only relevant in these times but very important. “Especially at a time when war has proved to be such a failure I think his emphasis on peace and on the importance of nonviolence must grow. And I think young people are sick and tired of

death, sick and tired of killing and fighting and realize that his message to stop the hatred is more valuable for all of us.”

Affirming that he sees a very promising future for U.S.-India ties, Wolpert says, “I think we are both committed to values that are not only democratic but also designed to help the world become a safer place. And the friendship...will grow stronger in the years ahead because economic ties are growing. And those ties have led to greater involvement, with more Americans coming to India and falling in love with India as I did 58 years ago.”

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