
**MAHATMA AND THE RAMS: A STUDY OF VISUAL-LITERARY
RECREATION OF THE HISTORY OF THEO-POLITICAL HINDU
IDENTITY IN POST-PARTITION INDIA.**

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Abstract:

This paper explores the visual and literary recreation of the Theo-Political Hindu identity in post-partition India. It examines how the secondary witnessing of India's partition contributed to a militant Hindu-Muslim political binary, which was later reshaped after the assassination of M. K. Gandhi. Focusing on *Hey Ram* and *The Great Indian Novel*, the study discusses how Mythistory and lived history can be expressed in an epic mode. Drawing on the writings of Gandhi's contemporaries, including J. B. Kripalani, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, and Nathuram Godse, it argues that Saket Ram, the protagonist of *Hey Ram*, symbolizes the Hindu intelligentsia of the partition period. The paper concludes that Gandhi's assassination halted the militant Hindutva expansion, reshaping Indian secularism into a more inclusive identity.

Keywords: Partition of India, Mythistory, Theo-Political Hindu Identity, Hindutva, Gandhian Thoughts.

Introduction

The Hindu-Muslim binary, which many of us believe served as the basis for the Two-Nation Theory and the Partition of India, was not purely theological. It should be noted that Muhammad Ali Jinnah and other Muslim leaders consistently emphasised that the ‘Two-Nation Theory’ was intended to take effect when British rule ends. In other words, it was not intended to be a demand for National Self-Determination or independent Nation-Statehood. In the opinion of P. C. Mathur, the Two-Nation Theory ‘was only an advance gambit played by Muslim League leaders to block the future options of the Indian National Movement, and, hence, should not be elevated to the level of a philosophical postulate or categorical imperative’ (1977, 436). He further observes that the Muslim League's political drive for Pakistan was secular rather than a theological crusade to create a country for Muslims (1977, 438).

The British administration has always used the Muslim League and the Two-Nation Theory to legitimise the claim of necessity of foreign rule in India. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a prominent provincial parliamentarian from colonial Bengal, observes that the British idea of ‘divide and rule’ was designed to maintain the communal and subnational disharmony among the Indian political class by communal appeasement towards Muslims. So, the British can conveniently use the Muslim population against the freedom movement and anti-colonial struggles. In his diary, he observes that ‘the European members of the House who never liked a strong Hindu-Muslim combination in the province’ (Mookerjee 1993, 51).

Thus, a more vigorous Hindu-Muslim political binary was formed under the colonial regime in India. This binary got further strengthened by the immediate pre- and post-partition socio-political circumstances and resulted in both Partition of India and assassination of M. K. Gandhi. In this context, we should consider how Partition and its causal and consequential circumstances affected the thought patterns of the secondary witnesses indirectly affected by this political decision. Most of the partition portrayal studies primarily focus on the primary witnesses of this tragic exodus. Though many regions in India were not directly affected by the Partition, a majority of the population in these unaffected areas were the secondary witnesses.

Giorgio Agamben elaborates his reflections on the aporia of witnessing by pointing out two kinds of witnesses. The ‘*superstes*’, or primary witness, is a term that designates a person who has lived through or experienced an event and can therefore bear witness to it. The ‘*testis*’, or

secondary witness, indicates a third-party position in an event (Agamben 1999, 17). This paper focuses on how this indirect witnessing is represented and re-represented in literature and art with the help of the movie *Hey Ram*¹ and the novel *The Great Indian Novel*.² The crux of our inquiry will be on the political significance of Gandhi assassination in deconstructing the Hindu-Muslim political binary and thus reshaping a new Theo-political Hindu identity and a new Hindutva philosophy in the post-partition, post-colonial India.

Saket Ram: The Man Who Wanted to Kill Gandhi

The film *Hey Ram* explores the development of the character Saket Ram who was called Ram throughout the movie. Ram is a secondary witness to the horrific violence broke out in India as part of Partition and its aftermath. Though not a direct witness and victim of the Partition, his intense empathy with the affected people comes from his experiences during the Calcutta Riots in 1946. He loses his wife Aparna on Direct-Action Day when a group of Muslim fanatics sexually abuse and murder her in front of Saket Ram, who was also on the verge of being sodomised.

The trauma of the primary witness is due to the kind of experiences that they have gone through. On the other hand, the trauma of secondary witnessing arises from the shame, helplessness and inability of their action regarding that event.³ Ram's trauma arose from his recognition of the helplessness when Aparna was sexually abused and murdered. The agony of witnessing the witness is depicted in the scene where Ram meets his friend Manohar Lalwani in rural Maharashtra. Manohar Lalwani was a wealthy merchant in Karachi who lost his family, home and wealth in the riots followed by Partition. After describing the horrors of Partition in a stammering voice, Lalwani remarks that Ram cannot understand the agony because he is a South Indian. Here, Ram consoles him by saying that he can also understand the agony (Haasan 2000, 01:34:31 - 01:36:37). Lalwani is unaware of Ram's incidents during the Calcutta Riots.

¹ The alternate history drama depicts the Partition of India and Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

² The novel recasts and resets the Mahabharata story in the context of the Indian Independence Movement and the first three decades after independence.

³ Refer to Goodhart, Sandor. 1992. "The Witness of Trauma: A Review Essay." *Modern Judaism* 12 (2): 203–17.

Thus, a secondary witness is a potential empathizer towards the primary witness. Here, human experiences transcend personal realms and condense to be the part of a shared identity. In that sense, every Indian is a victim of Partition.

This intense empathy motivates Ram to question Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in Calcutta ‘for making murderers out of ordinary man’ (Haasan 2000, 01:15:09). Here, Ram’s personal revenge is getting traversed to a matter of national concern with the tutelage of an extremist Hindu Nationalist called Shriram Abhayankar, and agrees to be a Gandhi assassin. Here, the movie puts the Hindutva ideologue Saket Ram and Gandhi, a practising Hindu, in a dialectical relationship. The same is true with Nathuram Vinayak Godse who assassinated M. K. Gandhi. Godse appears as a character in the movie as well. The paper will explore in detail this similarity in the coming sections. Before that, we need to explore the idea of mythistory.

Mythistory: When Creative Historiography Acquires an Epic Mode

With the advent of the Rankean paradigm in historical enquiries, myths and legends, traditionally believed as history, were subjugated to the realms of either pure literature or foster children of history and literature. Academic communities till the linguistic turn approached myth and history in an antithetical relationship. Along with the Rankean paradigm, the ancient dichotomy of *logos/mythos*⁴ strengthened this antithetical relationship. History was considered a discipline of *logos* and myths were narratives accepted by a group of people uncritically and evolved into an unchallengeable belief system. However, in the context of linguistic turn and postmodern historiography a blurring of the distinction between facts and fictitious occurred. The historians found it difficult to fix an ‘authentic past’ acceptable across generations. Peter Heehs asserts that ‘the best historians can do is to try to attain a better historiographical balance between Truth, truths and myths. When historians exert themselves to produce a presentation of “truths” (not Truth) that is credible and intelligible to a given audience, the result is what might be best called mythistory’ (1994, 4).

⁴ ‘Mythos’ relied upon narrative (fabula) and folk knowledge, and ‘logos’ referred to logical and rational analysis of the phenomena. Refer to page number 15 in Ivana Marková. 2016. *The Dialogical Mind: Common Sense and Ethics*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

The movie *Hey Ram* stands out as a richly layered example of mythistory, where the boundaries between historical reality and mythological narrative are masterfully blurred, creating a deeply evocative cinematic experience. Set against the tumultuous backdrop of post-Partition independent India, the film meticulously reconstructs the social and political upheaval that defined the era. Through its vivid portrayal of communal tensions, ideological conflicts, and the trauma of national division, *Hey Ram* exposes the psychological and emotional forces that shaped individuals like Nathuram Godse. Godse's character emerges as a product of societal unrest, his actions rooted in the collective anxieties of a fractured nation. In stark contrast, the film presents the figure of Saket Ram, whose transformation from a man seeking personal vengeance to one embodying Gandhi's dharmic ideals serves as a powerful counterpoint. Saket Ram's journey is depicted with remarkable psychological depth, tracing his internal struggles, moments of crisis, and eventual moral awakening.

One of the film's most profoundly mythistorical moments occurs during the fateful meeting between Saket Ram and Nathuram Godse. This encounter is not merely a dramatic device, but a symbolic convergence where the historical and the mythic merge, only to part ways in diverging destinies (Haasan 2000, 02:19:52). The scene's emotional intensity is heightened by the interplay of fact and fiction, inviting the audience to reflect on the nature of history itself—how it is shaped as much by imagined possibilities as by actual events. Saket Ram, though a fictional construct, stands as a representation of the countless individuals who might have been swayed toward extremism, mirroring the very real dangers of ideological polarisation present in the era.

After Gandhi's assassination, the film carefully charts the gradual dissolution of political antagonism and the emergence of a new, more introspective Hindu identity, embodied by the later Saket Ram. This evolution is depicted through subtle shifts in narrative tone and character development, highlighting the complex processes of reconciliation and self-discovery that follow moments of national trauma. The film's visual and thematic motifs—such as the recurrent use of religious symbolism and the invocation of epic narratives—underscore this transformation.

Moreover, *Hey Ram* is replete with allusions to mythological figures such as Rāma and Bhīṣma. These references are not simply ornamental; they function as integral components of the film's mythistorical framework. By drawing parallels between ancient epics and contemporary history, the narrative situates its characters within a larger, timeless struggle between dharma and

adhama, order and chaos. In doing so, the film suggests that the myths and stories of the past continue to exert a profound influence on modern identities, shaping the way individuals and societies understand themselves and their place in history. Through its intricate weaving of myth, history, and personal narrative, Hey Ram ultimately invites viewers to reconsider the boundaries between reality and imagination, and to recognize the enduring power of storytelling in shaping collective memory.

Hindu Intelligentsia during the Partition Period

The movie purposefully brings similarities between Ram and Godse to explore the mindset of Hindu intelligentsia in India during the Partition. The interpretations of the circumstances and reasons leading to Gandhi's assassination can be broadly classified into two. The first set of people categorises Gandhi's assassination as a culmination of religious fanaticism in India. For example, J. B. Kripalani observes that a fanatical section of the Hindu society believed that the Muslim community and their leaders, with their belief in violence, would come to their senses only if the Hindus and the Sikhs had been let to defend themselves. Gandhi prevented this adequate retaliation with his rigidity in the principle of non-violence, thus earning the discontent of Hindu intelligentsia. Many Hindus in India felt deceived when Gandhi persuaded the Indian government to pay Pakistan rupees 55 crores (Kripalani 2004, 723). Godse, in his affidavit, clearly mentions these reasons (2020, 82-93).

Nevertheless, this interpretation becomes inadequate because many critics of Gandhi upholding the Hindu cause were not fanatics. The second interpretation is a more comprehensive one that believes that Gandhi was criticised and eventually assassinated due to the illogical and lack of secular-scientific outlook of statesmanship in his decisions regarding Partition, and judging the communal dynamics in the immediate post-Partition era. This interpretation is not entirely neglecting the religious aspects in it. For example, Ashis Nandy⁵ asserts that Gandhi was assassinated by a representative of the modern world who 'sought a secular-scientific orientation to statecraft' (2007, 130). According to Nandy, the last speech of Godse 'was essentially a fervent,

⁵ Particularly refer to page numbers 127 - 162 in Nandy, Ashis. 2007. "From Outside the Imperium: Gandhi's Cultural Critique of the West." *A Very Popular Exile*. India: Oxford University Press.

rationalist, modern plea to recognise the dangers Gandhi posed to the growth of the modern state in India and to the conduct of normal politics' (2007, 130).⁶

Though his writings mostly point towards the first set of interpretations, Kripalani also summarises his arguments on Gandhi's assassination by asserting that the dislike of Hindu intelligentsia towards Gandhi was also because of the illogical remedy put forth by Gandhi for restoring communal peace in India. This remedy was 'whatever Pakistan may do and whatever the Muslims there or here may do, there should be no retaliation on the part of the Hindus and Sikhs' (Kripalani 2004, 722).

The inconsistencies in attitude of Gandhi towards the Partition of India invoked criticism from many leaders who were upholding the Hindu cause. For instance, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who then represented Hindu Mahasabha, observes that the most significant blow to the Hindu cause was the Partition of India. He criticises the British and Congress for yielding to the Muslim League's malicious demand though the country's people were against the decision. He observes, 'The Sikhs, led by Master Tara Singh, were with us. Fazlul Haq, Premier of Bengal, was influenced to side with us, and Allabux, Premier of Sind and a redoubtable champion of Indian nationalism and liberty, was hundred per cent with us' (Mookerjee 1993, 77). He expresses his shock and sadness that the 'Rajagopalachari Formula conceding the principle of Pakistan was secretly approved by Gandhiji while he was undergoing his fast at Poona in 1942' (Kripalani 1993, 93-94). Mookerjee expresses his discontent by writing, 'Gandhiji, though speaking unofficially but yet the friend, guide and philosopher of the Congress, was prepared to concede that India might be partitioned in some way other than the extreme form of Jinnah's Pakistan. And that was a great surrender which would ultimately hurt the cause of India's integrity and freedom' (1993, 95).

Syama Prasad Mookerjee also criticises Gandhi for his lack of logic and scientific temper in the sudden decision to accept the Partition. When Mookerjee asked Gandhi about the reason for this sudden change in the decision, he observed, 'Gandhiji could not give me any convincing reply, but he said that at momentous periods of his life he had acted according to his inner voice which made him understand what was right and proper' (1993, 64). Here, Mookerjee is also more

⁶ Also look at pages 72-79 in "Frustration of an Ideal." *Why I Killed Gandhi?*

concerned about the lack of rational and scientific justifications Gandhi had for supporting the two-nation idea rather than the religious component of the decision.

Like Mookerjee, many educated and politically active Hindus identified Gandhi as a traitor siding with and protecting Muslims over Hindu people. They hold Gandhi alone responsible for the division of India and the conflict between the two religions. Kripalani, a close acquaintance of Gandhi, clearly points out this mindset in his autobiography, where he remembers an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Gandhi on January 20, 1948. He notes that ‘a bomb was thrown’ on Gandhi’s prayer hall in Birla House ‘by one Madanlal, a refugee from Pakistan’ who was an agent of ‘the conspiracy hatched in Maharashtra and Gwalior to kill Gandhiji’ (Kripalani 2004, 723). The movie *Hey Ram* details this unsuccessful attempt on Gandhi to which Ram was also a witness (Haasan 2000, 02:26:23). This Gwalior and Maharashtra as the conspiracy hubs for Gandhi’s assassination was noted in both Godse’s affidavit⁷ and later in the Kapoor Committee Report. In the movie, the conspiracy to kill Gandhi was set in a palace in Maharashtra, where the Maharaja and Shriram Abhayankar convinced Ram to kill Gandhi (Haasan 2000, 01:41:06 - 01:43:49). In Delhi, when Ram goes to a soda factory in Chandni Chowk to retrieve his gun, he and his friend Amjad Ali Khan encounter a Hindu mob led by a person called Chari who enquires Ram whether he is from the Gwalior unit (Haasan 2000, 02:47:11). This indicates that the mob was aware of these conspiracies and was expecting Madanlal from Gwalior in Delhi.

In the movie, Saket Ram and Shriram Abhayankar are not hardcore religious fanatics. Ram is an archaeologist and a very temperate believer. The initial scene depicting the conversation between Ram and Amjad Ali Khan shows the pattern of their beliefs. They both praise the secular and liberal outlook of people in Mohenjo-Daro and satirically remark that Indus valley people believed that children need toys to play with, not a god for each person to play with (Haasan 2000, 00:07:50-57).

The following scene, set in a cosmopolitan, anglicised party in Calcutta, serves as a microcosm of the anxieties, debates, and social complexities that pervaded the years surrounding Partition. The gathering is portrayed with meticulous attention to detail: the guests, attired in

⁷ Refer to pages 81 - 89 in “Part V; Climax of Antinational Appearance,” *Why I Killed Gandhi?*

Western clothes and conversing in English, reflect the urban elite's adoption of colonial customs while remaining deeply enmeshed in the unfolding crisis of their homeland. Ram and his friends, who hail from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, engage in a spirited discussion about the looming threat of Partition. Despite their differences, there is a palpable sense of unity in their opposition to the divisive measure, highlighting a shared longing for a composite, undivided India.

A particularly moving moment in the conversation comes when Amjad, a Muslim intellectual, passionately declares himself a 'child of Gandhi.' His words express not just a political allegiance but a deep emotional and philosophical reverence for Gandhian ideals of nonviolence, secularism, and inclusive nationalism. Through Amjad, the film gives voice to the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the national Muslim intelligentsia during this turbulent era, emphasising their commitment to a pluralistic Indian identity.

In contrast, Ram's demeanour throughout the conversation is marked by a noticeable detachment from Gandhian values. He listens politely but does not participate in the effusive praise for Gandhi, signalling his inner conflict and subtle scepticism. This lack of engagement is significant, as it foreshadows Ram's subsequent ideological journey and transformation. The film thus uses this exchange to set up the divergent moral and philosophical paths that its characters will explore.

Ram's personal life further complicates his identity. He is depicted as living with Aparna, a Bengali teacher, in a relationship that openly defies the conservative norms of his orthodox Tamil Brahmin upbringing. Yet, even as he adopts modern, progressive attitudes in his private life, Ram remains tethered to tradition by his continued wearing of the sacred thread. This symbolic detail underscores the dualities and contradictions that define his character: he is at once a product of tradition and modernity, torn between inherited values and contemporary realities.

Through this scene, the film encapsulates the dilemmas faced by the Hindu intelligentsia of the time—individuals caught between the pull of modern, secular ideals and the enduring influence of cultural, religious heritage. By richly layering these interactions and character details, *Hey Ram* offers a nuanced portrait of a society in flux, capturing the tension, uncertainty, and hope that characterized India on the brink of Partition (Haasan 2000, 00:09:20 – 00:12:00).

Saket Ram: A Symbol of Militant Hindutva

Ram also symbolises a militant Hindutva philosophy, one of the many Hindutva thoughts developed during the colonial period, particularly towards the partition period. The change in nature and principles in the works of V. D. Savarkar, one of the pioneering ideologues of Hindutva politics, can exemplify this evolution of thoughts. In his book titled *The Indian War of Independence*, he claims that Hindus and Muslims had united in the fight against the British. But in his later writings, he proved himself to be considerably less enamoured of Hindu-Muslim unity and became known for his promotion of the rights of Hindus. A 1925 essay on Hindu Kingship, specifically on the splendours of India during Maratha rule, called *Hindu Pad-Padashahi*, also demonstrated the influence of various political events on Savarkar's thinking which included the Malabar Rebellion (Heredia 2009, 66-67).⁸

The relationship between religion and politics is very different for both Gandhi and Savarkar. For Savarkar, religion is just a binding factor of his ideology. However, for Gandhi, the core of his politics is religion.⁹ It should also be noted that Savarkar was a rationalist atheist and Gandhi was a practising Hindu who strongly believed in and upheld Hindu ideals. In order to bring the influence of Savarkar into the lives of both Ram and Shriram, the movie depicts Shriram giving a covered book to Ram and asking him to read it to understand more about Hindutva ideology. Shriram warns Ram that the book is banned, so he should always read without opening the wrap on the cover page (Haasan 2000, 00:52:41-48). He mentions that the book is by Veer Sir, which alludes to Savarkar, whom his fellows also called Veer Savarkar. Also, there is a hanging portrait of Savarkar in the secret room in the palace where the conspiracy to kill Gandhi was taking place (Haasan 2000, 01:42:03).

Representing the Political Figure called Gandhi

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi marked a watershed moment in the trajectory of Indian history, comparable in its magnitude and consequences to the death of Bhīṣma in the Mahābhārata, which signalled the decisive turning point in the epic's great war. Both figures,

⁸ Rudolf Heredia. "Gandhi's Hinduism and Savarkar's Hindutva."

⁹ Refer to R. K. Mishra. 2019. "Gandhi and Hinduism". *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 65 (1): 71–90.

Gandhi and Bhīṣma, stand as colossal moral anchors within their respective narratives, their deaths not only altering the immediate course of events but also symbolising a broader shift in the moral and ethical fabric of the societies they inhabit. Gandhi's assassination, much like Bhīṣma's fall, is depicted as the moment when the old order yields to the new, and the ideals for which they stood are subjected to intense scrutiny, reinterpretation, or even rejection by the generation that follows.

This parallel between myth and history is elaborately explored in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, where the lines between epic tradition and modern political reality are intentionally blurred. Tharoor's narrative reimagines Gandhi as Ganga Dutt, a character whose adherence to vows, public gestures, and ascetic discipline echoes the mythical grandeur and self-imposed restraints of Bhīṣma. Tharoor does not simply venerate Gandhi; rather, he approaches him with a satirical lens, highlighting the perceived impracticality of Gandhi's ideals in the cut-and-thrust of realpolitik. The passage, 'Ganga D. would always have a penchant for making his most dramatic gestures before a sizable audience. One day, he was even to die in front of the crowd' (2014, 13), underlining the performative aspect of Gandhi's public persona, suggesting both the power and the limitations of moral spectacle in effecting lasting change.

Furthermore, Tharoor's portrayal of Ganga Dutt is layered with irony and ambivalence. He is described as a man whose unwavering commitment to truth and vows often renders him disconnected from the pragmatic demands of the day-to-day world. As Tharoor writes, 'His manner had grown increasingly other-worldly while his conversational obligations remained entirely mundane, and he would often startle his audiences with pronouncements which led them to wonder in which century he was living at any given moment' (2014, 17). This depiction adds complexity to Gandhi's legacy, presenting him as an enigmatic figure who inspires awe and scepticism in equal measure, and whose vision sometimes appears anachronistic or out of step with the rapidly changing realities of the nation.

This critique of Gandhi's perceived impracticality is not confined to Tharoor's novel. In the film *Hey Ram*, the character Abhayankar voices similar doubts, questioning the effectiveness of Gandhi's philosophies amid political turmoil and violence. Abhayankar's scepticism mirrors the broader societal debate over whether Gandhi's ideals could genuinely address the urgent, often brutal challenges confronting India at the time. The convergence of these critical perspectives—

both literary and cinematic—underscores a recurring tension in the Indian imagination: the struggle to reconcile lofty moral vision with the messy exigencies of history and nation-building.

For characters like Abhayankar and for many others swept up in the tumult of the era, the decision to end Gandhi's life is rationalised as a necessary evil, justified by an overriding sense of duty to the nation. The motherland is elevated to the status of a sacred entity, and any action, however extreme, is considered legitimate if it serves her preservation. In this way, both the novel and the film grapple with the fraught legacy of Gandhi—exploring the consequences, both immediate and far-reaching, of dismantling a moral centre in pursuit of political and ideological goals. Through these layered narratives, the assassination of Gandhi is not only a historical event but also a site of mythic resonance, inviting ongoing reflection on the interplay between individual conscience, collective identity, and the demands of history.

The enmity towards the father for possessing the mother and the fear of being alienated from her give rise to the Oedipal patricide, which is the murder of the father for the sake of the mother. The concept alluding to the Greek myth of Oedipus from the Sophoclean tragedy (*Oedipus the Rex*) is exemplified through the film *Hey Ram*, but in a more political sense than psychological. Ravi Vasudevan aptly calls it 'the oedipal contest with the father' (2002, 2918). Godse and Ram decide to kill Gandhi for Mother India (*Bhārat Mātā*), the partition of which they lament as an atrocious act defiling and desecrating the mother. The libidinal instinct to conquer the mother is symbolically represented in the scenes before the interval in which Saket Ram passionately consummates with his wife, Maithili. Simultaneously, the urge to kill the father (here the father of the nation) also builds in him, symbolised by the gun on the bed (Haasan 2000, 01:48:21). A political interpretation deduces that Ram intended to kill Gandhi because he believed that Gandhi held the monopoly of Mother India and let the Partition happen. Therefore, the death of Gandhi was a solution to redeem and possess the mother.

Conclusion; Saket Ram and Mythical Rāma

As the name suggests, the character Ram in the movie exhibits traits of the mythical Rāma. At the movie's beginning, an elderly, moribund Ram lies in a hospital bed, recalling the events of his past. The prosthetic used on the actor Kamal Hassan, playing the role of Saket Ram, gives him the look of Gandhi. In addition, the sacred thread does not appear on his body. This establishing shot of the movie hints at Ram's subsequent embrace of Gandhian ideals and a new Hindu identity.

Eventually, the shot is a mythistorical moment when Ram becomes the confluence of the *dharma* epitomised by Rāma and Gandhi. Initially, Ram and Gandhi were in dialectical opposition, exemplified in several scenes of the movie.

Saket Ram, after witnessing the murder of his wife Aparna, resorts to violence to seek vengeance. He shoots the killers of his wife along with random Muslim people out of an emotional upsurge. Later, he realises the depth of the sin and repents. This shows that Saket Ram is inherently a humane person, shaped by circumstances. He is manipulated and driven by emotions when he decides to kill Gandhi. The scenes before the interval (Haasan 2000, 01:40:00 - 01:49:00) in the movie, when he consummates with his newlywed wife Maithili, show his mental state, blinded by emotions and trauma, seeking vengeance.

Saket Ram is shown to be pampering a gun all the time after he is traumatised and vengeful, forgetting many relationships. This implies the temporary adherence towards violence as the only means of satiating his vengeful mind. Change occurs when he sees his friend Amjad Khan die. As a result, he abandons the gun and intends to confess everything to Gandhi just before the latter's death, which never happens. Here, Ram is one of the primary witnesses to Gandhi's assassination. But, at the same time, he is a secondary witness to Gandhi's pain. His trauma that began with the secondary witnessing of the Partition ends with Gandhi's death. Here, Gandhi's pain becomes the symbol of India's communal disharmony, and Ram becomes the symbol of the theo-political Hindu identity in India. With his death, Gandhi deconstructed the militant Hindu-Muslim dichotomy and thus heralded a new Hindutva philosophy in India.¹⁰

Therefore, Ram and the new Hindu identify with a changed, new self inspired by Gandhian ideals. Hence, Ram, who stands for the Hindu intelligentsia, takes the chappal and spectacles fallen from Gandhi's dead body as souvenirs of their realisation. It also symbolises the paradigm shift in the attitude of the Indian polity, which aims to follow the Gandhian path and vision. This, in turn, shows the triumph of *dharma*, replacing adamance with acceptance. The movie concludes by

¹⁰ To know more, refer to Khan, Yasmin. 2011. "Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State." *Modern Asian Studies* 45 (1): 57–80.

showing the ideals of *dharma* of Ayodhyā Rāma manifested in Saket Ram to become a mythistorical moment. It is the moment when post-Partition and post-Colonial Hindu identity is reinforced through a confluence of Gandhian and Hindutva ideals.

Looking ahead, the film opens up avenues for further exploration of the complexities embedded in Indian identity after Partition. The transformation of Saket Ram serves as a powerful metaphor for the continual negotiation between violence and non-violence, tradition and modernity, and communalism and pluralism in contemporary Indian society. Future scholarship could examine how such mythistorical narratives continue to shape popular perceptions of national identity and communal harmony. Additionally, the film's intricate portrayal of the convergence between Gandhian and Hindutva philosophies invites ongoing dialogue about the possibilities for reconciliation and coexistence in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

As viewers and researchers alike reflect on these themes, the movie remains relevant, encouraging critical thought on how myth, history, and personal transformation intersect in the shaping of collective futures. Yet several intriguing questions remain: to what extent can myth and history be harmonised in constructing a modern national identity? How do personal transformations, like that of Saket Ram, reflect or influence broader societal changes? Can the reconciliation between Gandhian and Hindutva philosophies truly foster communal harmony, or does it risk creating new tensions? In what ways might future representations of Indian identity challenge or reinforce these evolving paradigms? These questions invite further inquiry, ensuring that the film continues to provoke discussion and inspire new perspectives for years to come.

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