

# TAMING OF THE UNMANNED ELEPHANT

An Analysis of Kamal Haasan's Hey Ram (1999)

Just Another Film Critic

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To

**Kamal Haasan,**

Cinema Personified

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## CHAPTER 1: PREFACE

Kamal Haasan's body of works can be broadly divided into two categories: Hey Ram and non Hey Ram. Such is the effort, brilliance and technique put into the work. An epic film does not necessarily mean high production values and a period setting. Any film whose intentions and strides are of mammoth proportions qualifies to suit the genre. Hey Ram, by all means, not only qualifies but even has the power to top the genre.

Movies that last a lifetime are the ones that are rooted in the culture of its country of origin, but deal with themes that are contemporary and universal at the same time. By culture, I not only mean traditions and practices of the country but also its inescapable history, politics, its figures, its events and the social impact of those. A prime example would be **Florian Donnersmarck's Das Leben Der Anderen** (2006) (aka The Lives of Others), a film that firmly had a foot in political chaos of the post war Germany, its political ideologies and restrictions imposed due to the same, but spoke about the universal concept of art and humanity. Not over a handful of movies have come out from our country that handles these issues with solemnity. One such film, **Kamal Haasan's Hey Ram** is arguably the best Indian film of all time.

In the following work, I would try to dissect the film and present an analysis of the film, though in no way, exhaustive. The film is fraught with symbols, metaphors and allegories that become clear only on multiple viewings. I have tried to cover them wherever applicable. I have tried to give the key images while trying to explain those scenes and also the conversation transcript wherever necessary. English translation of the same has been provided for universal access.

It would be of interest to note that the film was being made when another Kamal film had already kicked off, **Marudhanayagam**. So, naturally Kamal was into a thorough research on the freedom movement and its obscured characters. Hey Ram presents one such,

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perhaps fictional, character that was, though not instrumental in changing the course of history, an inlet to the mind of the father of the nation, **Mahatma Gandhi**.

## CHAPTER 2: TRUDGING THROUGH THE PAST

The film begins with a dedication, voiced by Kamal himself, to Ananthu, friend, philosopher and guide to Kamal Haasan. The titles roll up with the song “*Raghupathy Raghav Rajaram*” being sung in a very unconventional, war cry-like fashion in the background that defines the pace of the film. The credits proceed as the visuals begin in monochrome.

The year is 1999. A dark room. The room opens as the doctor enters. A few sunrays barely make into the room revealing the elderly figure that is lying on the bed. He is surviving on an artificial supply of oxygen. Who is, in a few seconds, revealed to be the old man’s grandson, Ram, is sitting next to him. *Suprabhatam*, which is essentially a wake up call for God, is being played in the background as though waking the old man up. This is the starting point for the string of references to God and man’s relation to God in the film.



The doctor asks why the room is not lit. Ram replies that he has never seen his grandfather in the open or even in light upon which the doctor remarks Gandhiji’s habit of keeping the lights on even during his sleep. Ram is quick to reply that his grandfather has always liked darkness and he is no Mahatma. However, he is a good man. The small conversation sets up the contrast between the grandfather and Mahatma Gandhi which is to be observed during the rest of the movie. As the conversation proceeds, it is revealed that Ram is a celebrated writer and is very close to his grandfather. It is also found that the grandfather is of unstable mind and hence isolated. Nobody except his wife has seen him in his normal state. He has not opened himself to anyone except his grandson, that too in the form of stories which the latter regards no more than figments of imagination. The doctor picks up one of the three monkey skulls placed on the adjacent

table in front of “Gandhiji’s three monkeys” and asks Ram about it. The dark light, that is suggestive of his exclusion from the outside world and his hidden past, slowly starts getting adulterated with bright light as he recounts his past. This bright light falls on the old man’s face as it is revealed that he was an archeologist at the Mohanjo-Daro ruins. The image of the dying man’s face is juxtaposed with that of a skull at an excavation site indicating the meeting point of his future and past.



Note the chromatic shift from grayscale to full colour indicating the complete opening up of the old man’s past. Such colour swings will be recurrent during the rest of the film.



The year is 1946. An excavation site. **Saket Ram** (Kamal Haasan) and **Amjad Khan** (Shah Rukh Khan) are digging through the layers of the past. Eventually, Saket will be excavating his own true self, mirroring his profession, revealing many hitherto hidden layers within him. Saket is clean shaven and wears spectacles whereas

Amjad is bearded. General Wheeler calls Saket from up above and asks him to pack up. Upon asking the reason, Wheeler says it is because of the communal riots as a result of the ongoing discussion about the partition of the country. Both are turned off but decide not to lose their temper as Mr. Wheeler shouts “*It’s pack up time*”. It is as though communal riots have become a commonplace and it is no news that a new one has broken out. Amjad points out that the Indus Valley civilization was miles ahead of the present one for they had much advanced thoughts but never had to fight about God and religion. So both decide to call it a day and head towards Karachi.

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Archaeological Society of India Recreational Club, Karachi. A party like atmosphere is around. Saket enters alone whereas Amjad alights from the car with his wife **Nafisa** and kids. Amjad's father asks both Amjad and Saket not to go out of control and return home quickly. Everything is cordial between Saket and Amjad's family.



We also come to know that Nafisa ties a Rakhi every year to Saket and Amjad is like a brother to Saket. This point will be elaborated later in the movie. We also meet **Lalwani**, a jocular Sindhi industrialist who is friends to both of them. There are jovial discussions about the partition and everybody seems to have an opinion. It is here that the background of both Amjad and Saket are revealed. Saket is a Tamil Iyengar from South India who is married recently to a Bengali woman. Amjad is a Pathan who had stayed who had finished his graduation in the Madras Christian College along with Saket and Lalwani, hence his knowledge of Tamil. His wife Nafisa is also a Tamil Muslim. This is revealed in a nice bit of dialogue between Amjad and a certain Mr. Bright:

*Mr. Bright: I always wonder how Lalwani and Amjad can speak in a Dravidian language...*

*Amjad: Same Alma Mater sir.*

This reply from Amjad is not just indicative about their college but the country itself. This reference of India as an “alternate mother” occurs throughout the film. This piece of conversation will ring loud during the final parts of the movie and will be reminded there. Just then, a call comes from Calcutta from Saket's wife Aparna. Amjad and Lalwani fool around with the phone and even manage to tell a few lies about Saket to Aparna, all in good spirits. After the call, the three booze and start celebrating. The scene basically establishes the affluence and friendship of the three men from different religious and geographical backgrounds. Saket plays the piano for the first time in the film. A song “*Ramar aanalum, Babur aanalum...*” ensues which tells about the importance of friendship over religion. A lot of photographs are taken too.

## CHAPTER 3: LOSS OF A BELOVED



August 16, Calcutta. Saket arrives at the railway station and takes a taxi to his house. He is surprised to see what is going on around: A large scale riot with masses of people running here and there. He also sees **Altaf**, his tailor among the Muslim rioters. Altaf recognizes Saket and makes way for the taxi to go. Upon inquiry, Saket

finds out that the riots are indeed due to the partition claim by the Muslims of Calcutta.

The taxi manages to get out of the riot and reaches the calm and serene surroundings of Saket's apartments. Saket asks the guard to bring his luggage up as he goes to his floor via the lift. He finds that many shops had to close because of the riot. He reaches his flat and plays a prank on **Aparna** (Rani Mukherjee) who gets frightened and takes up a pistol. When Saket reveals who it is, she gives him a slap and tells him that there is a telegram for him. He asks her casually whether it says that his father is ill or if he is no more. She says that it is worse than that and reads out the telegram. We find out that his father has called him back and has asked Saket to marry a girl they have chosen for him. It is here that we find that Saket is cut off from his parents and has left them for good. He has not even mentioned about Aparna and his later life. On Aparna's apprehension, Saket promises that he will never marry another girl.

He kisses her as they both lean on the **piano** as Saket plays it. This is the second sight of the piano in the film. The image of the piano plays a vital part in describing Saket and will be recurrent in the story. A moment later, both of them are seen playing the piano together. They play it with such care and love. Their



music is mellifluous and in harmony with each other. They make love as the melodious music proceeds.

Saket gets up from the bed and presents her the *Thirumangalyam*, the holy necklace that he had bought for her. Upon asking for a Bengali styled marriage, Saket takes the red ink pen from the table and puts a mark on her forehead. When Saket asks for reciprocation, Aparna takes out one of her *Mettis* (Toe rings) and slips it into his



finger. The toe ring is supposed to be a symbol of marriage and the well being of the husband. The toe ring forms a vital part of the narrative and will occur regularly. Saket asks for something to eat, Aparna indicates that the shops are closed and there is only bread and butter in the house. He asks her to get ready to go to the market to get something to eat for which she replies that she is scared to go out. Saket ridicules her and starts for the market.

It should be noted here that the film has heavy overtones of religion, especially Hinduism and a lot of parallels are drawn between Saket's life and the Hindu culture. These will be denoted whenever they appear. Hindu tradition mentions for **vital stages of a man's life** – *Balya* (Childhood), *Grihasta* (Marital life), *Vanaprastha* (Exile/alienation) and *Sanyasa* (Relinquishing worldly things for salvation). Saket has just entered the second stage, *Grihasta* and is in the marital bliss. But he is unaware that this stage is a short lived one.



Saket takes his bike and sets out for the market. In some street he notices a young Sikh girl being chased by a mob. He manages to get the girl on his bike and takes her home. He slowly learns that the riots have worsened and it is unsafe to be in the streets. He returns to his apartments and finds out that something is wrong. He

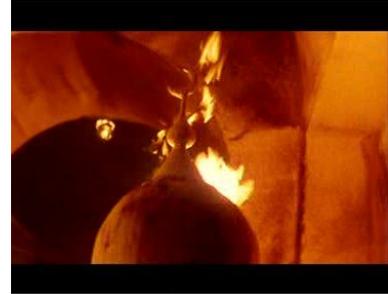
sees a corpse on the ground floor and runs to his flat. He finds that a group of men, led by Altaf are trying to break in into his apartment. Saket is held down as Altaf breaks in

through the window. Saket tries to resist but is hurt. He is pushed harshly on the piano and lands on his face. He vents his anger on the piano and pounds his face on it. The music this time is anything but sweet. The somber and even a bit creepy tone reflects his state of distress. He is able to hear the cries of Aparna – “*Ram, Ram*”. He somehow coaxes one of the rioters to set him free and manages to kill the latter by pushing him out of the balcony. He reloads his pistol to shoot the rioters but is too late. Everyone has left. He rushed towards Aparna to check. She is found raped and her throat slit. Saket Ram is helpless and cannot even call the ambulance. Blood sprouts out of her throat as Saket tries to close it. Aparna passes away. Saket is mad. He cries, but it is of no use. He looks out at one of the dead rioters and with a shriek of anger he starts his rampage for revenge. This would mark his entering into the *Vanaprastha* from *Grihastha*. Saket would be exiling his true self to avenge his wife.

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## CHAPTER 4: REVENGE

He loads his gun and starts for the hunt. The starting of this sequence has a beautifully shot image that looks as though a mosque is burning. In actuality, the setting behind it burns. This shot aptly sums up the rest of the sequence. The Muslim settlements start burning. Old men are killed. Innocents try to feign their religion just in order to survive. Young ones kill their elders to save their skin. Negotiations go on in vain. Amidst all this, a frenzied Saket Ram is searching for his prey. His spectacles are broken, as if to say his view and reasoning have taken a blow. He limps, he is blood stained, but looks are far from important at this moment.



Another Hindu concept running parallel in the film is the rights and duties of the male of the species. As a man, one has to protect his wife from evil which is in essence the **responsibility of masculinity**. As a man who was helpless in saving his wife from the clutches of evil, Saket is hurt by his impotence and uselessness. Thus, he is determined to justify his masculinity and is out to slay the violators.



He comes across Altaf's shop. He tries to shoot at it and realized that it is a fruitless effort. After a moment, he sees Altaf himself tries to flee from the Hindu occupied area. Altaf too sees Saket and tries to reason even though he knows it is futile. Saket finishes the formalities, but also kills an innocent old man who tries to stop him. Everything is now trivial to Saket who carries on into the streets. He sees a young man killing an elder Muslim. When he approaches him, the young man prostrated and salutes. Saket is disgusted but fires only towards the sky. The boy escapes and Saket

approaches the dying old man to finish the formalities. But as he shoots, he finds the pistol empty and starts to reload. The old man calls mutters that Saket has been sent by God to save him and summons someone from inside. Upon noticing movement from inside, Saket leaves the old man alone and enters the house. He looks up as if expecting a man, but is taken aback when he sees a small blind girl holding her doll. She murmurs “*Grandpa, I’m very scared*”. He is shocked and even goes blank. All he wants to do now is to get away from that place. He avoids touching that girl and hurries out of that place. It’s vintage Kamal all over this scene.

As he hurries out of the place, he comes across a group of Hindu fanatics. He points his pistol at their leader who reciprocates. He notices the *Upanayanam*, the holy thread on Saket’s chest and realizes that Saket is a friend not a foe. He introduces himself to Saket in the traditional Hindu salute:



*“Abhivadaye vishwamitra aagamarsana kaushika, triyashreya pravaranvitha kaushika gothra, aapasthambha sutra, yajusshakha adhyayee, Shriram Abhyankar sharma nama aham asmibhu”*

*(Of Kaushik, son of Vishwamitra...Of Kaushik, thrice blessed...Of Kaushik, the high priest of Yajur Veda... Of Kaushik, I bear my lineage. I am Shri Ram Abhyankar.)*

He is **Shriram Abhyankar** (Atul Kulkarni), the pivotal character in the film. He realizes that pistols are luxuries and his opponent is indeed a man of higher class. He shows his own holy thread and hands over a newspaper to Saket and says

*“Vande Mataram Bandhu, Would you like to hunt with us? I edit this news paper. This has my address on it. Come and meet me. We have a lot to do. “.*

As Saket leaves, Shriram stops him to say:

*“Don’t go like this. People won’t know what you are. Good Hunting”*

He puts the holy Tilak on Saket’s forehead, as Saket leaves the scene with the newspaper. Saket runs to escape the madness. He notices that the madness is not confined to the Hindus and Muslims alone. He witnesses a group of Sikhs slay a young Muslim lad. He runs from the scene.

Soon, dawn breaks. There are eagles all over the city praying on the corpses while municipality workers race against them to gather the corpses. It is like peace after a storm. Saket strolls and avoids the eyes of the police. He observes civilians trying to identify the corpses of their dear ones.



As Saket steps off the street, he notices an elephant standing alone. On a second sight he notices the mahout dead and lying besides it. The elephant is helpless without its master. It shakes him. It reminds him of his own situation. So far, he has been under the care of his wife who is the only person he needs to answer to. She

has been his only master. After she is slain, Saket is helpless and is only as good as the orphaned elephant. He breaks down.

He dodders to the address that Abhyankar gave him and finds that even the police is there. He tries to hide when suddenly, he feels someone calling him. It is Shriram Abhyankar, hiding among the ruins in the backyard of the building. He calls Saket over and informs him that the police is looking for him. Both of them walk away from



the building. As they escape from the area, Saket finds that Abhyankar too, is a Tanjore Maratha Brahmin and hence speaks Tamil. This is a long shot that spans around 70

seconds. Delighted, Shriram asks if he had a good time “hunting” the day before. Saket is bewildered and explains that he was never like that and he was always a peace loving person. It was the murder of the wife that pushed him to this limit. Abhyankar interrupts him to tell Saket about a similar happening to his sister. He adds by telling that nobody naturally intends to kill but it is the circumstances that push one to the drastic limits.

He then asks Saket to point out who is responsible for all this loss. He asks him:

*“Is it Bengal premier Suhrawardy? No. Is it Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah? No. There is only one man my friend. Barrister Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. From the beginning, in the name of Khilafat movement and such stuff, he has nurtured the young green plant to make it a tree.”*



The last line occurs once more in the film where it is clearer about its clauses. Saket tries to leave the place when Abhyankar stops him to ask where he is going. Saket says that he is going to surrender himself to the police. Abhyankar retorts by saying that no one is fit to punish them. They are on their own. They strike up a conversation as Abhyankar tries to escape the police by getting on a tram. Abhyankar speaks as Saket watches a dog inside the stomach of a slaughtered cow. His shot is reminiscent of the shot of the dog carrying the severed arm in **Kurosawa’s Yojimbo** (1961), both dealing with war torn cities.

**Abhyankar:** *“If killing is wrong, then so is war. So is it wrong to fight in an army during the war.”*

**Saket:** *“But I’m not a soldier. I’m a civilian.”*

**Abhyankar:** *“This is a civil war, brother. And now, we are all soldiers.”*

Abhyankar hands over a covered book to Saket and asks him to read without revealing it to anyone. As he indicated that this banned book is by Veer Savarkar, who was himself, a

staunch Hindu activist, police spot Abhyankar and try to catch him. He bids adieu to Saket and escapes by jumping into the Ganges. Saket watches on.

Saket decides to vacate his Calcutta house and packs up. He is unable to see the helpers manhandling the piano during the packing. The piano that has so far signified his relationship with his wife is now dangling for its life. Saket is unable to bear this and asks the taxi driver to leave the place. As the taxi starts to take Saket out of Calcutta, the piano falls onto the ground and breaks. Aparna is dead and gone.

As he leaves the city he notices the elephant from the previous scene going on a rampage with the stick that is used to pacify it. As if carrying a weapon, the creature is out of control and is on the loose. He again sees himself in the elephant and believes that his own madness and the outing with his weapon in the recent past are because of the murder of his mahout. As the screen fades, we hear the Tamil holy passage “*Padham kondu nadathum vazhkkai*” being played. It translates to:



*On foot my life proceeds without a mahout.*

*Nor goad to pierce and direct me about.*

*Like a demented rogue elephant I roam.*

*O! Lord of Sriranga praised in the four Vedas since times unknown.*

*Unto thee I surrender.*

The bridged audio plays on as the visuals transport us to the temples of South of India.

## CHAPTER 5: A NEW WORLD

Cut to Srirangam. Saket, his uncle **Bhashyam** and Aunt **Vasantha** are traveling in a car. Saket is fully bearded and sports a long hair. He is sitting in the car without any emotion and facial expression. He sits there as if it is forced upon him without choice. This is in total dissonance with the lively and even a bit agitated Saket we have seen in Bengal. The contrast of the situations in North and South India begins here.



Apparently, they are going to the house of the bride whom they have chosen for Saket to marry. It is found in the conversation that Saket's father has passed away. As uncle Bhashyam is trying to coax Saket to accept the alliance, the latter watches an elephant chained to a pillar. The recurrent image of the elephant suggests the new world Saket is in. From an uncontrolled mad man on the loose, Saket is now more passive and in fact chained down to conform to his family's principles.

Both his aunt and uncle express their wishes to see Saket married and have children. It is also discovered that aunt Vasantha's husband is bed ridden for years and it will be no surprise if he dies. Saket retorts and reminds them that it is not even half a year since his wife and father passed away and it was improper to marry now. They arrive at the house.



It is a typical Brahmin settlement. It is peaceful. There are no ripples of the riots in this part of the country. People are more preoccupied with the practice of religion rather than the fight about it. Unlike Bengal, people live in independent houses together with all the family members. The people thrive upon superstitions, traditions and formalities for every minute thing they wish to do. They are too finicky about the cultural details around them. These people seem to be total moderates as opposed to the

type of people he has been meeting in Bengal. The mellowed down attitude of the people is reflected in every activity they do. They have paintings of the more peaceful Young Krishna as opposed to the bow-bearing Rama and Durga of Bengal. It is although Saket has entered a completely new world.

He is greeted by the parents of the bride and called in. All the formalities done, the bride **Mythili** (Vasundhara Das) is called. The bride is asked to prostrate to the elders and also before Saket. As Saket blesses her he notices the toe ring on his finger and gets a bit upset. He is reminded of his inability to protect his wife and hence questions are



raised about his ability and qualification to take up another. He even feels a bit guilty of that. He, however, tries to overcome that and put his past life behind.



The bride is asked to sing for the groom. Everyone looks on as if it were a monumental event and as if the slightest folly would result in the end of the world, again denoting their addiction towards formalities and cultural rigidity. She sings the Hindu song “*Vaishnava Janato*”. The song will occur again in the film and will be more relevant at that point. For now, it is just a holy song. As the song completes, we see the marriage taking place in the utmost traditional way. It is gala of an atmosphere reminiscent of the wedding parties in **Francis Coppola’s Godfather** movies. Saket is clean shaven again as if starting a new marital life. His looks resemble his previous self, the one before the riots.

But Saket seems to be not much interested in the marriage and is more contemplative about the partition that is taking place in the north of the country. It is as if the South is a completely different country altogether. He discusses this with his relatives over there about the situations.

*Saket: Here I am. Getting married. And in Delhi... the worst political divorce ever is happening.*

Just then they hear someone cry out. Upon investigation, they find that aunt Vasantha has fainted. Saket's friend, Etty the doctor diagnoses her as all the others watch on curiously. It is found that aunt Vasantha has not eaten and hence has fainted out of hunger. As Etty informs this, he compares aunt



Vasantha's fast with that of Mahatma Gandhi as a joke. Upon this wisecrack, the people around him get upset. Uncle Bhashyam starts blaming Etty and attributes his irreverence to his bloodline. Saket's mother-in-law **Ambujam** (Hema Malini) mentions that if Mahatma fasts, freedom will be obtained whereas if the lesser mortals do that, they will just faint like aunt Vasantha. She implicitly asks Etty to not utter such things again. Etty is embarrassed. The sequence again refers to the moderate nature of the people of the family who believe whole-heartedly in Gandhiji and his principles to the point of blindly following it.



Mythili is sent into Saket's room that night. She sees Saket reading some book sitting on the chair as she reluctantly enters. She finds that it is Gandhiji's biography and says that it is her book. As Saket apologizes and tries to put the book away she stops him and asks his opinion about the book. He says that he does not like biographies. This is contrasted to her appreciation for the book that indicates her admiration of Gandhiji once again. The frame composition reflects the large distance between the two characters, both physically and emotionally. She tells Saket that she will change her clothes and come in a moment. She enters the next room and starts changing into a more casual wear when a lizard falls on her shoulders. She is scarred out of wits and starts shrieking at the top of her voice. As it goes on, the sounds of the shrieks turn into Aparna's cries for help. Saket hears this and rushes towards the door. Saket bangs

the door in order to get in. He feels his helplessness and calls out Aparna loudly. As Mythili opens the door after dealing with the lizard, Saket realizes the truth. He gets upset as Mythili asks who Aparna is. He goes inside the other room and shuts the door. As Mythili asks if he is all right, the others come into the room and bang the door to call Saket. Saket goes to the tap at the end of the room and drenches himself in a bucket of water. This is not only an act of desperation to snap back to reality but is also a symbol in Hindu tradition that signifies relinquishment of a kin. Saket is trying to get rid of Aparna or her memories at least.



Another haunting sequence occurs now in the film. As Saket settles at the end of the room, he sees the figures of the people he had killed appearing in the room and greeting him. This is followed by the image of a lizard struggling to walk in a pool of blood on the floor. The lizard is the indicator of Saket himself. The lizard's habitat is not the floor but the walls. It never comes down unless by an accident. It is unable to walk on the slippery blood on the floor. Likewise, Saket never expected himself to come down to the level of killing people and drenching himself in blood. As a result, he is unable to get a firm foot in life and is struggling to get back to his original position. Saket cringes on observing this image and starts shivering.

## CHAPTER 6: CALCUTTA REVISITED

14<sup>th</sup> August 1947. The birth of Pakistan. Cut to Calcutta. The nation is getting ready to celebrate independence. Saket strolls in the streets of the city. He has not informed his family about his disappearance from the house. He has grown a moustache, perhaps indicating the masculinity he has regained over the time of healing. He returns to his apartment. He looks up he can see Aparna calling him.



Subsequently he sees his piano once more in the film dangling on a loose rope. It eventually falls and breaks down. He looks at the place where the piano had fallen. Tall grass has grown indicating the one year that has passed since Aparna's death. The image of the piano once more underlines the relationship Saket had with his wife. The piano is no more and so is Aparna.



He starts wallowing in his old world as he tells the watchman that he is here to meet Aparna and starts walking towards the lift. It is a new watchman and is confused but understands that he is here to see Mr. Nair who has just moved into the apartment. He gets into the lift and relives all the good moments when Aparna and he had just moved into the apartment. He recollects the good times and Aparna's paintings

as he stares into the same flat he had lived. As Mr. Nair keeps asking what he wants, Saket keeps staring into the flat. Finally, when Saket snaps back, he can hear Mr. Nair's words and starts the conversation.

*Mr. Nair: What can I do for you? I'm from Madras Presidency too. Been here six months. But I've no idea who the last tenant was. All the tenants here are new. What's the name again?*

*Saket: Saket Ram.*

*Mr. Nair: When did you see him last?*

*Saket: Whom?*

*Mr. Nair: Saket Ram.*

*Saket: One year ago! Exactly one year.*

*Mr. Nair: Please don't get me wrong. But a year ago..., there was a massacre in this building. Your Saket Ram... Maybe he was killed? Sorry!*

*Saket: No. It's all right.*

*Mr. Nair: Then looking for him would be futile!*

*Saket: No harm in searching.*

*Mr. Nair: What is your relationship with Saket Ram?*

*Saket: Like body and soul. We were very good friends.*

When Mr. Nair asks when he had met Saket Ram, Saket replies that he had seen him one year ago. Here he points out that he was no more the Saket he knew – the one that was more peaceful and loving. Mr. Nair says hesitantly that Saket might have been killed in the riots for which he seems to agree and not object. He considers the original Saket dead. Mr. Nair says that it will be of no use searching for him for which Saket replies that there is no harm in searching for him suggesting his quest to rehabilitate to his former self. Upon asking his relationship with Saket Ram, he says that it was one between the body and the soul. The soul is gone, the body remains. But what is the use of the body without the soul? The search for the soul continues.

Saket asks if he could take back Aparna's painting that is hanging as a decoration on Mr. Nair's wall and is given the painting. Saket holds the painting to his chest and walks back into the streets. He recollects all the great times with Aparna as he roams the city. The melodious song "*Nee partha paarvai*" plays on. The night is out and



Saket revisits the sites that had, just a year ago, been plagued with riots. It is totally calm and peaceful. He once again sees the images of people he had killed greeting him into the streets. Somehow, he seems to have been immune to them and has learned to live with them. He is unshaken by the images and carries on into the settlements. He reaches the house of the little blind girl that he had seen last year. She starts speaking.

*"Hey! Ram, Shall I tell you how I died? Ram, let me tell you."*



Saket is disgusted and starts puking when a crowd of, what it seems to be, protestors calling out "*Down with Gandhi! Down with Suhrawardy!*" coming towards him and dragging him with them. The crowd merges onto a bigger one that seems to be gathered outside a large building and is being stopped by a group of Gandhians. In a few moments, it is revealed that Gandhiji is in the building as he opens the windows of the balcony. This is the first time we see Gandhiji (Nasseeruddin Shah) in the film though a lot has been talked about him. Interesting trivia must be presented here. Nasseeruddin Shah was turned down in the final minute for the title role in **Richard Attenborough's Gandhi** (1982) which eventually was awarded to **Ben Kingsley**. He regains the lost chance in this film. He silences the crowd as he calls Suhrawardy to the window. At Gandhiji's initiation, he starts delivering a showcase speech about peace among Hindus and Muslims. Saket loses temper at this and questions Suhrawardy about his responsibility during the last year's riots. Suhrawardy tries to escape Saket's questions diplomatically but is pinned down by Saket and the apparently supportive crowd. Realizing his situation, Suhrawardy admits that it was his responsibility and he has failed.

Ironically, the crowd around is amazed and starts appreciating the apology with the cries of “*Long live Mahatma Gandhi*”. Saket is disgusted by the crowd as it applauds. They seem to be satisfied with the apology. He realizes that the protest was just a formality and was not heart felt at all. He is surprised at the people’s fickleness and is unable to digest people forgetting and forgiving the mishaps that had taken place.

He moves away from the place. As he moves towards a more isolated place he hears somebody asking him if he is disgusted by all this. As Saket looks up, he realizes it his old acquaintance Shriram Abhyankar, clean shaven, speaking. He informs Saket that he has been in the jail for just 10 months for none could prove his guilt. He also adds the following lines.

*“Heard that lecture from Suhrawardy? And he takes support of a snake like Suhrawardy. What kind of Mahatma is this Gandhi? The public remembers nothing. Only you and I remember. This senseless flock of goat follows the old man who survives on goat milk. This flock doesn't know that he is off to celebrate Bakrid! In between this, a theater is staged to run the state. No permission for the critics to watch it!”*



Shriram hints that the foolish people do not know that there is going to be large scale massacre against the Hindus in the newly formed Pakistan whereas the Muslims in India are going to be protected in India. He is mad that nobody is questioning the happenings. As they walk the streets, they meet a drunk holding an Indian flag and shouting out “*Hindu and Muslim! Brothers! Brothers!*”. Shriram stops him and starts mocking him. He mentions various political rival and improbable friends for which the drunk replies “*Brother*”. There is a reference of goat again as in the previous passage indicating the blind followers of Gandhian politics. Shriram continues to mock the guy until he gets confused and grabs the flag from his hands. He walks away with the flag shouting the same thing as Nehru’s “*Tryst of Destiny*” is broadcast. It is 12.00 A. M. 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947.

## CHAPTER 7: NEW WIFE, NEW LIFE

Cut to Srirangam. The contrast of situations between Bengal and the south once more. Mythili is speaking on the phone with her mother. She informs that Mr. Chari's prediction about Saket returning home was spot on and he had returned safe and sound. She indicates that he looks like the Tamil poet **Bharathiyar** with his



moustache. This becomes an important point as will be seen in a few moments. She hangs up the phone and returns to the bedroom. Saket is getting ready to go out somewhere as she enters the room. *She still maintains her distance* and walks away from Saket. As she stands away from Saket, observing him, he apologizes. On asking the reason for his apology, he says it is because of his bizarre behaviour and she is too young to understand it. She demands an additional apology for that and tells that she is neither too young to understand things nor is their marriage a child marriage. She tries to assert her position in the relationship for the first time. She tries to tell Saket that she is equal to him and forms half the relationship. **Bharathiyar**, who never gave a thought about his wife **Chellamma** being an important person earlier in his life, later realized her value and also of every woman in the society. Eventually he started the feminist movement in Tamil poetry that revolutionized the position of women in the society. Thus the reference of Bharathiyar early on implies evokes a similar relation between Mythili and Saket.

What follows is seemingly a banal piece of conversation. But it is only later that we find that there is more to it. The importance of the conversation will be denoted later.

***Mythili:** All I knew in the beginning is that I'm your second wife. Now I know what you've been through. You were just three months old when your mother died. Right? You never even saw her. Right?*

***Saket:** I have her photo though.*

*Mythili: But not having a mother means...*

*Saket: Sister Vasantha is like my mother.*

She then empathizes with Saket about Aparna. A few moments later Saket draws out the picture drawn by Aparna and hands it over to Mythili and says:

*“This is a piece of me. For You. I hope you don’t mind”*

He explains that it is Aparna’s work. Mythili is quick to accept it and runs inside and brings out her own painting. And hands it over to Saket and, like a child, she repeats the same line as Saket above. Here again, the equality of both the spouses is stressed upon. Her painting is that of Andal, the Hindu devotee who admired Krishna, fell in love with him but never met him. This serene painting, a symbol of love, is directly in contrast with that of Aparna’s Kali whose terrifying stature and expression make her a symbol of death and violence. Thus, once again, the contrast between Aparna and Mythili and between the North and South of the country is evident here.



She now requests Saket to accept her as a friend (like the Krishna-Andal relationship) if not wife. She offers a handshake as Saket reciprocates. This is the first time they are close and come under the same depth in camera. Here, they are both physically and emotionally closer for the first time in the film not counting the ritualistic closeness during the marriage. She then asks if she can hug him. He accepts as if fulfilling a child’s petty wish. She hesitantly hugs him. He observes her keenness and mixed fear and is unable to help but smile. She says it is the first time. Upon asking what was, she replies that it was the first time that she saw him smile. Indeed, it was the first time he was smiling in a very long time. He is not able to believe that he smiled and looks into the mirror. He wants to look at the façade he has pulled over himself during the torturous year. He wants to see how he looked smiling. She insists that she had seen it even though it lasted for a fraction of a second. He is happy about that and smiles once

again which Mythili is prompt to point out. She even calls for a hatrick after Saket smiles once more for a wisecrack from her about his smile.

He stares at her for a moment, relishing her child like innocence and her eagerness to bond but immediately feels guilty of not reciprocating the feeling. He is not able to look into her eyes and looks down. The view of the toe ring on her feet just adds to the guilt. He looks up again in her angelic face. He wants to say that he's sorry for not



caring for her and he has not been worthy of her attention. He takes his arms near her face as she places her cheek on his palm. As if consoling, he goes for a passionate hug when uncle Bhashyam interrupts.

Uncle Bhashyam calls Saket downstairs to meet Mr. Chari, the astrologist who has come a long way to meet him. Saket leaves the bedroom as he gazes Mythili for the first time. Saket goes downstairs to see everybody in the room sitting anxiously, ready for the conversation. Mr. Chari is staring at Saket's horoscope which is objected by Saket. Upon asking the reason for his scrutiny, Mythili's grandmother prompts Mr. Chari to tell him



what he had told them. Surprised at this Saket looks at Mythili to ask if she had anything to do with this. Mythili gets a bit frustrated and denies it with a shake of her head. Mr. Chari starts explaining that since he has been working with dead bodies and skeletons there has been some force that has taken control over his thought and it can be cured by performing specific rituals. He also says that there is no scientific cure to all this and this is beyond science. Saket asks if it is beyond god too. Cornered, Mr. Chari tries to deny that only to be harshly treated by Saket. He urges Mr. Chari to go out. Saket has found out that all this arrangement is done by uncle Bhashyam in order to make Saket and others believe that he will no longer behave in such strange fashion that he had done once he performs these rituals. He even criticizes uncle Bhashyam who objects his

gross faithlessness in astrology and asks Mr. Chari to leave at once which he does. Infuriated by all this, Saket hurries to his room and starts packing.

The helpless Mythili, fearing he may leave once again without information, requests him to inform the elders before leaving about his destination. Saket replies that *they* need not tell others wherever they go. Upon hearing this, she confirms if she should leave with him which Saket affirms. The hitherto far Mythili moves closer to Saket in the shot indicating the increase in closeness of their relationship. Saket asks her to pack and leave with him which she does happily.



Meanwhile Mythili's mother Ambujam has packed food for the travel as delivers it to them as they board the car. As Mythili's mother hands over the food to her daughter, Saket's mother (read aunt Vasantha, as mentioned in the "smile conversation") prompts him to take the food during the travel. A while later, uncle Bhashyam calls out Mythili in the pretext of a blessing and asks her to use symbols to convey the name of the railway station where they are heading to so that the rest of the family can follow them. She boards the car and tries to ask the name of the railway station for which Saket gives a smile. She insists on Saket answering her for which Saket reminds her that he had smiled for a fourth time and asks her if she noticed. Saket's smile is clearly for the fact that he has seen through their petty plan and has devised his own way to break it. They board a flight!



On the flight Saket is reading the book given to him by Shriram. Mythili interrupts him with hesitation and asks him if the book is some lewd novel. Saket replies that some things are done better undercover to which Mythili point out that Gandhiji has said that nothing should be

hidden from the world. Saket ridicules the statement and says that her blouse looks good even though it covers. Mythili suggests that Gandhiji means words and actions should not be hidden. Upon this Saket points out to the newspaper headline that she is holding and asks her opinion about that quote by Gandhiji. The headline reads “*Protect Muslims in India and then alone would I go to Pakistan to protect the Hindus*”. He is unhappy with Gandhi’s incessant support to the Muslims of India. Mythili tells that whatever Mahatma says would have a firm reason and it would be beneficial to follow it, affirming the Southern image of Gandhiji as a demi-god. She adds that revenge will take one nowhere and one has to live in harmony. Saket gets turned off and says that if we are to protect the Muslims here first, the Hindus in Pakistan will be long gone. He interrupts Mythili and makes a comment about Gandhiji. And Mythili replies.

**Saket:** “*He has three kinds of monkeys, around him. The first, will only hear Mahatma. The second keep their mouth shut. Lest they let slip some criticism against Mahatma. The third close their eyes... and pretend to live in a world of Gandhi-esque fantasy. What kind are you?*”

**Mythili:** “*Among those cronies who use proximity to Mahatma for political gains, you might find monkeys like these. But as far as I’m concerned, I’m like the three Gandhian monkeys. I’m the monkey that sees, hears, or speaks no evil. But if it be good, my eyes, ears, and my mouth are always open.*”

Note the bitter adversarial relation between them. Saket’s interpretation of the three monkeys portrays the closed nature of Gandhian followers and their inability to be pragmatic whereas a more cherubic meaning is assigned by Mythili who even follows that interpretation.

Upon hearing her openness, Saket offers her the book to read and asks her to read the historical work. This time, opposite to that of their first night of marriage, it is Mythili who denies the offer and says that she does not like works of semi-fiction. Again, the equality of the sexes is emphasized. It also shows how she has grown up idolizing the

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great men through their biographies and works of non-fiction. Saket accepts the argument with a “*Touché*”. He offers her a compilation of Marathi poems, also a covered book, possibly by Veer Savarkar again. The plane flies towards Bombay amidst cloudy situations symbolic of the tough times ahead.

## CHAPTER 8: AN OLD FRIEND

The plane lands at Bombay Airport. Saket notices Shriram Abhyankar as they proceed to gather their luggage. He is in a completely new attire. He greets Saket with a “*Vande Mataram*”. He carries some suitcases as Saket introduces him to Mythili. He interrupts Saket and introduces himself as **Ramakrishna Pandey**, clearly



assuming anonymity. Saket introduces Mythili to Pandey as his wife. Pandey is amazed and disappointed at Saket’s “mellowing down”. He is not happy with Saket putting his past behind him. He almost asks why Saket had done so but restrains himself to asking when he had married. As Saket mentions that it has just been two months, Pandey greets Mythili as a formality and the three walk towards the car. Pandey asks her if she would like to join the hunting party with the Maharaja the next day. She turns down the offer reporting that she is a vegetarian (again the meekness of Mythili is evident). After a vernacular joke about vegetarianism and Hinduism, they get in to the car specially sent for Saket by the Maharaja.

Mythili asks how people can kill animals as both the men justify it. She asks if it would be right if the animals decide to start killing people for which Saket replies that first the animals have to learn to hold a gun. She offers an alternate argument about a wolf that carries off a human kid. She asks would that be correct. Pandey replies that the moral correctness depends on whether you are the human or the wolf as he changes his dark glasses for a transparent one. He has changed back to Abhyankar from Pandey. Clearly, there is a parallel struck between the ongoing argument and the Hindu-Muslim clash. The men are of the opinion that the hunting, which began during their first meeting in Calcutta, will be clear to Gandhians, such as Mythili herself, only if they stand in the victim’s boots. They leave the station.

The next day at the Maharaja's hunting grounds, Abhyankar asks if Saket likes Deer meat or Rabbit meat for which Saket replies that he is a vegetarian and hunting is just a passion. The Maharaja is surprised and asks Saket

*"Only passion, no hunger eh? Just the need to kill."*



suggesting Saket's political leanings have become stronger than personal revenge. The Maharaja is impressed and thinks he is the kind of man for their job. They leave the estate after a group photograph. The photograph again, as in the party at Karachi, fades to grayscale indicating that the stories behind them will be

never revealed by Saket to his family.

Their car arrives at a closed railway crossing and the car stops. Abhyankar asks if he should go have the gates opened to which the Maharaja replies:

*"I said all the doors now are closed for Rajas like me. So what is the use of opening only this door?"*

The point made here refers to Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel's efforts to banish kingship in India and integrate all the princely states to form a Pan-Indian political rule. The kings are truly out of place in the Indian governmental system.

The Maharaja asks Abhyankar to call the man selling Papad to which Abhyankar says that Papad is a poor man's food. The king again makes a wisecrack that Maharajas will have to learn to eat Papad in Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel's rule! The vendor comes to the car as Saket watches somewhere else. The Maharaja buys the



whole lot of Papads and pays the vendor a handsome amount. He condescends on the

vendor and says that he will be grateful that he prospered because of a fading king and wonders if the vendor could count that sum of money. The vendor is quick to reply that counting loads of money is what he did in Karachi before the riots there. It is only now that Saket notes that the vendor is none but his old friend Lalwani. He is shocked and delighted at the same time. He had never imagined that Lalwani, who was one of the richest businessmen in Karachi, would be selling Papad for meager amounts of money.

Saket introduces him to the Maharaja as an industrialist when Lalwani stops him. Saket learns that Lalwani has lost his office, shop and his family during the riots. He has lost his elder kid in a refugee camp due to Cholera while the small one was lost in a crowd. Lalwani adds that Saket will not understand his plight since he is a South India to which Saket tells the ugly truth about Aparna. Lalwani is the representative symbol of Hindus in Pakistan. Saket's apprehensions had become true. The Hindus in Pakistan are unsafe, thanks to Gandhi. He takes Lalwani along with him to his place.



It is Vijayadashami. Lalwani is drunk to his heart's content. Mythili offers him a sweet that he drops down. As he tries to pick it up to eat, Saket grabs it and throws it away. Lalwani is disappointed and says that bygones are bygones indicating his escape from the past. Just then, Abhyankar offers him what it seems to be alcohol in a cup and asks him to drink. Upon his hesitation and Mythili's efforts to stop Saket, Abhyankar urges Saket to drink it after he tells him it is just Soma (The drink of the gods), the drink that comes along with the festival. Saket drinks it up as Mythili seems a tad disappointed. They all go to the event of burning the mammoth idol of Ravana by Rama. This is headed by the Maharaja himself. There is a huge crowd at the place. The maharaja starts the proceedings as the large 10-headed figure starts burning. People start the loud chants of "*Victory to Sri Ram*" and celebrate.

It would be ideal now to introduce the biggest allegory that runs in the film and intensifies from this point onwards. The whole film is laid on the structure of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Saket is the Rama figure of the story. “Saket” takes up the meaning of “Ayodhya” also. Thus Saket is a representation of the **Ayodhya Rama** in



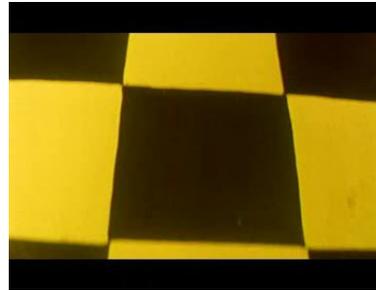
the film. Saket has lost his wife Aparna in the riots in a similar fashion to the original Rama who loses **Sita** to Ravana. Ironically, in contrast to the ideal traits of the epic hero, our hero Saket Ram is an imperfect Rama – A Rama that drinks Soma, a Rama who has remarried after his wife’s death and a Rama who has been unable to rescue his wife. Also “Mythili” is another name for Sita – our Rama’s second Sita. Lalwani is the Guha figure of the story whom Saket brings home irrespective of his present social position, similar to Rama declaring that **Guha** is his brother even though he was born in a lower caste. The references will increase and will be pointed out at relevant places.



This Vijayadashami is about to change it all. The Soma has got onto Saket’s head. He feels his masculinity as he watches the Ravana idol burn. He feels as if he has regained his masculinity and twists his moustache, now definitely representing his manhood. He looks at Mythili, her inviting lips. He approaches her for the first time sensually. As he tries to touch her, her image transforms into the blind little girl he had seen in Calcutta. He is shocked and moves back just to trip on one of the people he killed. He is haunted by the unexpected hallucinations. He realizes that it is the drink that had brought about the momentary masculinity, that is now gone. As the idol of the demonic Ravana burns, Saket realizes that he has to first slay his inner demons before he can go about slaying his Ravana – Mahatma Gandhi, the man responsible for his wife’s disappearance.

## CHAPTER 9: IN SEARCH OF MANHOOD

As the event ends, Abhyankar informs Saket that he is being summoned to come alone by the Maharaja. Ram moves away from Mythili with reluctance. Our “Guha” is also disappointed at the separation. The image of the falling Ravana is now juxtaposed with that of Abhyankar leading him to the Maharaja. Abhyankar is the analogue of **Hanuman** in the film and leads our Rama to “his Ravana” in the same way as Hanuman leads Rama to his nemesis Ravana via the sea between Rameshwaram and Lanka.



Rama is able to see the “sea” as Abhyankar takes him through. The wet floor transforms into solid tiles as they proceed representing the more “mechanical” version (uncompassionate) of the Ramayana is about to take place. Saket gets dizzy and faints (sea-sickness?). The effect of the Soma has reached its peak.

As he wakes up, he is taken to the Maharaja's secret chamber where a crowd has gathered. What follows is a very instigating and intriguing surreal sequence. The Maharaja's room is decorated with traditional Indian weaponry characteristic of the Maratha kingdom. Portraits of Hindu nationalist **Veer Savarkar** and racist **Hitler** hang on the wall. The Maharaja's ideologies do not digress much from these historic characters either.



The Maharaja gives a briefing of the gathering.

*“Gentlemen, if our Hindu soul is to survive, this Mahatma must die. The misfortune of this Hindu nation is its worst enemy is a practicing Hindu! Right from beginning, he has been taking their side and neglecting the people of his own religion. For centuries we have been worshipping the valour and its accompanying instruments He now wants us to change our form of worship and pray to a new God, himself, and a new religion, Ahimsa. My brave men, it should be done as a symbolic act and not as the revenge. But to show the world and the country what a Hindu is capable of.”*

Saket is unsteady as he listens to the briefing. He recollects Abhyankar's words about Gandhi as the equivalent images appear along with it:

*“He has nurtured the young green plant to make it a tree”*

Gandhiji stands in front of a green background and pours what seem to be grains of wheat onto the ground. A green thorny cactus plant sprouts up and grows out of bounds. Note

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here that green is the traditional colour used to represent Muslims and Saffron is the colour used to represent the Hindus.



Saket imagines Gandhi to be nourishing the green plants (read Muslims) which has grown to become a threatening issue. It is also interesting to note the whole film, especially the part after Aparna's murder carries a Saffron tinge indicating the Hindu nationalist rage that has crept up into Saket.

The Maharaja stands in front of the Kali picture, the symbol of demon slaying, as he chooses a chit from a closed container. He opens it and calls out Abhyankar's name. Abhyankar seems happy and thanks god for that. Clearly, it is the selection of men who are going to carry out the job of killing Gandhi.

The next name that is called out is that of Saket's. As Abhyankar, bit disgusted at Saket's marriage, points out that he is a married man and won't get involved. Saket objects, doddering to centre stage which is appreciated by the Maharaja. As Raja speaks about the selection, Saket sees Aparna herself speaking:

*"Brave men, today is Vijayadashami. It seems like it's the will of Bhavani that it shall be a Ram who should do the job. Come, my Rams. Choose your weapons."*



Saket and Abhyankar take the guns they need. Our Rama has got his bow. He takes the pistol and fires at the image he has formed in his mind – *Gandhiji sitting in front of the Pakistan flag surrounded by the statue of the three monkeys, which Saket speaks about on the flight, a Spinning wheel and presumably a Koran.* The image shatters as Saket finalizes his quest for slaying his Ravana.



The shattered image leads to the Hindu Swastika (on a “green” background) transforming into the German Swastika (on a red background), as made famous by the Nazis, indicating that a Third-Reich like Hindu fanaticism is being evolved and Hindu supremacy I intended to be established wiping out the Muslims from the country, like Hitler’s extermination of the Jews.



The German Swastika later transforms into a lotus shaped figure (on an orange-ish background) which I will not assign any meaning to and will leave it for you to decipher!

Cut to the Maharaja's palace. Saket is watching a dance as the effect of the Soma persists. As the leader of the dance troupe approaches him, he sees Aparna dancing in a similar fashion back in his house at Calcutta. He tries to touch her, but is unable to. Disappointed, he approaches Mythili. He tries to force Mythili for a kiss as Abhyankar watches on. She tries to get away. He takes her upstairs and passionately kisses her. His masculinity has returned.

Another surreal sequence begins as they get onto the bed. As Saket closes in on her, the bed collapses and falls into space and looks like it is approaching the ruins of Mohanjo-Daro. They fall through thin air making love.



He knows that it his the last time he is making love and it is the road to ruins from now on. The images of Mohanjo-Daro and free fall indicate ruining of his future course of life and his present nonchalance towards it. Saket tears off his shirt hinting his high masculine coefficient at this point as he pounces on Mythili.

He kisses her passionately. The image of Mythili lying on the bed under her blanket morphs into that of a large rifle under the same blanket.



Saket uncovers the gun and kisses it passionately. He is in love with it. The concept of the “mechanical Rama” is evident once more. Additionally, this is the transformation of Saket from a person who wants to get back into peaceful marital life into one who is in determined to carry on in his self destructive mission to

satisfy his political ideologies and avenge his wife’s death.

After he has made love, Saket sits at the piano and plays it mechanically. The image of the piano in the film comes for one last time and produces a very creepy and robotic tone suggesting that this is the last time he connects to his wife and the connection, too, has been a very ritualistic and mechanical one. He stares at Mythili, who is lying on the



bed in an almost-angry fashion and gets up to tie his long locks back. He is imposing in stature. Saket is now at the pinnacle of masculinity. He only has to slay his inner demons now and then the outer.

## CHAPTER 10: LONE RANGER



The next day, at the Maharaja's palace grounds, crowd has gathered to watch a polo match in which Saket and Abhyankar are playing. Mythili and Lalwani have come too. All is well until Abhyankar meets with an accident wherein his horse collapses on his trunk. People rush and retrieve him out and admit him to the hospital.

Cut to the stable of the collapsed horse. Saket and the Maharaja are observing the horse on the floor. The Maharaja asks if he could put down the horse and gets a confirmation from the doctor. It is a practice in race circles wherein a fallen horse is put down if it is found it can't run any more. He takes his revolver out and kills the horse after having the eyes of all the other horses covered. He then tells Saket:

*"This Kathiawar horse once was great and useful to me. But now it burdens itself and others. I think it would amount to kindness to put him to sleep"*

Again, Mahatma Gandhi is referred here. The Maharaja suggests that once Gandhi was of use during the independence struggle, but is more of a liability now and it is best to get rid of him. The other horses (read Gandhians) must not know about the murder.

Saket and the King come to the hospital to visit Abhyankar. Saket finds here that the King has got Lalwani a good job in exchange for his service. The Maharaja goes inside to meet Abhyankar as Saket waits outside along with Lalwani and Mythili. Lalwani is happy that Saket had helped him put his past back, and thanks him. "Guha" then bids adieu to Saket and leaves. Mythili breaks into tears upon



which Saket asks the reason. Mythili says that she is lucky that Saket has survived the accident on the field. She says that she is going to say something that her ancestors never would have said to their spouses and says “I love you”. Saket says he loves her too and that is why he is disturbed. He is not able to digest the fact that he is going to leave this innocent girl suffering in a few weeks. Saket says his hands are stained with blood and he should not be with her. She says that it is because of his passion for hunting and it is



natural for a tiger (symbol for masculinity yet again) to hunt and kisses him. Little does she know that Saket is not hunting animals but himself is an animal that has hunted a lot of humans and is going to go on. He sympathizes for the girl whose innocence adds more and more to his guilt and he asks if he would find peace if he tells her everything about him. She asks him to tell her everything after he has met Abhyankar. Saket looks at the toe ring on his finger, removes it and slips it onto Mythili’s finger. This ironical shot not only shows his acceptance of Mythili as his wife but also the relinquishment of his last traces of *Grihasta*. He tries to kiss Mythili as the Maharaja interrupts.

Saket learns that Abhyankar has become quadriplegic and wants to see him alone immediately. He leaves her and goes into Abhyankar’s room. Abhyankar lies on his bed unable to even move. Saket tries to offer some consolation which is turned down by Abhyankar. He says that he has lost his body and now he is submitting his untainted soul to Saket. He asks Saket to promise that he will fulfill their duty for the sake of their religion, ideology and for the motherland. He also asks him to vouch that no blood relation shall stop him from attaining his goal which hesitantly Saket does.



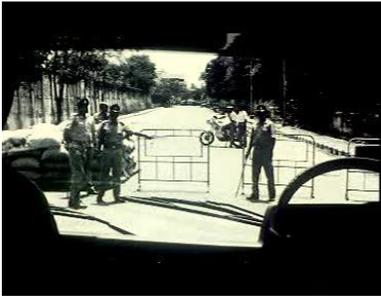
He asks him to gather the parcel from the adjacent table and place it on his chest. Saket takes the parcel that is kept in front of the Hanuman (tearing his chest to reveal Rama) photo and places it on Abhyankar's chest. The most evident analogy between Abhyankar and Hanuman is placed here as Abhyankar asks him to tear open the package which Saket follows. Saket finds the gun that Abhyankar had chosen for his mission in the box. Abhyankar asks him to take possession of the gun. He also instructs Saket that he will be telegraphed the details of the mission by the Maharaja and he has to carry it out without fail. Abhyankar has torn his chest and given his soul to Saket.

## CHAPTER 11: CHANGE OF TIMES

Cut to the present. 1999. Return to Grayscale. Saket struggles for breath. He is taken into the van on a stretcher. Ram asks his father, the son of Saket, to assist him. He refuses and says that it would not be necessary. Ram asks if he had at least informed grandmother Mythili. His father



replies that it won't be necessary either and will tell her later; whatever the result of the treatment is. He is totally indifferent towards his father's health and does not care about the life of a man that he has never talked to. The conversation shows the change of times from when the South Indian families were tightly bound and each relation was very dear to each other to now, when no one cares unless cared. Ram is infuriated but is urged by the doctor get into the van. This difference in times will be highlighted throughout the rest of the film.



They drive to the hospital but are stopped by a road block on the way. It is found that the road block is set up to prevent the possible riots. It is then they find that the date is December 6, they day when the Babur Mosque in Ayodhya was demolished. Again the contrast of times is shown here. South India, which was so peaceful in spite of the riots in Calcutta, now fears riots due to similar reasons. They ask the policemen to allow them to pass explaining their situation and even trying to bribe them. But the policemen say that they have their own problems and it is better for them to leave.

They take a different route to the hospital as Ram and the doctor have a nice bit of conversation:

*“Ram: Oh God! I hate this religion in politics.*

*Doctor: So does God.*

*Ram: This combination of religion and politics is dangerous. Just like sex and violence.*

*Doctor: But a commercial mix, everyone, from city to village, can understand.”*

As Russian ruler Stalin and Chinese premier Mao Zedong said “*Religion is a poison*”, Ram too points out the ills of religion in politics and compares the concoction with the confluence of sex and violence as in crimes of passion. The doctor’s reply emphasizes the degree of influence religion has had in politics.

As they snake in and out of the city streets they find that the riot has started intensifying. A nice technique, reminiscent of **Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List (1993)** is employed here. All the elements of the monochrome visuals are retained except the shots of fire which is given in true colour. This suggests that ignorance of the past (denoted by the black and white of the video), the communal hatred and riots still carry on from the past and are still fresh. Thus, the elements of the riot viz. the fire and explosions are shown in colour.



They try to avoid the rioters and start going through different lanes. Saket struggles on the stretcher inside the van. A group of police personnel spot the van and shoot out the tyres of the van. Their leader (Nasser) rushes towards the van and starts evacuating the people inside. It is now that we learn that Ram’s full name too is Saket

Ram and the doctor’s full name is Munawar. They explain their situation to the officer who asks them to lower the stretcher into the nearby trench in order to safeguard him. He also asks the rest of them to go along with him into the trench. He closes the trench from above. The officer waits for the green signal for the shooting orders. As he gets the go, he asks his men to stay alert and wait for his command. Just then a couple of rioters throw

petrol bombs in the street and the rest of them rush towards the police officers. The men try to counter the rioter. Mean while Saket Ram (senior) returns to his recollection of his past.

We move into another surreal sequence. The atmosphere is hot and cloudy. The saffron tinge in the film goes up. Stage is set for a storm to rage. Saket Ram is practicing at the target board with his pistol. With the long rifle in his hand he is reminiscent of Rama wielding his bow. Only that this Rama is more mechanical. He fires at a lump of irregular pillar of clay - what may be considered as one of his “inner demons”, formless but prominent.



Moments later a huge twister comes along, ripping everything in its way. Saket stands still as the twister passes through him. His long hair flows out but he stands still. He survives the ordeal. Saket Ram has defeated his biggest inner demon - his past. Now there is no stopping him from slaying his Ravana.

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## CHAPTER 12: SANYASA

Cut to Tanjore. Saket's house. Saket is sleeping on his bed as Mythili wakes up. She has evidently moved closer to Saket as she kisses him as he sleeps. However, Saket is just pretending to be asleep as he does not want to reciprocate (after his definite venturing into *Vanaprastha*) nor does he want to stop her (not to disrupt her beliefs).

A car arrives at the house as Mythili's parent alight out of it. As Saket enter the house at the same time, he is surprised to see her in-laws, but manages to not look out of place. He does not know the reason for their arrival. As they all move in, Mythili's mother asks her why had she not told Saket about their arrival. Mythili replies that Saket had become more of a *saint* after returning from Bombay, both physically and mentally. This reference of a saint will become vital in a few scenes from now.

Cut to Saket's private study. Saket is modifying his pistol and ammo using gun making manuals and the required instruments. His walls are decorated with pictures that conform to his ideology. A vampire-like demonized Gandhi and a political map of India renamed by Saket as "**Gandhi's itinerary**". We once again see the "*Mechanical Rama*" wielding the welding flame and sporting the dark welding glasses, modifying his new love - his rifle.



He hears some chants from outside the house and checks out what it is. He sees a group of Krishna devotees in procession chanting verses. He realizes that dawn has broken. Again the emphasis on the religious conservativeness of the people of the south (especially towards the peaceful Young Krishna) is shown. Saket packs up and switches off the lights.

It is morning and Saket is sitting on his table reading Ananda Vikatan, the local magazine. The servant comes in carrying a telegram. Saket never expects to be his and is shocked to see what it reads.

*“Abhyankar died yesterday painlessly. Gandhiji in Delhi for the whole month. To do or die. Please go ahead and help him Vande Mataram.”*

One of the two Rams selected for the mission has passed away. It is up to Saket Ram to complete the mission and the prophecy. Amazed to see the telegram, he hides it in the magazine as the family enters singing divine verses of Young Krishna. He receives a bigger shock as they reveal that Mythili is pregnant. He is speechless as uncle Bhashyam asks Saket to get the elders’ blessings. They play M. S. Subbulakshmi’s record (about Young Krishna yet again, signifying the birth of the new child) on the gramophone as Saket quietly moves away from the room. He does not return Mythili’s smile, thus clearly unhappy about the situation. He goes upstairs with a heavy heart. As he gets away from the view of everyone, he leans on the wall as a gesture of helplessness. This shot is immediately followed by the shot of Mythili watching him and looking down. She is disappointed yet again by Saket’s indifference towards her. Saket’s guilt doubles now as he not only betrays Mythili’s trust but also his to-be-born child’s.



The deepest sequence in the film occurs now. He looks at the two pictures hung on his bedroom wall, the pictures of his two “mothers” – His actual mother who he has not seen, a map of his motherland, India, before partition. He caresses them both, one after another.



This single shot takes up numerous meaning by itself. One of them is that Saket's child is not going to see his father after birth in the same way Saket could not see his mother. Saket is frustrated as his disappearance is going to be deliberate as opposed to the natural death of his mother. Also, Saket's child will not be able to see its true motherland when it is born. As Saket mentions in the "smile conversation", he had seen his mother just in the photograph and not in reality, Saket's child, too, will be seeing its "mother (land)" only on a map and not in reality. It is going to be a different country altogether. Also, simply the equal positioning of the two photos signifies Saket being torn apart by the question of "home vs. the country". He knows that both are like his two eyes. He is going to be sacrificing his home for his ideology and the country. He is shattered that he is going to blind one of his eyes.



Saket's hears some voice from downstairs, from aunt Vasantha's room. Surprised, he opens the ventilator to check it out. To his shock, it is his uncle, **Jegannatha Iyengar**, aunt Vasantha's husband who has been paralyzed for 7 years, who is calling out some indiscernible words (possibly "Mahabahu" (Vishnu's name meaning one with long arms), suggesting that Vishnu is calling him with arms wide open). Surprised, he rushes to the room and tries to talk to him. Aunt Vasantha is sound asleep. He notices his uncle senseless. He checks for pulse and finds that his uncle has passed away after years of torment. He had spoken his last words to Saket. We know from the "smile conversation" that aunt Vasantha is like his mother. So that automatically

makes his uncle equivalent to his father. Interestingly, Rama's father, Dasharatha, went into a state of mental paralysis after his son was sent into exile as per the wishes of his wife Kaikeyi. He died some time after Rama left the house.

Saket turns back and sees his "mother" asleep. He sees her toe ring. He is shattered that she is blissfully sleeping without knowing that the toe rings have lost their meaning. He touches it gently. He cries, not for his aunt, but for Mythili who is years younger than her, but is going to end up in the same situation. She, too, is going to lose her husband and lose the meaning of the toe rings. The image of his aunt's feet fading from light is cut with the image of Mythili's feet who, too, is sleeping blissfully without the knowledge that she would have lose her husband soon. She is now compared to Saket's "mother Vasantha" for her caring nature towards Saket and her plight.



He touches for one last time, without waking her up. He packs his materials and leaves the house on a bicycle. He writes a letter to Mythili informing about his exit and deposits it in the post box.

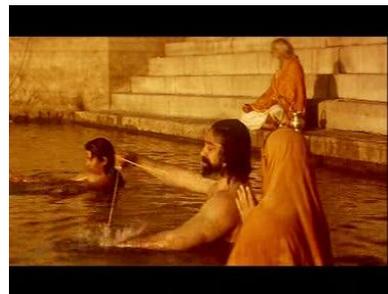
Cut to Varanasi. Saket moves into the pond with a few holy men. He cuts his hair suggesting his leaving behind of all his familial relations. He cleans himself in the water and cleanses him of all the worldly deeds. He has decided to become a *Sanyasi*. This is in resonance with Mythili's talk with her mother as she enters the house. Mythili mentions Saket transforming into a near-saint, which becomes completely true now.



This image of Saket submerging himself in water is cross cut with a tear drop falling from Mythili’s eyes on the photograph of Saket’s mother, indicating again that the child has lost his father even before it is born. Also, she is now compared to Saket’s original mother in addition to her comparison with Saket’s other mother, Vasantha.



As the rest of the family cries upon the loss, Mythili’s mother continues reading the letter wherein Saket pours out his guilt and apologizes to Mythili for being such a curse in his life in spite of her being very caring towards him. We see him breaking his *Upanayanam*, breaking off his worldly ties.



The letter continues as every one continues to cry. It reads:

*“The reasons for my actions will be known shortly to you. For the service I plan to do for our nation, my relatives and friends may be in my way. May the shadows of my failings never touch our child. I pray that our child is born with your virtues. I’ve never seen my*

*mother. Aunt Vasantha was like a mother to me. And now you too. Your parents are going to curse me. Their anger is justified. Now I belong to no one. Loveless: Saket Ram”*

The comparison of Mythili to his mother(s) now becomes explicit through the letter. At the end of the letter, aunt Vasantha collapses. It is learned later that she passes away, signaling the severance of Saket’s bond with his last familial mother. He has only one mother now – his country. This sequence explicitly portrays Saket’s venture into *Sanyasa*, the final stage of a Hindu’s life eschewing all worldly ties, from his tormenting period of self-exile, *Vanaprastha*.

## CHAPTER 13: PREPARING FOR THE HUNT



Cut to Delhi. Saket arrives with a suitcase. He looks the same as he did in Calcutta a few months ago, but with dark glasses for anonymity (like Pandey did in Bombay). He enters a certain Hotel Marina and registers under the name K. Bhairav (Kaal Bhairav, perhaps - An angry form of Lord Shiva, the god of destruction.). He is assigned room number 43 and he proceeds towards it. Govardhan, a local follows him to his room and tries to get close. When Saket is angered and asks him what he really wants, the local replies that he can get girls from any state if Saket wants. Saket turns the offer down. Govardhan hands Saket his visiting card in case if he were to change his mind. Saket takes it and dumps it in the dustbin inside after Govardhan leaves.

It is morning and Saket immediately gets down to work. He arrives at Gandhiji's staying place where tight security has been provided and a lot of Gandhians have arrived. He is here to survey the place so that he can execute his work perfectly. As he enters, he sees a group of protestors raising cries against Gandhiji. Saket doesn't



seem to know the reason and enters the villa. We see a fasting Gandhi talking to Nehru and Moulana Azad. As Saket enters, we also notice a group of, what it sounds like, plotters discussing the course of action. Saket does not hear all this as he is busy looking at Gandhi. He sees Azad and Nehru leaving after the chat. He also notices that there is a small cabin behind the stage on which Gandhiji would be addressing his followers everyday. He starts making the plans. He goes around the central building for the access to that cabin.



There are goats running around in the compound. This reminds us of Abhyankar's comparison of Gandhians to goats in Calcutta a few months ago. He approaches a man lying on the cot near the cabin. He learns that the cabin is a servant's quarter and belongs to the man who is lying there. He asks him if he can go in and take photographs of Gandhi from inside as he delivers his speech. The servant asks him to go inside but warns him about the darkness in the room, again signifying secrecy. Saket gets near the ventilation over the stage and gets on the rickety cot beneath it. He can hear some men on the other side trying to fix the microphone. He makes sure that he gets a good view of the stage and comes out of the room. He learns from the servant that another group has also asked him to let them in for photographs. The servant milks money from Saket as he belonged to a different group. Saket has his suspicions. He pays up and walks towards the stage.

As he walks, we can see two tense men discussing something about one of their men backing out. We also learn that one of them is called **Nathu**, the man who would go on change the course of history. Saket, oblivious to the discussion, goes towards the stage. Just then he sees a large crowd coming along with Gandhiji



singing a song. Saket is angered, visibly, at Gandhi, his Ravana. Ironically, the song being sung as Gandhi arrives is in praise of Rama! A visibly weak Gandhi is being carried by his followers on to the stage.



Saket feels a pat on the back. He turns back and is shocked to see Uppili Iyengar, his father-in-law standing behind him. He is euphoric at meeting Saket. He informs him that everybody is soulless at home. Also that his aunt has passed away after his uncle. Saket is shocked but regains composure after reminding himself of his

*Sanyasa*. Apparently he has misconstrued the telegram and thinks Saket left the home to serve Gandhiji in Delhi. He is happy that he left the house for a good cause and introduces Saket to **Mr. Subhash Goyal** (Om Puri), an influential industrialist who is arranging a meeting between Uppili Iyengar and Gandhiji.

Gandhiji starts delivering a speech which is announced loud by one of his followers, **Dr. Susheela Nair**, following the failure of the microphone, denoting that Gandhiji's fast had made him so weak so that he is not even able to speak loud. As Gandhiji speaks about Muslims still being slaughtered in Calcutta, even after his



continued attempts at peace, Saket notices somebody in the servant's cabin at the ventilator. He also notices a distributed group coordinating something using symbols. This is followed by a minor blast near the building which starts a panic among those gathered. Gandhiji calms them down and asks Dr. Nair why she was so scared and what will she do if someone really comes to assassinate him.



Saket approaches the scene of the blast as Uppili Iyengar and Mr. Goyal prevent him. He is now almost sure that there is another cabal out with the same mission as his. He sees police chasing the suspects. As they move out, Uppili Iyengar complains to Saket that times have become so bad that someone has even tried to kill

Gandhiji. Saket has no words for this and walks along silently as they are stopped by the policemen for security reasons. As Mr. Goyal clarifies their identities Saket notices the man, who had set off the blast moments ago, arrested. We also see that the date is 20<sup>th</sup> January – 10 days for the fateful day.

That evening, Saket looks out of the balcony in his hotel room as he hears in the news that a Hindu activist group may be responsible for the blast. He comes down to the reception and asks if there is a movie theatre nearby, so that he can get his mind off all the tension. The receptionist says there is one but does not play a good movie. Saket does not care and steps outside as he notices a group of policemen entering the hotel. He rushes back without getting noticed and comes to know that the police have discovered the to-be-assassin of Gandhi residing in the hotel. They have brought along the suspect with a search warrant and have asked the hotel manager to not allow anyone to go out of the hotel till they finish their job.



Saket does not understand how the police came to know of him or if they are searching for him at all. He rushes to his room and closes the door. He takes his gun from the drawer and searches for a place to hide. He notices a soda truck beneath his balcony, just within his reach. He gets over the ledge and places the gun in the truck, with the intention of retrieving it later. As the police keep knocking his door, he returns and flushes his commode and unbuttons his pant. He asks the police to wait and returns after a few minutes to open the door. As the police inquire him, he buttons his pant back, making them believe that he was in the bathroom all the while. The police finds that a man named **Nathu Ram Godse** is in room number 40. They apologize for disturbing him and ask him to stay in the room till they are gone.

With a sigh of relief, he goes over the balcony to get back the gun only to find that the truck has left. He is shocked and enquires the bearer in the hotel about the truck who says the truck will not come for 5 more days and asks if he wants soda. Saket says that his wallet has fallen into the truck and has around 5000 rupees. The



bearer says that it is better to lose 5000 rupees than to lose his life. He informs him that it is a curfew is on at the locality of the Azad Soda Factory, the place where the truck has come from. He also adds that the place, Chandni Chowk, is a predominantly Muslim area and will be dangerous for a Hindu to visit during curfew.

## CHAPTER 14: A YOUNGER BROTHER



Saket is desperate to get the gun back. Just then he gets a brainwave. He remembers Govardhan telling him that he knows the place in and out. He digs through the trashcan and retrieves the visiting card Govardhan had given him. As the curfew nears, Saket goes into Chandni Chowk with Govardhan. He does not tell till then that he was in search of a truck and not a girl. Govardhan says that he is scared and wants to leave. Saket does not allow him. Govardhan picks up a stick and tries to attack Saket. But he is too slow and too old for Saket, who twists his arm and sends him begging for life.

As Saket asks Govardhan about the address, he hears someone calling “*Hey Ram*”. It is Saket’s friend Amjad. He is delighted to see Saket. But Saket is not a bit surprised or happy. Perhaps, he views Amjad as a Muslim and not a friend. Amjad hugs him and asks him if Govardhan is troubling him. The coward Govardhan says



that he is a close friend of Saket’s and tries to stick with him in order to save his skin. Amjad asks Saket about Aparna and he comes to know of the mishap. He asks Saket to come to stay at his house till the curfew is lifted. He says that he has moved to India permanently and Saket’s sister Nafisa is there too. But Saket is not interested. Amjad reminds him that this is not South India and will get butchered if he stays out. Saket says that he needs to find this Azad Soda Factory first to retrieve his wallet.

Amjad smiles and leads them to the place. Possibly, it is his factory. They proceed as Govardhan sticks around for safety. They go through a surreptitious setup to enter the factory. Govardhan tries to leave but Amjad prevents him to go out during curfew. As they enter the factory, they are able to see many Muslim men holding guns and staying

low. Amjad asks them to wait till he gets back with the wallet. Amjad talks to a few men about the wallet who hit him back for conniving with a Hindu and tell him that the “wallet” is actually a gun. One of the men, Amjad’s uncle decides to deal with Amjad later and finish off the Hindus now. Saket is not a bit scared, in contrast to Govardhan who is trembling. Saket stands with his cold deadpan face before the Muslims. Amjad defends Saket and says that he is like a brother to him and Nafisa ties a Rakhi every year. He also believes that the gun is not Saket’s. But to his surprise, Saket admits that the gun is indeed his, but is not here to kill anyone. It just came thereby accident and he will go back if it is returned. Govardhan is scared out of his wits and begs for mercy. The other two Muslims get ready to shoot the Hindus as Amjad defends them. He tries to negotiate as Saket takes a good look around and plans his next move.



One of the two Muslims asks Amjad to move and says that he will only blow Saket’s knee off. As Amjad tries to stop him, Saket jumps into action and manages to ward off the people surrounding him. He falls off the window along with Amjad’s uncle, who dies moments later. He manages to hide here and there as the other Muslims search for him. Amjad helps him to hide too. Meanwhile, Govardhan calls a certain Mr. Chari and tells them about the factory and the ammunitions in it. As Amjad and Saket hide from the eyes of the rest of the Muslims, they talk about the situation, the partition and much more. I’ll give the transcript of the conversation instead of paraphrasing it for more effect.

***Amjad:*** Tell me the truth. I can still save your life. Did you come here to kill Muslims?

***Saket:*** No

***Amjad:*** But this gun...

***Saket:*** Mine.

***Amjad:*** But why did you bring it here?

**Saket:** *I didn't. Your Uncle's truck brought it here. Okay, I am leaving now.*

**Amjad:** *Are you mad? Fool! You'll die. Fool! I don't know why you are carrying this gun, but you'll need my help to get out of here.*

**Saket:** *I don't need anyone's help. I'll escape on my own.*

**Amjad:** *And you're going to shoot your way through, won't you? Which means that gun is meant for killing Muslims!*

**Saket:** *It isn't, but it could be."*

**Amjad:** *You too Ram? But why?*

Saket points the gun to Amjad's forehead who is surprised to find his tame friend carrying a gun. His reply reminds us of **Caesar's** final words as **Brutus** stabs him. The conversation continues as they find another place to hide.



**Amjad:** *Because your Aparna is dead?*

**Saket:** *She was killed! Like countless Hindu men, women and children! By Muslims.*

**Amjad:** *So you are here as a representative of your religion? Do you remember my father? He didn't die on his own. The Hindus killed him!"*



They get behind a ruined crate to hide again and the conversation intensifies. Both Amjad and Saket become representatives and symbols of their religion as they talk.

**Saket:** *Enough! Just go away. Get out! Out of our sight!*

**Amjad:** *Go away? Where?*

**Saket:** *To your Jinnah's Pakistan.*

**Amjad:** *Jinnah's daughter considered India as her own country, and stayed back. I am Gandhi's son. I have decided to stay here.*

**Saket:** *Decided? With whose permission?*

**Amjad:** *I don't need anyone's permission to live in my own country!*

**Saket:** *Your country? You foreigners walked across the Khyber and ruled us for 700 years!*

**Amjad:** *I was not born then. I belong to your times. Many came from the Khyber. Why pick on me? You call me a Foreigner! Aren't you also a foreigner?*

**Amjad:** *Some say that your Lord Ram came across the Khyber.*

**Saket:** *Don't you dare mention my Ram's name!*

**Amjad:** *If not your Ram, O.K., Can I talk about my Ram? What's happened to you?"*

Saket mentions that Muslims have settled in India because of the Mughals who had invaded India through the Khyber Pass while Amjad mentions the theory that Rama is actually an Aryan who has his origins in Europe. Both of them get enraged by these comments. Additionally, Amjad mentions that he (Muslims) is Gandhi's son and very much Indian. He is shattered to see his friend being turned into this animal. He had always seen Saket to be a very calm and peaceful person. He asks him why he had turned like this,



**Amjad:** *Am I not your brother? At least, am I not your friend?*

**Saket:** *That's just why you are still alive. Leave before I change my mind. Now.*

**Amjad:** *Everything was peaceful for a few days, thanks to Gandhi. See what you started!*

**Saket:** *You started it. You people killed Aparna!*

**Amjad:** *All Right. I will put an end to it too."*

Amjad kneels before Saket and asks him:

*"Forgive me for killing your Aparna. I forgive you for killing my father. Now will you accept me as your brother, Ram?"*



The camera is high above Saket's head denoting his dominance and majority and Amjad's pleading position and minority. This scene where Amjad asks Saket to be accepted as his brother carries a lot of weight in the film and gives out multiple meanings. As Saket and Amjad have become representatives of their religion during the conversation, this plea by Amjad acts as a plea by the minority Muslims to become brothers with the Majority Hindus. Hence the camera raised angle over Saket's head. Additionally, it is a plea from a single man, Amjad, a simple one, who has lost his beloved friend and wants to get him back. He requests Saket, straight from the heart, to accept him as his brother. Even though they are born to different mother(land)s (Amjad was born in now-Pakistan whereas Saket was born in now-India), they have been raised by a single undivided mother – the pre-independent India. This again takes off from the conversation between **Amjad and Mr. Bright** during the **Karachi** party where Amjad says that Saket and he are from the same alma mater.

Saket turns down the plea. Amjad continues:

*“Very well, then. Shoot. I'll give you the pleasure of killing Muslim. And once you are done, cleanse your heart of the hatred. Let my death save you from this madness. Somebody will have to put a full stop to this.”*

Though he does not show it outwardly, Saket is immensely moved by this statement. He says that he is not here to kill Amjad, but the cause of all this – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Amjad is surprised at this and informs Saket that Gandhi is the only sanity in the country. If not for Gandhi, whatever peace is being maintained couldn't have been possible. Just then he hears a gunshot nearby and tries to check out what it is. Saket senses that it is not the Muslim group but a Hindu group with weapons, which was called by Govardhan.

Saket asks Amjad to hide immediately. The roles of the saved and the saviour are reversed now. It is Saket, now, who is trying to save Amjad from a fanatic group. Amjad realizes that Saket indeed wants Amjad alive and says that Hindus and Muslims can be brothers if they try, like Gandhiji says. Saket drags Amjad to safety as the fanatics



follow. He even hits Amjad to make him quiet and orders him to go into the hiding place he has pointed to. But this is all an act of kindness and possessiveness, like the one between two siblings. Amjad reminds Saket that if anything happens to him, he should take care of Nafisa, their sister. Saket is moved and asks him to hide.



The fanatic group led by Chari arrives along with Govardhan. They ask Saket to point the way to the factory which contains a lot of Muslims with weapons. He says they want to attack the soda factory so that they can equip themselves with rifles instead of traditional swords and axes. Amjad is shocked to hear this and

comes out in to clarify that there are no weapons in the factory, just some old men, women and children. He also offers them to show them the place where guns are there. Saket is surprised and speechless but musters some courage to say something to defend Amjad. Note the frame composition here. The *misé-en-scène* is strikingly similar to the scene where Amjad defends Saket, with the defended on one side and the fanatic group on the other and the defender in between.

*“Saket: He is my brother. Bharat, that’s his name. He’s madly in love with a Muslim girl, Nafisa. He is mentally ill. You are mad. Ever since, he has been dressing up like this. I came to stop him before he converts to Islam in this madness. Come home, Bharat”*

Yet again, the Ramayana track being emphasized. **Bharat**, in Ramayana, was Rama’s half brother. Rama was born to **Kaushalya** and Bharat was born to **Kaikeyi**. Even though they were born to different mothers they were the closes than two brothers ever will be.

Similarly, in spite of Saket and Amjad being born to different mother(land)s, they are very close and will give their lives for each other.

Amjad turns down Saket's offer to defend him, in the same way Saket had turned his offer of defense in the soda factory, again highlighting the reversal of roles. He decides to reveal the truth to the gang. He steps to the centre, with chest held high and says

*"I am Ram's brother all right. But not Bharat. My name is Amjad Ali Khan. And if you want, you can add a Bahadur."*

The "*Bahadur*" indicating his bravery too. He knows that Saket has always accepted him as his brother. Just as he finishes, he is knocked down from behind with a hammer. Saket is mad and shoots the guy who knocked Amjad down. As Chari comes forward to attack Saket he shoots at him, killing him and Govardhan. The rest of the crowd, scared, runs off.



## CHAPTER 15: LOSS OF A BELOVED - 2



Amjad struggles for life as Saket lifts him up. He also ties a cloth around his head to stop the wound. Saket is searching for the hospital. He is not able find his way out. Amjad asks Saket to take him to the soda factory as Saket obeys. Many people fire at him. Saket does not care if it is a Hindu or a Muslim. He just kills them to save Amjad.

He finally brings Amjad to the factory. The ladies cry on seeing him in that condition. Saket retires at a corner as he sees the silhouette of a woman giving birth inside the room. The shrieks of the woman are heard by Saket as they transform to the cries of “*Ram, Ram*”. The sounds remind him of Aparna’s cries during the attack and the visuals remind him of Mythili’s pregnancy. He is haunted by both the memories, which he thought he had forgotten. He is reminded the universality of womanhood.

Amjad struggles to upstairs as Saket follows him. They see the men fighting the Hindus. It is learned that the pregnant woman is Qureshi’s wife, the man who wanted to kill Saket in the factory. Qureshi tries to shoot Saket and is stopped by the struggling Amjad. Qureshi has run



out of bullets and the building is soon to fall. Amjad tries to negotiate with the shooters even as the others in the factory object, but in vain. Amjad is shot in the leg. Saket is furious and shoots out a few Hindus with his gun. He then opts to defend the factory for the sake of his brother. He too runs out of bullets after a while. Meanwhile, Qureshi tries to shoot Saket, with the newly obtained bullets, just to be stopped again by Amjad who asks him to give his weapon to Saket. As he throws his gun to Saket, Qureshi is shot to death.



As Qureshi falls, we hear the cry of a new born. Clearly, it is Qureshi's child. A new life is born as another one dies. This is the same thing that happened when Saket was born. His mother passed away on his birth. Saket, once again, is reminded of the universality of life and death. The attacking crowd disperses as the atmosphere

becomes silent.

Suddenly, there is a bang on the factory's door as a wooden drum is dislodged and rolls into the trench where the women and the children are. They gather the drum and start playing it to celebrate the birth of the child. Amjad watches them pityingly for they are not aware of Qureshi's death yet.



The banging continues as Saket and Amjad become alert expecting another Hindu onslaught. Saket closes the trench in order to save the Muslims below from the attack that is to happen above. Saket and Amjad are pleased to find that the people at the door are policemen and have come with an ambulance to save them. Amjad is taken into the ambulance on a stretcher as Saket touches his brother's blood drenched palm. He is moved. He opens the trench door and finds that Qureshi's child is a boy – his rebirth perhaps.



They thank him for his help and learn that Qureshi is dead. Amjad's mother and Nafisa ask him where and how is Amjad. He is speechless as Nafisa runs crying after the ambulance. Saket breaks down. It is him who has been responsible for all this murdering. He had started riots in the hitherto quiet locality. Yet another wife has lost her

husband and yet another newborn child won't be seeing its father. And the count goes on. He has been the initiator for the massacre that has brought about his brother's plight.

Saket enters the hospital where Amjad is. It is overflowing now. He realizes it is because of him alone. He sees children, women and old men – the innocents of the riot – struggling for life. He enters Amjad’s ward and sees an inspector inquiring him about the “man with the gun”. Nafisa and her mother-in-law thank their saviour- Saket. Upon being asked if he has seen Bhairav earlier, Amjad replies

*“I’ve never seen that animal before! I only know Ram...my brother!”*

Amjad reaches for Saket and holds his hand. He then collapses. The doctor tries to do some treatment as the senior doctor evacuates the area and calls Saket alone. He informs him that Amjad is no more and the treatment is to avoid his family from breaking down in the emergency ward. He asks Saket to take them out



and inform them. Amjad gets his final blow. His brother is dead because of him. Just when he thought he had got rid of his guilt about being unable to save his wife, he is reminded of his *masculine impotence* in saving his brother. Saket takes Amjad’s family out as the ward door closes on Amjad, physically and metaphorically.

## CHAPTER 16: RENDEZVOUS WITH RAVANA

Cut to Birla House. Gandhiji is holding a talk with Premier Suhrawardy as the other Gandhians watch, suggestive of Gandhiji's transparency in his affairs. Saket is watching too. Suddenly Gandhi turns back and calls the photographer who is behind him.

*“What is going on behind my back? Don't shoot me from behind... Be a man shoot my ugly face from front”*



As Saket hears this, he gets a lump in his throat. He feels as if Gandhiji is addressing him. He not only realizes the absence of his masculinity in shooting a Gandhi from the ventilator at the back, but also feels guilty of conniving surreptitiously against a transparent man. After the meeting Gandhiji is accosted by a group of affected Hindus and is asked to not involve himself in the politics of the country. Gandhiji patiently, hears them out and says that the Muslims want him to stay whereas the Hindus want him to go away. He is confused as to whom to listen to and also adds that he will only listen to the voice of God. He asks the people to stay there till he finishes his work with the others gathered. As the crowd becomes restless, Gandhiji's helper tries to send them away. Gandhiji stops the helper and says:

*“If they have to vent their anger, it is better they vent it on me, rather than on some Muslim brothers. Tell them to wait.”*

Saket is shaken once more. This is apparently what he has done. His anger on one person has caused the death of one hundred. He is surprised at Gandhiji's dedication towards his goal and realizes that his true intention is peace and is not backed by secondary motives.

As Gandhiji walks, his helpers ask the people gathered to respect him at least as their elder to which Gandhiji tells her:

*“You are getting yourself off. How can we introduce them of kindness if we who keep advising them cannot control our own tempers?”*

She says that she is not a Mahatma to hold her temper and be calm. Gandhiji notices Mr. Goyal ahead of him, greets him and tells him:

*“This girl seems to be insinuating that I am a Mahatma. Yesterday I slipped and fell in the bathroom. If I had died there, the world would've known I'm not a Mahatma.”*

Mr. Goyal introduces Uppili Iyengar to Gandhiji. He tells Uppili Iyengar that everyone is a Mahatma and if one is not, he is an animal. Mr. Goyal introduces Saket to Gandhiji and tells him how he saved the Muslims in the factory. Gandhiji calls him his “Rama from the South”. It becomes a strong statement in two senses. One that Saket is like Rama of Ramayana and also that people like him are rare since the south predominantly associates itself with Young Krishna. Mr. Goyal also introduces Amjad’s family to Gandhiji upon which Nafisa says that Amjad wanted to walk to Pakistan with Gandhiji. He also learns that she is Saket’s foster sister. Gandhiji asks Saket:



***Gandhiji:*** *When did she become your sister?*

***Saket:*** *Before my country was torn into two pieces.*

***Gandhiji:*** *See, Mr. Uppili, even your son-in-law is also a Mahatma.*

***Saket:*** *No, I am not.*

***Gandhiji:*** *Most Mahatmas don't admit they are one. Do you think I am one?*

***Saket:*** *You will deny it if I say you are, so I shall deny you another denial, sir.*

***Gandhiji:*** *Nafisa, I am already liking your brother.”*

He consoles Amjad's family. He turns to Saket and tells:

*"You know Ram... I am willing to take all this communal hatred in the form of a bullet if I am promised that along with that bullet, they will also bury this communal hatred, and live together as one community."*



These words resonate in Saket's ears. Tears rush into his eyes. He is not able to get words out of his mouth. He manages to tell Gandhiji that these were the exact words that Amjad had said before he was struck down. He realizes, now, the universality of feeling of brotherhood and want of peace. Gandhiji asks Saket and Nafisa to walk with him to Pakistan to fulfill Amjad's promise. Saket develops a strange sense of respect for the man standing before him. He is amazed by his sense of commitment and true desire for peace.

Gandhiji asks Mr. Goyal to come the next day as he is tired because of the fasting. He walks away from the scene as he turns to Uppili Iyengar.

**Gandhiji:** *I speak little Tamil. "Nettiku vaango". "Nettiku" is tomorrow, isn't it?*

**Uppili Iyengar:** *No, Bapu, "Nettiku" is yesterday. Tomorrow is "Naalaiku".*

**Gandhiji:** *So my critics are right. They say that this Gandhi is still stuck with yesterday."*

Saket watches Gandhiji go. Ironically, it is Gandhi, the Ravana who has asked the sans gun Saket, Rama to go today and return tomorrow in contrast to the epic hero who asked the weaponless Ravana to return the next day. We not only see the roles getting reversed here, but also the morality of the two people involved. We are gradually revealed the heroic nature of Gandhi (Ravana) and the cruel side of Saket (Rama). We also notice the slow respect that is built for Gandhi in Saket, a reversal of the image he has formed of Gandhi in his mind. Gandhiji is not a demon now. He realizes that it is because of people like Gandhiji that the country is surviving. He learns that his mission is a wrong one.

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## CHAPTER 17: THE LAST BREATH

Cut to the present. Back to black and white. Saket and the rest of them are still in the trench. Saket's eyes are lit alone by the light from above, once again indicating his recollection of the past. The nurse informs the doctor



Munawar that the oxygen supply, on which Saket is surviving, just got over. We can here the sound of gunfire from above. Dr. Munawar murmurs: “*Ya Allah*”. The oxygen mask on Saket's face is removed and he is left alone to breathe his final few breaths. He looks at the nurse who appears to him as the young Mythili, in the form he had last spoken to. He smiles and tells her that he is not able to breathe. She asks him to wait a little till the gunfight above stops. He asks what the reason for the fight is. His grandson tells him that it is because of the Hindu-Muslim clashes. Saket cries out:

“*Still?*”

He is pained by that the Hindu-Muslim riots, that had ruined the lives of many over 50 years ago, still continue. He is surprised that the riots have not stopped even after Gandhiji has taken the “bullet of hatred” and gone down.



It is said that some of your life's moments flash through your eyes the moment before you die. As Saket's breath becomes tougher and tougher to take, he is able to Mr. Wheeler of the first scene shouting “*It's pack up time*”. Indeed, Saket Ram's time had come. Saket says to “Mythili” what would be his final words.

*“I’m getting those bad dreams again. Wake me up. Wake me up.”*

By “bad dreams”, perhaps, he means his whole life again. He wants to forget his cruel and torturous life. He asks Mythili to wake him up and free him from the torment. Indeed, he is freed of the torment. Saket Ram draws his last breath. “Saket” Ram passes away on the same day Saket (Ayodhya) was desecrated – December 6<sup>th</sup>. The nurse closes his eyes as the only surviving Saket Ram breaks down.

The shutter from above is removed as the police inspector comes. He says that the riots are over and they were lucky to survive. He asks the plight of the old man and learns that he is no more. He apologizes as the stretcher is taken onto an ambulance. We also see the TV reporter covering the riot and learn that these riots take place every year. Again the dissimilarity in times is being shown here.



As the ambulance leaves, Saket Ram asks the inspector, who has saved their lives, his name. The inspector searches for the badge on his chest, only to find it is lost in the battle between him and the rioters, indicating that true heroes’ names go unnoticed during war times. He leaves it alone and tells Saket his name is **Ibrahim**. A beautiful parallel is struck here. Saket, a Hindu, had saved the life of Amjad, a Muslim, though momentarily. He had also saved Amjad’s family and friends in the trench inside the house. Similarly, Ibrahim, a Muslim, has saved the life of Saket Ram, though only for a while. But he has saved the lives of his family and friends, also, in the trench. It is as if Amjad was reborn to save Saket and pay back in kind for his support. Also, Dr. Munawar, a Muslim, tried to save Saket till the very end but fruitlessly. This is in agreement with Dr. Mani, a Hindu at the Chandni Chowk hospital, trying to save the life of Amjad till the very end, also fruitlessly. Evidently, this portrays the circle of life and

the universal nature of humanity. The camera angles perfectly highlight the similarities (and dissimilarities) of the saviour and the saved in both cases.

The ambulance delivers Saket's corpse to his house where his mourners have gathered. A very old Mythili is sitting besides the corpse. This is the first time we are seeing her old. We also see an old Nafisa entering and consoling Mythili who says:

*"He has left me all alone, Nafisa."*

Again we see the double entendre that has been so consistent in the film. Mythili's words mean that Saket has passed away before her. It also reveals her despair at Saket leaving her for *Sanyasa*. She did not speak one word immediately after he had left. So, as we see it, this is the first time Mythili is opening up her sorrow of Saket



leaving the house. We also see another person placing on Saket's chest. He greets Mythili and stands back. He is introduced to Saket Ram as **Tushar Gandhi** (Tushar Gandhi), the great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi.

*"Tushar: I have read your books. I am your fan.*

*Saket: I am your fan, too.*

*Tushar: No. You are mistaken. You must be my great grandfather's fan. I am just a great grandson. But you're a great writer."*

Upon this, Mythili says that Saket Ram was so proud of his grandson indicating that indeed he had spoken to Mythili after all the chaotic events. She hands Saket his grandfather's cupboard key and says that his grandfather wanted him to have it. Tushar and Saket then go to Saket's room to see it.



Saket switches on the lights of his grandfather's room for the first time in years. After a very long time this is the first time anyone could see the objects in his room. Tushar and Saket see the things around with equal awe for they are both alien to this world. Tushar notices the three monkey skulls in front of the "three monkeys" statue. The statue, perhaps, indicates that the three monkeys, which Gandhiji had endorsed, are no more and people no more follow the principles behind the statue and Gandhi's principles in general.

Saket opens the cupboard and brings a box and calls Tushar.

*"Saket: Mr. Gandhi, I think I have the most extraordinary story to tell you.*

*Tushar: Sure, I like your stories very much.*

*Saket: It's not just my story. It's your story too. In fact, it's ours now."*

Saket realizes that the stories that his grandfather had been telling are not tales of imagination but absolute truth as he claimed. It was the history of the country. Saket is shocked at the discovery and realizes the importance of this truth in history. As he reveals the story to Tushar, we are able to see the photographs of Saket Ram Sr.'s mother, his grandson and others in bright light.



## CHAPTER 18: THE SHOWDOWN



We cut back to the past even after Saket Ram is dead. The rest of the story is revealed to Tushar by Saket Ram's grandson. We return again to colour. Saket is ready to renounce the animal inside once and for all. He looks at the animal for one last time in the mirror. He will not be the same person hereafter. He closes the gun case after placing the gun in it, metaphorically implying that he has put an end to his rage of violence which will be shut hereafter.

Saket arrives at the Birla house. He notices the date on the calendar – 30<sup>th</sup> January. The day India would cry. He notices Gandhiji walking out with Sardar Patel and Moulana Azad after his daily prayer. Shruti Haasan appears as Sardar Patel's daughter. Saket knows Gandhiji's routine for he has been observing him every day for the whole month. He notices Gandhiji walking towards him as he tells his helpers about how punctuality is important in life. He is walking fast towards the main building. He interrupts Gandhiji and a conversation ensues:



***Saket:** Please, Babu is late for the meeting. I have a confession to make.*

***Gandhiji:** I also have a confession to make. I'm ten minutes late. At my age, every second counts. And to waste it amounts to murder.*

***Saket:** Please, Babu, listen to me.*

***Gandhiji:** You listen to me, Ram...When we walk to Pakistan together, we will confess our sins to each other. There will be days of walking and lots of time."*

Little does Gandhiji know that wasting time literally is going to amount to murder. Saket is tormented as he stands before Gandhiji. He is pushed on his knees by the weight of his guilt and the humbleness of the man in front of him. He places his palm on the box and tries to tell Gandhiji the truth. Gandhiji's words push Saket more and more to guilt and bring him to near tears reminding him of Amjad's promise to walk to Pakistan. As Saket tries to delay Gandhiji so that he can pour his heart out, the latter apologizes and walks on.

As Gandhiji walks, he talks to his helpers about the quality of food he is being given

***Gandhiji:** You have been feeding me cattle fare.*

***Susheela:** Bapu, you used to call it horse fare.*

***Gandhiji:** It is not grand of me to relish what no one else will even touch."*

Note the comparison of Gandhiji once more to a horse reminding of the comparison established by the Maharaja in the stable in Bombay. Also Gandhiji, perhaps, indicates that nobody else follows his doctrine of Ahimsa. He alone has been following it.



As Gandhiji proceeds, the crowd grows thicker. As he nears the building, a man, whom we had seen during the blast 10 days ago stalling Gandhiji and greeting him. As the helpers tell him that Gandhiji is late for the meeting, he reveals a pistol and shoots Gandhiji thrice who falls down helplessly. He does not cry *"Hey Ram"* as believed by many to be his last words. The man is Nathu Ram Godse, who had escaped the clutches of the police in the hotel. He drops his gun after making sure Gandhiji is dead. Everyone around is stunned but are quick to start thrashing Godse. Mr. Goyal stops them and tells them that this is the moment of truth. He asks them to follow Gandhiji's doctrine of Ahimsa in the most testing time. He manages to stop the crowd beating Godse. Gandhiji, the Ravana is killed. The prophecy is complete, but not by our Ram. It is a Ram all right, Nathu Ram.

The mentality of Saket is most complex now. They say that you'll know the value of things when they disappear. The same thing happens to Saket. As he sees Gandhiji being shot and killed, he is both furious that a man has done such a crime and frustrated that the mishap has occurred just when he had decided it should not. He is enraged at the



murder and runs towards him taking out his gun. He is ready to kill the murderer as he runs. As he nears the scene, he is able to hear Mr. Goyal's appeal for non-violence. Saket breaks down. He sees himself in Nathu Ram. He sees how he had wasted his life and even committed sin killing tens of men. Mr. Goyal's appeal reminds him of how wrong he was in getting back at the murderers immediately after Aparna was killed. He realizes that this is indeed the moment of truth and holsters the gun back into the box. He learns that *true masculinity* is not avenging a loss, but much more non-violent and cerebral than that. He has decided that he will not commit the same folly as he did in Calcutta and closes the box. He has eschewed violence for good. But at the cost of what?



As Godse is taken away from the police, Saket cries holding the box close to his heart, careful not to let it slip open, suggesting that he will not indulge in violence by the fall of the mind. As Saket stands crying alone in the vast grounds, we hear the haunting rendition of “*Vaishnava Janato*” by D. K. Pattammal, the same song

that Mythili had sung during their first meeting. The song translates to:

*“He is the real Vaishnava, who feels other's suffering as his own.*

*He is the real Vaishnava, who feels other's suffering as his own.*

*He is the one without any conceit who serves those afflicted.*

*He is the one without any conceit who serves those afflicted.*

*He is the real Vaishnava, who feels other's suffering as his own.”*

Saket Ram realizes the truth of the song with reference to Gandhiji. He realizes that, even though he was a Vaishnava by birth, he has not done enough to sustain the title. He does not deserve to be called a Vaishnava. As the corpse of Gandhiji is taken away by his followers, Saket watches on. The colour shifts back to black and white to indicate that nobody knew what followed.



Saket traces back the path that the followers came. He sees the blood of the Mahatma on the way. He goes back to the scene of murder and notices Gandhiji's slippers and spectacles on the floor. He picks them up takes them with him. The role of the mechanical and angry Rama is gone. He has become, instead, Bharata who brings back home, his beloved brother's sandals with love but immense pain about his exile into forest.

He waits at the Birla House as Lord Mountbatten, Nehru, Azad and Sardar Patel arrive. They try to pacify the crowd by saying that it was a Hindu, not a Muslim, who killed Gandhiji. They go in and discuss the further course of action.



***Nehru:** How did you know it was a Hindu?*

***Mountbatten:** I didn't. Was it a Hindu?*

***Nehru:** Yes.*

***Mountbatten:** Thank God for that! Or the country would have been torn apart."*

They decide to announce that it was a Hindu who murdered Gandhi. Saket cries. He considers himself to be that Hindu. As Saket falls to the ground, we hear the song "Raghupathy Raghav Rajaram", as we did in the beginning, being played in the background completing and closing the circle of madness of Saket.

## CHAPTER 19: INTO THE FUTURE



Cut to the present. The video becomes full fledged colour, suggesting that all that has been hidden is now revealed. The walls are decorated with the photographs that were taken during the entire journey of Saket’s madness. Saket Ram describes the photographs to Tushar. Tushar then asks if he could take back his great grandfather’s sandals and spectacles back. Saket says that it indeed belongs to him and returns it. What Saket Ram Sr. took from Gandhi Sr., Saket Ram Jr. returns to Gandhi Jr. As he returns the grasses, Saket Ram tries to look through it, as if trying to look at the world through the eyes of Gandhi. Tushar follows suit and tries to look through the glasses too.

The song that is being played in the back ground is “*Ram Ram, Hey Ram*” – A very vibrant and majestic tune that talks about non-violence, cultural tolerance, the future and need for resurrecting humanity. Ironically, without playing a somber tune on the death of Gandhi and Saket, a more motivating tune is being played hinting that past



is past. We have to learn from it and move forward carefully. It is up to the new Gandhi and the new Saket, the youth of India, to lead the nation on a non-violent path. As the end credits roll on, Saket and Tushar open up the windowed wall that has a huge sketch of Gandhi, allowing sunlight to pierce the room for the first time metaphorically opening up Gandhiji’s mind to the world and appealing to the nation’s youth to expose themselves to the history of the nation and also gain an insight of Gandhiji. The song attains its crescendo at this point. The screen fades to black, the song continuing, as the future of India stand near the open door discussing the nations past, present and future.

## CHAPTER 20: EPILOGUE

Not a single scene, line or character is wasted in the film. In fact each character is used to the maximum by employing the fitting metaphors and allegories. Each line carries so much weight that the film packs more than thrice the film's length in it. The screen time is so judiciously used that one can feel how serious the film is both for its makers and viewers. It is one rare Indian film that invites the viewer to take part in the film and not just sit back and wait for things to happen. A truly multi-layered film that delivers different amounts of entertainment, thought and excitement depending on the viewer's perception and perceptibility.

The quality of the techniques employed in the film has "class" written all over. The music in the film never becomes emotionally manipulative as less confident directors would have opted to use. Kamal uses the right amount of amplitude and tempo for the music that Ilayaraja has given which ranges from classical Carnatic, Hindustani and Lavni to western classical and choir music. The compositions were done using the Budapest orchestra and symphony group in Hungary. Alternatively, silence is also used effectively in many places. Being a period film, Art direction becomes vital for description of the story. Sabu Cyril has taken care of that big time. Right from the old Pears calendar in Birla House to the British cement advertisement in Calcutta, from the Tanjore paintings in Srirangam to the vehicles and instruments in the cities, not one object or concept is anachronistic or out of place.

Costume designer Sarika Haasan cruises through the project, probably her biggest yet. The costumes range from traditional Iyengar, Bengali and Marathi to conventional British and Gandhian. Her work perfectly provides the soul for Kamal Haasan's narration. Thiru's camera work comfortably underlines the emotions that the director wants to convey. Employing high and low angle shots to respectively contrast the saviour and the saved, the majority and minority and the violent and non-violent, the cinematography is

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effective in capturing the romantic and physical closeness of humans and also the emotional alienation and friction between individuals.

It is just a cliché to talk about the greatness of Kamal Haasan's performance. I will just skip that and assure you that Hey Ram will easily count in his top five performances ever. With an army of India's finest grade-A actors that includes Nasseeruddin Shah, Om Puri, Girish Karnad, Hema Malini, Shah Rukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee and Atul Kulkarni, one cannot complain about the performances. All the actors have dubbed for themselves, though making it difficult to follow at times, adding to the depth of the characters.

Perhaps the biggest asset to the film is its refusal to employ black and white characterization. Right from Gandhi to Govardhan, no body is projected as an all good person and everybody has their own selfish reasons in their life. As these flawed yet lovable characters lead their routine lives, Saket, another deeply flawed character, completes his pitch perfect character arc. A rare thing to see in Indian films is this transparent treatment of their characters.

They say a picture is worth a 1000 words. And a film is worth a 1000 pictures. I say a movie like Hey Ram is worth a 1000 films. With the help of his top grade technicians, his most personal and riveting script, fabulous performances and brilliant direction, Kamal Haasan has woven a film that is truly anti-violent and makes a heart felt appeal to stop the atrocities carried out in the name of God.

*"Hey Ram"* is not only the call of the victims towards God for help, it is also one man's cry to himself, to find the reason for his spiritual disappearance and the quest to restore humanity and peace within him and outside him. The film, way ahead of its times, was a box office failure but will be hailed as a classic decades after its release. It will be recognized as the turning point of Indian filmdom and these two words will resonate as the *Vande Mataram* of Indian cinema: ***Hey Ram!***