



{ THE PHILOSOPHER'S TONE } COLLECTED WORKS

The writings of a maximalist master

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In his foreword to the English translation of Harilal Gandhi's biography, the philosopher Ramchandra Gandhi (1937-2007) observed that "Harilal's rebelliousness must have tempered Bapu's ego by the realization that he could not control everything," and added: "Harilal's role in the spiritual growth of Gandhi cannot be overestimated." This short text aptly mirrors one of independent India's most inventive minds. In a few penetrating words, he overturned conventional beliefs about the

Ramchandra Gandhi on 17
August, 1995

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two men and underlined a "deeper mystery which united" them. If the alcoholic son contributed to the Mahatma's spiritual evolution, both lives must be assessed afresh. This foreword is contained in a new book, *Ramchandra Gandhi: Talks and Writings*, edited by his student A Raghuramaraju, now a professor at IIT-Tirupati. Raghuramaraju also edited an earlier book of his writings, *The Seven Sages* (2015).

Ramchandra obtained a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford before finding a permanent home in Advaita. A devotee of Ramana Maharshi, he was an orator in the tradition of Indian sages. His genius perhaps best erupted in his lectures. In a talk at the California Institute of Integral Studies in

1988, drawing an illuminating connection that both Ramakrishna Paramahansa and J Krishnamurti had died of cancer, he proposed that Gautam Buddha also succumbed to the disease because Buddha's compassion "would have invited the madness which cancer represents". In another lecture, he lined up "a cricket team" of Indian sages between a span of a hundred years — 1886, the year Ramakrishna Paramahansa died, to 1986, when J Krishnamurti died. He saw an "off-spinner" in Ramakrishna; and elsewhere located "Beethoven's later music" in Mahatma Gandhi's speeches

around Partition violence: "not symphony, but illusive like the concertos, very illusive".

The mind of this grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and C Rajagopalachari navigated across time and space, locating fascinating umbilical cords among seemingly diverse people and phenomena. It reflected his range of

interests but it was also perhaps a result of his Advaitin consciousness. He could begin a chapter on Krishna with a quote of Godard and compare the second



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innings of a Test match with rebirth. He could invoke Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ramana Maharshi in the same breath, and state with an innate wonder: "What a pity Wittgenstein never met Ramana!"

He spoke about an India that had escaped the gaze of historians, novelists, anthropologists and sociologists. With great intuitiveness he blended mythology and spirituality with contemporary politics. His writings also reflect his concern about the fate of humanity. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told China that Tibet was its internal affair, he criticised the government. He then offered a solution: Screen Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* for world leaders at the Potala Palace; and hold an MS

Subbulakshmi concert on the banks of the Lake Mansarovar!

Perhaps his most adorable trait was an unrivalled sense of humour. Consider an article, *A Sense of Rumour*, in which he wrote that "it is strongly surmised that the Chinese pull-back from our doorstep in 1962 was caused by President Radhakrishnan's thunderous declaration on All India Radio that Dharma was on our side. Thinking that Burma, a new ally, was on our side, the Chinese wisely withdrew." How to decode this coming from a Vedantin? He once remarked that "there is maximalism, an insatiability, to Indian spirituality". This, perhaps, was Ramu himself.

A maximalist master.

This book is a testimony to his maximalism.

Ashutosh Bhardwaj is an independent journalist. His recent book, *The Death Script*, traces the naxal insurgency.