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**Emptied of all love:
Gandhiji on 30 January 1948**

Tridip Suhrud



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Emptied of all love: Gandhiji on 30 January 1948*

Tridip Suhrud**

He walked in silence, preparing his heart for the prayer that he was about to offer. Three bullets stopped him. He gave himself up to the Ramanama.

His intense longing and desire was to attain self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. He lived and moved and had his entire being in pursuit of this desire. Prayer was the very core of his life. Bhakti poetry sung by Pandit Narayan Moreshwar Khare moved him. He drew sustenance from Mira and Charlie Andrews' rendition of 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,' while young Olive Doke healed him with 'Lead Kindly Light'. He recited the *Gita* everyday. What was this intense need for prayer? What allowed him to claim that he was not a man of learning but a man of prayer? He knew that mere repetition of the Ramanama was futile if it did not stir his soul. A prayer for him had to be a clear response to the hunger of the soul. What was this hunger that moved his being?

His was a passionate cry of the soul hungering for union with the divine. He saw his communion with God as that of a master and a slave in perpetual bondage, prayer was the expression of the intense yearning to merge in the Master. Prayer was the expression of the definitive and conscious longing of the soul; it was his act of waiting upon Him for guidance. His want was to feel the utterly pure presence of the divine within. Only a heart purified and cleansed by prayer could be filled with the presence of God, where life became one long continuous prayer, an act of worship. Prayer was for him the final reliance upon God to the exclusion of all else. He knew that only when a person lives constantly in the sight of God, when he or she regards

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**Tridip Suhrud works at the Preservation and Memorial Trust, Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad.

each thought with God as Witness and its Master, could one feel Rama dwelling in the heart every moment. Such a prayer could only be offered in the spirit of non-attachment, *anasakti*.

Both Satyagraha and Swaraj proceed from this. Satyagraha is not only insistence upon Truth but it is an act performed with God as witness. It is Swaraj, he said, when we learn to rule ourselves. To rule oneself is to attain mastery over our mind and passions, so doing we know ourselves. Swaraj is a mode of self-recognition, Satyagraha is a means to that knowledge. Prayer was a constant preparation for this awareness as also a reminder of that goal, an expression of this desire. Satyagraha and Swaraj gave Gandhi's longing universality; it not only made prayer congregational, but accorded his yearning a societal and political dimension. His quest did not make him a lonely seeker or even a seer but a man who lived in the world, experienced its pain, suffering and joys with intensity, albeit with a desire to remain unaffected by it. He knew that no one can be called a *mukta*, free from all attachments and longings, so long as one is alive. It allowed him to place Daridranarayan on the same spiritual plane as Satyanarayana. It allowed him to construe search for Truth as an act of service, as a sacrificial act, as a *yajna*.

He added two other practices to this search. One was fasting, the other Brahmacharya. Fasting in its original sense is not mortification of flesh, but it is *Upvas*, to dwell closer to Him. In this sense there could be no fast without a prayer and indeed no prayer without a fast. Such a fast was both penance and self-purification, its silent spiritual force evident to all those who came under its sway. Brahmacharya was not merely celibacy, it was not suppression of one sense, rather an attempt to bring all senses in harmony with each other. Thus understood and practised, Gandhi sought to restore to the term its original meaning, *charya*, that is conduct which leads to Brahman, that is Truth. Only a man who is a Brahmachari, whose fast leads him closer to Him, who prays for purification, who feels the presence of Truth dwelling in him could lay claim to hear and be guided by the small, still voice residing within him, a voice that he called his 'inner-voice', or the voice of his conscience. Prayer was a plea, a preparation, a cleansing that enabled him to hear this inner-voice.



Christ on cross symbolised for him the perfect yogi, an ideal where life was lived and death embraced in the spirit of sacrifice. He often repeated the desire, that the inner-voice would enable him to lead his life and meet his Maker in the true spirit of yajna, a sacrifice.

On 30th January 1948, as he stopped three bullets in their path of hate Gandhi uttered the name of Rama.¹ It was *iccha mrityu*, a death that he had desired and willed. For months before that day Gandhi had imagined this death: A violent death at the hands of an assassin, and at that moment his ability to face the bullets on his chest without any trace of hatred for the assassin, and to meet his Maker with the name of Rama on his lips. Such a death, he hoped, would show that he had been a true devotee of God as Truth, Satyanarayan. Speaking to those who had come to listen to his prayer discourse and also to those who sought to prevent him from taking the name of Rahim in his prayers as also his would be assassins, Gandhi said, 'I shall have won if I am granted a death whereby I can demonstrate the strength of truth and non-violence...Yes, if I have been sincere in my pursuit of truth, non-violence, non-stealing, Brahmacharya and so on and if I have done all this with God as my Witness, I shall certainly be granted the kind of death that I seek. I have expressed my wish at the prayer meeting also that should someone kill me I may have no anger against the killer in my heart and I may die with Ramanama on my lips'.² In private he had expressed his desire to give one final proof, one definitive demonstration of his faith, of his striving to see God face to face. He said to Manu Gandhi, his constant companion and partner in yajna that he no longer desired to live for 125 years and that his striving was to meet death with the name of Rama on his lips. He believed his striving to be incomplete but hoped that death would be his witness. He said to Manu, 'If I should die of lingering illness, it would be your duty to proclaim to the whole world that I was not a man of God but an impostor and a fraud... But if I die taking God's name with my last breath, it will be a sign that I was what I strove for and claimed to be'.³

¹ This is also Ramachandra Gandhi's formulation.

² Gandhi (Mahatma), *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1994), vol. 90, p. 489. Henceforth CWMG.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 86, pp. 521-522.

Why would he want a demonstration of his faith with such finality? For at least a few years before his assassination this country and its leadership had turned away from him. As he sought to heal himself and the country in Noakhali, Bihar, Calcutta, and Delhi, he had seen both the efficacy of his ahimsa as also its frailty. Despite his ‘Miracle of Calcutta’ and the barefoot march through the ravaged villages of Noakhali, the country was in the grip of an unprecedented orgy of violence. A final demonstration of ahimsa, of total submission to Rama, he hoped, would cure the country of this disease.

This desire of surrender, of submission was not new to him. Ramanama was ever-present in his life ever since Rambha *dai* gave it to him as a remedy for his fears. He was convinced that on three occasions when he was about to surrender to his lust and be with ‘public women’, he was saved by the presence of Rama dwelling within his heart. He was to later claim that he really became aware of the existence of God on that terrible night of 5 May 1891, at Portsmouth. He said, ‘Seeking pleasure I learnt self-restraint. On the path to forsake Rama’s name, I had His *darshan*. A miracle indeed’.⁴ To be sure, the name of Rama was not on his lips at that hour; on his lips was the language of lust. Gandhi believed that Rama came to him in the form of a friend who warned him “Whence this devil in you, my boy? Be off, quick!”⁵ He faintly understood the meaning of the term ‘God saved me’. At the time of writing the autobiography he was still grappling with the deeper meaning of what it meant to be saved by God. He was convinced that if he had submitted to his lust that night, he would have been rendered totally incapable of waging Satyagraha, of taking vow and remaining steadfast to it, of washing away the ‘filth of untouchability’, of repeating the sacred name of Charkha and would have been unfit to be blessed by the *darshan* of millions of women who came to him without a trace of fear.⁶ Ramanama was on his lips

⁴ Ibid., vol. 27, p. 110.

⁵ Gandhi, M. K.; *An Autobiography Or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (tr.) Desai, Mahadev, (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, 1999), p. 60.

⁶ The fact of keeping a vow was of great significance to Gandhi’s self-understanding. Erik Erickson has observed; ‘That young Gandhi left England with his vow intact was a matter of enormous importance, not only in his own eyes, but later also for his ethical stature among his people.’ Erickson, Erik, *Gandhi’s Truth: On the origins of militant non-violence* (New York: W. W. Norton & co.; 1993), p. 152.

when he fell to the blows of Mir Alam and his associates in Johannesburg in 1908.

Who was this Rama that he invoked? Gandhi was no image worshipper. He, in fact liked to think of himself as a destroyer of idols, in so far as they represented subjugation to tradition, to textual authority invoked to show the untrue as true and as justification for injustice. And yet, he understood the symbolic power of idols. Gandhi's Rama, as his Krishna and Jesus, was a composite of four aspects. One was the historic Rama: the Rama of the various *Ramayanas*, the son of Dasharatha, the husband of Sita, the slayer of Ravana as also of Vali, the king of Ayodhya who also banished Sita. The second was Rama as an exemplar, regarded by millions as an incarnation and worshipped as Shri Ramachandra Prabhu. This Rama was, for Gandhi, the Rama of Tulsidas, not so much of Valmiki and much less that of Kalidasa and Bhavbhuti. The third Rama was the symbolic Rama. Rama who stood for Satyanarayan and Daridranarayan; for conscience, for the inner voice to which he sought to surrender himself and whose guidance he sought. The fourth was Rama as Name; name that stands for itself and not as a symbol for a reality for which it stands.

The historic Rama did not move Gandhi. While introducing his translation of the *Gita* as *Anasaktiyoga* Gandhi had claimed that he was not interested in the historicity of either the *Mahabharata* or the *Gita*. He preferred to read it allegorically. He wrote, 'Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work....This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*....I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense'.⁷ Gandhi did not worship or invoke the historical Rama. The Rama of history was far too imperfect. That Rama was not an infallible person. That Rama had killed Vali and also banished Sita. But even if the historical Rama had not committed any of these acts, the mere fact of him having lived in a body made him imperfect. For Gandhi, any embodied person, even an *avatar*, could not escape the limitations that the body imposes. 'The man called Rama who lived in the past was subject to limitations.

⁷ Desai, Mahadev, *The Gospel of Selfless Action or The Gita According to Gandhi* (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, 2007), p. 127.

His body was perishable'.⁸ The body is the root of ego and hence sin for Gandhi. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi quoted Tulsidas, but in a significant transposition he chose to alter the saying, to indicate his conviction that body was the site of sin. He wrote, 'Of religion, pity or love is the root, as egotism of the body'.⁹ The embodied, historical Rama was hence imperfect and subject to sin.¹⁰ 'The timeless body in Rama is sinless. The physical Rama, is of course subject to sin.' And the one who is subject to sin, not necessarily because of a particular moral failing or due to lack of virtue, but by mere fact of having been in a body cannot save one. He cannot be the one to whom one sings '*Nirbal ke bala Rama*'.¹¹ Gandhi wrote to son Manilal and daughter-in-law Sushila that, 'The Rama of history, who is qualified by attributes, good or bad, would not have the strength to save us'.¹²

In any case he preferred myth and legend over history. 'According to me, imagination is superior to historical fact.'¹³ Gandhi preferred Tulsidas' *Ramacharit Manas* over any other rendering of the life of Rama, including that of Valmiki. He was willing to grant Valmiki's *Ramayana* superior artistic merit but Tulsidas was for him unrivalled in his spirit of devotion. Whenever he invoked the *Ramayana*, it was Tulsidas' *Ramacharit Manas* that he spoke of.¹⁴ But even a work that he considered as an unrivalled spiritual text was not without its flaws. It certainly was no historical work, nor was Tulsidas beyond the failings of his times as also his own failings. He said that, 'Literal application of the lines attributed to Rama by Tulsidas will land the doer in trouble if not send him to the gallows'.¹⁵ Tulsidas had composed a poem as an act of devotion to the Rama of his imagination. 'Tulsidas had nothing

⁸ *CWMG*, vol. 57, p. 197.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 47. The couplet attributed to Tulsidas reads: '*Daya dharma ka mool hain, pap mool abhiman, Tulsida daya na chandiye, jab lag ghatmen pran.*' Gandhi replaced *pap* (sin) with *deha* (body).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 32, p. 284.

¹¹ Refrain from Surdas' hymn, 'He is the help of the helpless, the strength of the weak.'

¹² *CWMG*, vol. 40, p. 405.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 50, p. 359.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 32, p. 77; Gandhi was partial to *Ayodhya Kand*, which deals with banishment of Rama. 'It is enough to make anyone rejoice in suffering,' he claimed.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 26, p. 335.



to do with Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his *Ramayana* would be fit for the scrap heap.’¹⁶ He believed that he and we have little to learn from Rama if we regard Him as a historical figure who had waged a war against another historical figure, Ravana. As Gandhi’s invocation of Ramanama grew in intensity more and more people questioned him on his devotion to *Ramayana* and to Rama who had also killed Vali by deception and banished Sita. Gandhi remained unperturbed by these searching questions as he was concerned with neither the Rama of history nor did he regard Tulsidas as infallible and sacrosanct.¹⁷ Gandhi insisted on reading the life of Rama in the image that he held dear. He argued, like he did with all religious texts and texts that had validity as shastras, that ‘nothing contrary to truth and ahimsa need to be condoned’.¹⁸ Of course, it would be perverse to argue that since Rama practised deception, we could do like wise. The proper thing would be to believe that Rama was incapable of practising deception.

Gandhi had a deeper reason to not regard the Rama of Tulsi as infallible. Was it given to the fallible to have a full conception of the infallible? Commenting upon the fallibility of the composers of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (and by implication figures of Rama and Krishna that emerge from them) Gandhi said, ‘Only an infallible person could do justice to the lives of infallible beings. One can therefore only take the spirit of the great works for guidance, the letter would smother one and stop all growth’.¹⁹

Gandhi was sympathetic to the idea of avatara, incarnation. The avatara does not deny the historicity of a figure. It does not mean that Rama or Krishna as adored by people never lived, but the idea of perfection is an after growth. In his introductory remarks to the translation of the *Gita* Gandhi said, ‘Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 28, p. 111.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 28, p. 318; Tulsidas’s saying that women along with Shudra and the drum deserve beating, Gandhi said; ‘May be Tulsidas himself, following the practice of his time, used to beat up his wife; what even then? The practice does not cease to be reprehensible.’

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 41, p. 543.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 26, p. 335.

and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary... perfection is imagined'.²⁰ All embodied life is an incarnation of God for the believer, but avatara for Gandhi, is a homage paid by people to someone who had lead an exemplary life and rendered extraordinary service. Gandhi saw noting wrong in such a homage, as it took nothing away from God's greatness. Rama or Krishna in this sense are imbued with divinity.²¹ Rama as a historical figure no longer lives, and it is not that Rama that we worship. Gandhi said, 'We do not worship the historical Rama or *Gita*. The Rama of history is no more now. But Rama to whom we attribute perfect divinity, who is God directly perceived, lives to this day'.²² The timeless Rama as an exemplar is sinless. When he invoked Rama and Sita, he often invoked them as exemplars, as those who show the path of rectitude. Gandhi invoked Rama's steadfast adherence to a vow, His *tapascharya*, His willingness to undergo suffering so that He could demonstrate the superiority of soul-force and eradicate evil, adharna. Rama as an exemplar could embody Daridranarayan, the God as embodied in the poor and the suffering. He said, 'I take Rama to mean Daridranarayan and it is our duty to forsake the company of the one who does not serve the Daridranarayana'.²³ He could in the same way claim that Rama resides in the charkha and that sacrificial spinning (sutra yajna) would bring merit equal to the recitation of Ramanama. It was for this reason he could suggest to the priest of the Rama Janmabhoomi temple that the idols of Rama and Sita should be in dressed in khadi, request needless to say was disregarded. In this denial and his acceptance of this refusal he saw his own failing. He invoked Tulsidas. Tulsi had insisted that

²⁰ Desai, Op. Cit., p. 128.

²¹ Ramachandra Gandhi spoke of the necessity of Sri Krishna for the truth of India. He asked, 'Who is Krsna? Did he actually live in historical time? Most emphatically yes, a single visit even to modern touristy traffic-ridden Vrindavana convinces the open-minded and faithful to the indubitability of Govinda's physical existence not only in the past but timelessly in the present also.' See, *I am Thou: Meditations on The Truth of India*. (Pune: Indian Philosophical Quarterly, 1984), p. 52.

²² CWMG, vol. 40, p. 405. This divinity of Krishna and Rama were crucial to Ramachandra's Gandhi's understanding of India's spirituality as well. He wrote, 'The divinity at least of Rama and Krsna and their historicity alone can account for the undefeatedness of Indian spirituality.' See, *I am Thou: Meditations on The Truth of India*, p. 53.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 45, p. 6.



Krishna appear before him as Rama and Krishna took the desired form. Gandhi said that if his devotion to Khadi equalled that of Tulsi to his Rama, the priest would not have refused that our Gods must be in swadeshi clothes. The necessity of effort, of national service and identification with the poorest took precedence over mere recitation of Ramanama for the sake of self-realisation. Gandhi believed that self-realisation cannot be in absence of Swaraj. Ramanama could provide the self-purification required in a satyagrahi seeking swaraj. In response to a query regarding the possibility of attaining self-realisation without participation in the national service, he said that he could never appreciate teaching of the philosophy of inaction; ‘...effort is necessary for one’s own growth. It has to be irrespective of results. Ramanama or some equivalent is necessary not for the sake of repetition but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is, therefore, never a substitute for effort...Ramanama gives one detachment and ballast and never throws one off one’s balance at critical moments. Self-realisation I hold to be impossible without service of and identification with the poorest’.²⁴

Rama as an exemplar allowed Gandhi to extend the symbolic power of the avatara. But what was central to Gandhi was the Rama of his imagination, Rama who symbolised God, His presence, His compassion and mercy. He said, ‘There was a time when I knew Rama as Shri Ramachandra. But that time has now passed. Rama has now come into my home’.²⁵ Before Rama came to dwell within him, there was a possibility of amnesia, of forgetting Rama. He recalled how he had come to forget the teaching of Rambha *dai* in his conceit and how his fears had revived.²⁶ ‘As I grew old, the faith weakened. My mentor, the nurse, was dead. I ceased to take the name of Rama, and my fears revived.’ The power of Rama and His glory can be felt only by the one who believes. It is in fact the believer who gives resonance to the name. In absence of faith Rama has no power. Gandhi gave analogy of the quinine tablet to illustrate this. ‘Ramanama has no independent power. It is not a quinine pill, which has a power of its own...It destroys malaria germs wherever they may be. Ramanama has no such

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 31, p. 511.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 24, p. 196.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 23, p. 302.

independent power. A *mantra* acquires power through devotion.’²⁷ The power that a devotee bestows on the name of Rama has to be done in the spirit of detachment, of selflessness. Gandhi said that if the first devotee who took the name Rama had done so to acquire pleasures of heaven, Rama would have been no more than one of 33 crore Gods. ‘But the devotee of Rama linked the name with Moksha, and the result has been that a good many people have attained Moksha by uttering Rama’s name in prayer.’²⁸ Gandhi wished to be one such devotee.

On 30 March 1928, on Ramanavmi day he addressed the ashramites. He said that the Rama of whom they sang was not the Rama of Valmiki, nor even the Rama of Tulsi, because here was not the Rama whose name we may recite to cross to the other shore or whose name we may repeat in moments of despair. This Rama was not the embodied Rama, he could not have a physical form. Hence, ‘The Rama whom one wishes to remember, and to whom one should remember, is the Rama of one’s own imagination, not the Rama of someone else’s imagination’.²⁹ Because this Rama of Gandhi’s imagination was the Perfect One, He was the one who saved and purified even those who had fallen and committed sin, He was *patit pavan*. It is such Rama that he sought to worship. ‘We should worship Him, the Inner Ruler, who dwells in the hearts of all, yet transcends all and is the Lord of all. It is He of whom we sing: *Nirbalke bal Rama*’.³⁰ It was this formless and flawless Rama that Gandhi wished to see face to face. The Rama that he referred to and the name that he repeated all his life and at the moment of his death was not that Rama who we know as Dashrath’s son.³¹ It was that Rama whose name Dashratha gave to his son. That Rama was Atmarama, it was Truth. Truth is not merely that which we are expected to speak. It is That which alone is, it is That of which all things are made, it is That

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 69, p. 415.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 32, p. 112.

²⁹ Ibid., vol. 36, p. 164.

³⁰ CWMG, Loc. Cit.

³¹ Ibid., vol. 85, pp. 331-332. The idea of Rama being a son of Dasharatha also grew with time. If Rama is merely Dasharath’s son he could not be all-pervasive, but if a devotee were to think of Rama as all-pervasive then his Dasharath too becomes all-pervasive.



which subsists by its own power, which alone is eternal. Gandhi's intense yearning was that such Truth should illuminate his heart. Despite his awareness that Rama had come 'home' to him, He was not near enough, and hence he needed to keep the recitation of the name. He spoke of this distance and his need for utterance; 'Even now, although Rama is near, He is not near enough to me; hence the need to address Him at all. When He is with me all the twenty-four hours, there will be no need to address Him even in the singular'.³²

In the final years of his life Gandhi gave himself up to the Ramanama. He was surrounded by failure and a raging fire. It was at once a sign of Gandhi's deep faith and his utter despondency and loneliness. Ramanama became the cure and perhaps the only form of cure that he came to rely upon. In the midst of intense debate about the nature of India's independence, Gandhi often retreated to Uruli-Kanchan, to a naturopathy clinic. The retreat was a mode of finding a cure, a healing, not only for the diseased body of patients that he treated but also for the disease of India.³³ To one and all he said recite the Ramanama with a pure heart. The cure for the disease, both of the body and the body-politic of India, lay in the Ramanama. He spoke of Ramanama as infallible remedy, as he put it in Gujarati *ramban*.³⁴ Ramanama was no longer a symbol, nor was it a metaphor. Ramanama had become the thing itself. Ramanama alluded to no reality or presence outside of itself. It had become for Gandhi, Real. It was incumbent upon him to prove this reality. He was convinced that the violence that surrounded him was due to his own failing, his imperfect ahimsa and imperfect Brahmacharya. As he walked through the ravaged villages of Noakhali and Bihar, sleep eluded him. Even the chanting of Ramanama failed to bring repose. He lamented, 'Why can't I, who preach all healing virtues of Ramanama to others, be content to rely on it exclusively myself?'³⁵ This was true of India as also of his own body and that of Manu Gandhi's. Manu had become the partner in his yajna. Her frail health,

³² *Ibid.*, vol. 24, p. 197.

³³ The metaphor of the diseased India had stayed with him since the time that he wrote the *Hind Swaraj*; wherein he spoke of the need to find a physician for diseased India.

³⁴ Literally, the arrow of Rama, as infallible as the arrow.

³⁵ *CWMMG*, vol. 86, p. 218.

her illness, which finally required her to be operated upon, plunged Gandhi into deep crises. He was convinced that if Ramanama had actually taken firm root in his heart Manu would not have suffered any physical ailment. 'After all I have made her my partner in this yajna. If Ramanama is firmly rooted in my heart, this girl should be free from her ailments.'³⁶ He shared his despondency with Manu. 'Since I sent you to the hospital, I have been constantly thinking where I stand, what God demands of me, where He will ultimately lead me... I know my striving is incomplete; your operation is a proof.'³⁷ Manu's ailment and surgery became the metaphor for the partitioned India. If he could attain perfect Brahmacharya (charya or conduct that leads to Brahman that is Truth), and unsullied ahimsa the flames raging around him would subside. His quest in the final years of his life was to attain this perfect *Brahmacharya* as embodiment of Truth. This could be attained only if his heart was filled with the presence of Rama. He confessed, 'I am no where near realising Rama yet, but I am striving. When I have the realisation, the glow of my ahimsa will spread all around'.³⁸ He must discover the full potency of Ramanama or perish in the attempt. And perish he did. But in that final act of *iccha mrityu* he attained his Rama. His desire was fulfilled in a way that allowed his grandson Ramchandra Gandhi to claim years later that 'Gandhi stopped three bullets on their deathly trajectory of hate'.

Vinoba, speaking on 2 February 1948, at the prayer meeting at Gopuri, spoke of hope. This hope, this act of faith was directed towards himself and many like him who saw themselves as disciples of Gandhiji. He drew sustenance from the image of Christ on Cross. He realised that the sacrifice of Christ had filled His apostles with light. This light had eluded the disciples so long as Christ was in their midst. He hoped that similar light would fill him and others such as him. He knew that the light would not come to him and us either through institutions or memorials. Nor would it come by seeking reprisal for the act. Revengeful anger would make him and the other disciples equal

³⁶ Ibid., vol. 86, p. 486.

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 86, pp. 521-522. This sense deepened with his own fast. The last fast affected both his kidneys and liver, a sure sign that the purity that he had wished and prayed for still alluded him.

³⁸ Ibid., vol. 90, p. 350.



partners in the assassination. What was required was an inward gaze, an intense act of soul-searching. God by taking Gandhiji away had provided them with the greatest impetus possible for this soul-searching. Gandhiji was no longer with him in body, but with the death of the body all the imperfections of the body and the embodied had disappeared. Gandhiji had become pure in a way that is not given to anyone so long as they are imprisoned in the body.

Not surprisingly during the thirteen days following Gandhiji's death Vinoba and many others repeated the Ramanama. Vinoba hoped that this Rama would fill his heart; illuminate him with His light. Vinoba invoked Tulsidasji and reminded the country that with the disappearance of the form, what remains is the Name. The absence of the form does envelop the disciples with darkness. But this darkness is the result of longing, an intense desire to feel the presence of the body. But this darkness can only be temporary, as what is permanent is not the body but the thought. And that is why Tulsidasji sang the glory of *namasmaran*. Name, that is pure thought, is higher than the form. Because thought does not disappear with the death of the form; it in fact shines forth more clearly. The disciples had faith in Gandhi's thoughts and practices. His sacrifice could only make this belief steadfast, give their faith a depth that they had found lacking. Because with his death the doubts and hesitations that plagued them would also disappear. This allowed Vinoba to describe the nature of Gandhiji's death as limitless mercy and kindness of God. He saw this as a sign that God wished to purify him and the countrymen by this fiery ordeal.

What was the pure thought that Vinoba hoped would guide him and us? Gandhiji had made this clear to the disciples. Just a few weeks before his assassination Gandhiji had undergone a fast. The ashramites from Wardha visited him in Delhi and sought his guidance with regard to their duty in event of his likely death. Gandhiji's response to them was unambiguous. It was to be their duty, he said, to complete his work on Khadi. As to what or who should guide their lives in his absence there was no doubt. The eleven vows, the *Ekadash Vrata* were to be their beacon, because they were the principles around which his life was woven, they were the basis of the Ashram life. Ashram, a community of men and women of religion, of co-religionist, would

fulfil its obligation; perform its duty through its daily practise affirmed by the *Ekadash Vrata*.

Khadi, the very centre of his life was not just a textile. It was also not just a means to Swaraj. Khadi was his method of being one with the poor and the wretched, the Daridranarayan. Khadi was yajna. It was sacrifice. Spinning was to be done in the spirit of yajna as enjoined to all those who sought to follow the *Gita*. The *Gita* declares that yajna came with the Creation itself. We are given the body so that we serve with and through it. Gandhiji emphasised that every single act of the one who wished to live a life of purity had to be in the nature of yajna. Gandhiji had raised spinning to the level of daily mahayajna, primary sacrifice. Spinning in this *ashram* was called sutra yajna, sacrificial spinning. Spinning became more important to him than the study of *Gita*. He wrote to Mira that, 'Spinning was the applied translation of the *Gita*.' This was one act that allowed all the ashramites, householders included, to perform the duty of renunciation. Because it is the duty of renunciation, Gandhi said, that differentiates humans from the beast. Thus when Gandhi spoke of Khadi to the ashramites he was pointing to them the path of sacrifice, of renunciation.

Of the *Ekadash Vrata*, Satya, and Ahimsa are obvious and easy to grasp. Satyagraha Ashram owed its very existence to the pursuit and attempted practice of Truth. Ahimsa, or love, was the means to this end.

Gandhiji had increasingly come to realise that the practice of ahimsa in its pure form would remain elusive so long as one did not attain the state of Brahmacharya. Brahmacharya was not merely celibacy. It was not suppression of one sense by others. Brahmacharya was in fact an attempt to bring all senses in harmony with each other. Thus understood and practised Gandhiji sought to restore to the word its original meaning. Charya, that is conduct, which leads to Brahman, the Truth. Brahmacharya is the practise of Truth. Only a Brahmachari's mind is 'untroubled in sorrows and longeth not for joys, who is free from passion, fear and wrath'; who knows attachment no where; only such a Brahmachari can be in the world 'moving among sense objects with the sense weaned from likes and dislikes and brought under the control



of the *atman*.' The *Gita* describes such a Brahmachari as a *Sthitpragna*, a person whose intellect is secure. Gandhi desired Swaraj and wished to attain the state of *Sthitpragna*. Both these quests required knowledge of oneself, because it is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves, to rule oneself is to have control over our minds and passions, so doing we know ourselves.

The quest for Swaraj, the practice of Brahmacharya, fast that lead him closer to the Maker, prayer offered in the quest for self-purification, incessant awareness of the duty of sacrifice and the yearning to feel the presence of Truth dwelling within him lead him to that light which Vinoba spoke of, that light which Vinoba wished for himself and us. Gandhiji spoke of this light as a voice, a small, still voice that he called his inner-voice or the voice of conscience. He waited upon this voice and sought its unfailing guidance in moments when darkness enveloped him, when he groped for light.

When Vinoba spoke of the power of light he was alluding to this inner-voice. He had hoped that he and we would find our own inner-voices. When we refer to the absence of Gandhiji we refer to a void that is created by our inability and unwillingness to hear our own inner-voice. Because if we could hear the voice of our conscience our lives would be illuminated by the same light that filled Gandhiji. The true nature of Gandhiji's absence lies in this void.