Three Gandhi Poems – A Historical Background

[These three poems from among many by Jhaverchand Meghani (1896-1947) were written in the turbulent years of 1931-32. The historical backdrop to those times may help explain some references in these poems. Meghani, an eminent Gujarati poet, writer, folklorist and journalist was given the honorific of ‘Rāṣhtreeya Shāyar’ – the Nationalist Poet – by the Mahātmā.]

1930:

Rejecting the British proposal for a dominion status for India, the Indian National Congress promulgated a Declaration of the Independence of India, resolving the Congress and Indian nationalists to fight for a ‘complete self-rule’ apart from the British Empire on January 26.

In one of the first civil disobedience movement initiatives, Gandhi broke the British salt laws at the conclusion of the Salt March on Dāndi on April 6, sparking large scale acts of nonviolent civil disobedience all across India. The British imprisoned Gandhi to take life out of this movement, but the outcome was just the opposite. Following massive unrest, Viceroy Lord Irwin promulgated decrees curbing many civil liberties and jailed leaders of the movement. British documents show that the British government was shaken to the core by the Satyāgraha, the non-violent movement.

1931:

The British Prime Minister announced the Second Round Table Conference and offered to free the imprisoned Congress leaders if they complied with the Viceroy’s ‘requests’. Gandhi accepted the offer. After two weeks of intense negotiations between the two men, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on March 5, 1931. The pact required the Indian National Congress to discontinue its civil disobedience movement and to participate in the second Round Table Conference in London. It required the British Government to withdraw all its ordinances imposing curbs on the activities of the Indian National Congress as also to stop all prosecutions relating to several types of offenses and to release prisoners arrested for participating in the civil disobedience movement.

Lord Irwin was replaced by Lord Willingdon as Viceroy soon after the pact was signed. Gandhi felt a moral obligation for the strictest adherence to the terms of the pact. The new Viceroy felt no such compunction and his office was given to quibbling over the terms of the truce while local bureaucrats and police officers actively circumvented its provisions.

Disappointed and frustrated by these blatant acts over a five-month period, Gandhi was unwilling to go to the Round Table Conference. The British knew that the absence of the Congress from the first Round Table Conference would render it meaningless. They very badly wanted Gandhi to attend the second Conference. Pressured by the British Prime Minister, Viceroy Willingdon summoned Gandhi to Shimlā – the summer capital of British India – in August, 1931. The Viceroy finally agreed to let Gandhi propose the total independence for India at the Round Table Conference. Gandhi and his entourage were rushed to Mumbai on a special train.
They reached Mumbai with only four hours to spare before sailing for England aboard SS Rājputānā on August 29, 1931.

In a statement to the Associated Press before his departure, Gandhiji said: “I see no hope on the horizon. Being born an optimist, I am not giving up hope. I have faith in God... and hope He will choose to use me as His instrument to serve the humanity.”

In an article “What did I bring from Europe?” written while on his way back from England, Gandhi answers that question: “I certainly do not come back with total independence... or even partial independence. That is not something you buy in any market abroad. But, I am coming back with greater energy to wage the battle for our independence.” He was returning to India with empty hands, but not dirty hands.

1932:

In March, Gandhi had addressed the British Secretary of State on the proposed ‘Communal Award’ declaring untouchables as a minority and thus giving the Hindu depressed classes seats in the legislature, to be filled only from special depressed class electorates. Gandhi argued that separate electorates would divide the Hindu community without doing any good for the depressed classes. He recalled what he had said at the Second Round Table Conference, that he would resist with his life the grant of such separate electorates. On August 16, 1932, Ramsey MacDonald, the British P.M., chose to announce the 'Communal Award' anyway. Gandhi, in prison at the time, immediately wrote to the Premier that he would embark on a ‘fast unto death’ on September 20, even while incarcerated. The P.M. did not relent, and the fast began on that date. The British capitulated quickly but the opposition of the leaders of the depressed classes turned out to be a sticking point. That was eventually resolved and the fast ended with an agreement, popularly known as the ‘Poona Pact’. The British Cabinet accepted the Poona Pact and Gandhi broke his fast on September 26.

Each of the three poems is presented here in the original Gujarati, followed by its English translation.

These translations are by Ashok Meghani, the poet’s youngest son. Ashok, an engineer by training, retired as a technology executive and now devotes a good deal of his time to working on translations from Gujarati. He has translated three of his father’s novels and continues to work on other translations. He lives in the United States.
ખેલો કટોરો
અદેવરયંક મેઘાણી

ખેલો કટોરો જેરનો આ : પી જાઓ, બાપુ!
સાગર પીનારા! અંજલી નવ કાઢો, બાપુ!

આણસુચત વિશાલે વાહન જવન તમારું:
ધૂરો-નગલાંચી થયી પડખું પણારું:
શનુ તથ્યો પૌંઢો ઢળી સુમધી સુનારું:
આ આમરી ઓશીલા સિર સોયોં, બાપુ!
ાપે લખે ગાજો! રિપ-મન માચાં, બાપુ!

સ્વ-અસૂરના આ નવભુગી ઉડઘ-વિલાંદો,
શી છ ગતાગમ રઢાના કારી જણોને?
તું વીના, શંભુ! કોછ પીયે જેર હોયો?
હેયા લગી ગાંધા ગરલ જુટ જણો રે, બાપુ!
ઓ લૌહ-રીમા કરાલ-કોમા જણો રે, બાપુ!

કઘેશં જગત: જોગી તધા શુ જોગ ભૂતિયા?
ડેશયા ગાયા શોપાઈ? શુ ધાન-નીર ભૂલયા?
પુ આબ સૂરજ-યંબરમાં તેલ ભૂલયા?
હેચભી અમારા ક.ધ.મ નવ અટલી જણો, બાપુ!
સભેયુ ધાણુ, સહેયુ ધાણ: નવ ધકધાણો, બાપુ!

ભાબુક, જટી, ડા, ડાડા મારના,
જીતાં કબરસાન કાસાગારના,
શોકધાણું કટકાં જોગીબારના -
એ તો બધાં જરી ગાયા, કોસ પજાં, બાપુ!
૧૨૩શાં અમ હેડા તમે લોહે ધડાં, બાપુ!
સું થયું — તયારી હીગાડું લો—ન લાયો!
બોસા દેશું — લાયે માટ્ર હાથ આવો!
લેપાં તારે કહો રસબરસતી મુજબાં!
દુનયા તારે મોચે જરી જરી આવેલો, બાપુ!
હમણા સંદેશકા દેશ આવયો, બાપુ!

જગ માણસે માે એનું: ન આવો આતમાની!
ના’વો ગુમાની — પોલ પોતાની પહંચીની!
જગઘયી જોયો! હાં દુનયાની ન જાયી!
અખાર માનવ-જીત આકાલ થઈ રહી, બાપુ!
તારી તબીબી કષ એ તલામી રહી, બાપુ!

જ, બાપા માતા આણાલે નાયાલો,
જ વિશ્વચા ઊપરે જુણ છોટાનો,
જ સાત સાગર પાર સેતુ બાંધવાનો —
ધનદૌર ધનની વાનની વાડે અજબાનોનો, બાપુ!
વિરામ કેસરયાનો પંપાનો, બાપુ!

આવો જભ! ટુજ ગોમિયો બંગાવનો છે, બાપુ!
છેલો કરો જેનો પી આવચ, બાપુ!

(કિંમતી નોધ: 1931. ગાંધીજી ગોરીમાજી પરિણામક્રમ જયતા નીકળ હેઠળ લાંચ તેમને કહેવિને સંપ્રેક્ષણ. [સાધારણ] 'સીલાણુ' નો પહેલો કેંદ્રીય ગુજરાત પરંપરોનું વાચીનો છે. આગળ બાકી આયા કરી દેશએ નીચામંડળી પર પછી સેતલી રચના કરી —
શીંર પર ગાંધીજી રેખાંતી કરી.)

મહાકવી હેનાના નોધ: કિંમતીના તારે અને ગોમિયો બંગાવલા તે માંગબોટમાં વાંચવા માંડવા.. . મેધાલીની છેલ્તા કોચો વે વાંચવા માંડવા.. . મેધાલીની છેલ્તા કોચો વે વાંચવા માંડવા.. .

અંદાજેસાદોં ઓંખોને — મેધાલીની છેલ્તા કોચો — અંદાજ પણ એક જેવી લગે છે.)
Swallow the hemlock, o Bāpu¹!
Jhaverchand Meghani

(August 27, 1931. Two days before Mahatma Gandhi was to leave for the 2nd Round Table Conference in London to plead for India’s independence. The people’s expectations were very high in India. But, the Mahatma knew the political reality, and understood the futility of this exercise.

This poem was an attempt to put in words the turmoil in the Mahatma’s mind and heart. It was written for the weekly Saurashtra in about an hour just before that issue went to press. It was rushed to Mumbai and delivered to the Mahatma the next day aboard the SS Rajputana after it had sailed for England.

On reading the poem, Gandhi said, “This is a totally accurate portrayal of my mindset.” Mahadev Desai, his private secretary and the person closest to Gandhi, wrote: “... Meghani’s spirit appears to have been a constant witness of Gandhiji’s past fifteen days ... almost as if he observed it all from behind an invisibility cloak.”)

Swallow this final bowl of hemlock, o Bāpu!
You’ve swallowed oceans of insults,
   Spill not, please, this handful, o Bāpu!

Living with an immutable faith in your fellowmen:
Aware of being amidst cheats and double-crossers:
At peace, even as you slumbered in the enemy’s lap:
   Lay your head on this final pillow, Bāpu!
   Behead you? He may, but ...
       ... Get the measure of our enemy, Bāpu!

They’ve teamed up again, the new-age gods and the demons;²
They churn the ocean, lust for gems, unaware of what awaits’em:
The deadly halāhal comes out first, it takes a Shiva to contain it.
   So hasten there, and take the poison ...
       ... Unto your heart, Bāpu!
   O tranquil-terrible! Hideous-dainty! Godspeed, Bāpu!

All world will wonder: has the saint run out of his divine powers?
Have the oceans drained? Have the dark clouds paled above us?
Did the Moon’s and the Sun’s wicks run dry, up there in the heavens?
   Don’t let the thoughts of our miseries stop you, Bāpu!
   We’ve suffered much, we will suffer more ...
       ... Please waver not, Bāpu!

¹ Bāpu : Father. The loving address people used for the Mahātmā.
² This stanza is based on the story of Samudra Manthan in Hindu mythology. Devas (the gods) and Dānavas (the demons) join forces in search for Amrita (the Nectar) and other gems; they proceed to churn the Ocean of Milk. The first to emerge from the ocean is a pot of Halāhal poison that threatens to wipe out all life. It takes Lord Shiva to save the situation; he drinks the Halāhal but holds it in his throat. Shiva, one of three principal Hindu deities – the God of destruction – is known for his tender and terrible personas.
Whip-lashes fly, batons descend, fines to pay, homes under raid,
Locked up in the dungeons dark, like tombs for us living dead,
Sprinklings of gun-shots in the air, filling our hearts with dread,
   We’ve endured it all, become immune to all, Bāpu!
   Our hearts, once tender, now hard as steel …
   … Shaped by your hammer, Bāpu!

Would we care if you don’t bring us a ‘rag doll’ gift from there?
Our kisses will show, it matters not if you return empty-handed!
A million arms lay in wait, to wrap as garlands around you!
   Go, say hello to the waiting world, smile for them, Bāpu!
   Go, convey to them our sympathies …
   … As also our aspirations, Bāpu!

[But, if you choose not to go, Bāpu…]
Ridicule will fly: “A ‘self-realized’ man, is why he stayed away!
What arrogance! Bet you he knew ‘twas all hot air anyway!
‘Lover of Humanity’ indeed! What does he know about their pain?”
   The humanity’s been ailing long, it can wait no more, Bāpu!
   Cure-hungry, it yearns away …
   … For your healing touch, Bāpu!

Go and lock your horns with those raging bulls, Bāpu;
Go, douse the world-devouring fire burning there, Bāpu;
Go, span the seven oceans with your peace-bridges, Bāpu;
   Go, blaze new trails through those darkened woods,
   Caress his mane, show the king of beasts,
   … You fear him not, Bāpu!

Stop not, for He goes with you; Godspeed, Bāpu!
Go and swallow this final bowl of hemlock, o Bāpu!

© Ashok Meghani
માતા, તારો બેટડા આવે!

અંતરયાંક: મેધાશી

માતા! તારો બેટડા આવે:
આશાભાર ચેકલો આવે.
જો જો! મારો બેટડો આવે:
સંદેશાત્મક પ્રેપિયા લાવે.

જીવાલમુખી અને કાળજી રે, અને આંખમાં અમૃતિલાર –
અને ઓળખ માનવી આવે:
વેલા શજ-સોતરાં લાવે. – માટાં。

સૂતો રે હેવ તો જગણ્ણે, સાવર! ઘેર આવે પાણાધર,
હેવે તારે ઝાર્ની હિવલા ખાય:
મોટી મારો ભાય બે જોવા. – માટાં。

ધૂમરાણા અને મું નાથી, વીરા, છાં શીતલ છોલ,
પ્રિયશી પાણીલી ધોડી!
આછે આછે યાઘર હોયે! – માટાં。

તારા જેવા અને આતમાં ગભી હમ, અગાધ બીખજાણ;
તાં તારે આજ આગ લાગી છે:
ધૂમાધાર તો પાણ ધારી છે. – માટાં。

સાત સિંધુ, તમે સામાટા રે – અને ઓળખાશે નહી અણ,
હાલાં નવ દીવાં પાણી!
ના ના અને વીલ્પન નાની. – માટાં。

કેટ્કેટાન હુલાશ જલે તારા હૈયાની માંખી, ઓ આલા!
અને ઓલખ આપા ધીક્યે,
છાં અને છાં છાં ચોકડી નીઘે. – માટાં。

 માનતાંત્રથા ક્રાં માનવી રે અને કેસલાવી તેવી સેલાંત!
પારધીના પિજરા માતી:  
હંમે મારો નીકળવો હાલી.  - માતા।

ઘોર અંધરી એ રાતમાં રે બીજાં બાલ ઘોરાં તમામ;  
આઠ પો’ર જગતની અંખને  
બેહે તું તો હીવડે શાંખ.  - માતા।

બૃકા બીજ ઘેલકા રે માયામહેશ કે રે પાસવાર,  
બેટા! તું તો પોયાં નાના:  
જીબું ઓક આઢીલાં.  - માતા।

પોતાના પાણ્યાંપમાંયોના તે તો જોગને પેલાં: બાળ;  
યૂમી યૂમી છાતીયે યાંયાં:  
બંધતાના બોલડા આંખા.  - માતા।

રામરે રામ તચર હું તીસી તચર કાર્યા કાટું નાગ;  
ડંખે ડંખે દુધની ધાર  
રવતી તારા દેહથી, પ્રાર!  - માતા।

થીર પાંખાલીના પેલાંમાં નો’ર્યા પાંખાઓએ હીખ હાથ;  
આખ ઘિમિંગ મએ દેશી:  
બેટાઓએ મળને પીભી!  - માતા।

કૃક પીઢા, હીખમાન પીઢા, પીઢા ઘોલી હગાળાં હૂંધ;  
કરકરતાં તે તે પીઢાં:  
ગાલી ગાલી લોખ પાર પીઢાં.  - માતા।

ગોપરીના છાના ધાર કલ્યાણના રાજ જુભુ આમોષિત!  
વાણમહેંદ્રા સંહના વાશી,  
ટે ટે તારી વાટ જીવાશી.  - માતા।

કંપશે સાત પાતલા, આભી જાતા જીવશે સાયર લોખ;  
પંડે પંડે બોલજી લાવશી :  
બૃક્ષયોના ગાંધીની પાની.  - માતા।
‘ધાઓ ધાઓ, ઘેરુપળા!’ તેવા તે હું કહીશે તહકાર,
શાખવા ના સાંભ માતલા
હું હું ભગત ભાગ્ય મેળા. - માતા।

બાઇ વિદેશીકર! વીનાં રે - અને રેક્ષણ મા આજી વાર;
બેહી કું તો હીમિંડી ભાજુ;
ક્યારે અેના ગાલ પંપાંણુ! - માતા।

તારી ક્માઈ-ગુમવીનો મારી માગવી નો’ન હિસાબ;
બેતા! તારી ભાજ્ય અંદેલી
માતા ડેરે મન અમોલી. - માતા।
(1931ાં જંગલી હતાશ હેવે ગેરમેઝબમાંથી પાછા વડલા હતા તે અરસાં રોથાણુ.)
Forlorn He Returns, O Mother!

Jhaverchand Meghani

Translation: Ashok Meghani

(1931. Written around when a brokenhearted Mahatma Gandhi was on his way back to India from the 2nd Round Table Conference in London. The ‘mother’ is Mother India.)

Your son is on his way, o mother!
    Dejected and forlorn he returns.
Look, look, my son’s on his way back,
    Or so tell me the messengers.

A volcano waiting to erupt in his heart, but
    Only compassion dripping from his eyes,
Here comes he – a mere mortal of a man,
    An invite from the Angel of Death in his hand.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Wake up and listen, o mighty ocean!
    The apple of my eyes is sailing home.
Pray gently rock my boy on your bosom,
    He has earned the sleep of the just.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

All covered with dust, his face can do with
    A few splashes of your cool water;
Wash his tired feet, with a loving caress,
    And dry them with a gentle breeze.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

In the mysterious depths of his soul,
    Normally cool, and like yours, unfathomable,
A mighty inferno is raging today,
    As if he were hit by a smoking cannon-ball.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Waters from all the seven blue seas
    Cannot douse the flames of that fire;
Hold your water, waste not your breath,
    Nay, far too intense is his torment.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Millions of pyres burn a-roar,
    In the hearts of galaxies up yonder.
A billion such fires blaze away,
    Without a squeak, beneath his chest.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!
The schemers had really believed,
    That you’d be an easy one to deceive;
To their dismay, when the trap was sprung,
    Their prey had flown the coop.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

The pitch black night had surrounded,
    All of my children in its shadow;
You kept the watch all through the night,
    In your dim lamp’s sputtering glow.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

There are always ones who covet too much,
    And drown in their own greed-lust;
You, my son, stay untouched by it all,
    Fending water off like a poyanun\(^3\) lotus.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Surely you had enemies thirsting for your blood,
    But you had their children playing in your lap;
You hugged them hard, and showered your kisses,
    Taught them lessons of love and friendship.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Those vipers black, bared their fangs, and
    Shot their venom into you with a vengeance;
You bled white, from each of those stings,
    Your body spewing milk of human kindness.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

The Pândavas of yore, hung their heads in shame,
    As the villain proceeded to strip Pâncâli\(^4\).
That hideous act, pales in comparison today,
    With the sons molesting their own mother.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

You alone rose up, spoke for the downtrodden,
    And stood blocking their exploitation.
The enemy noticed your infinite compassion,
    They played on that ‘chink’ to perfection.
    ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

\(^3\) Poyanun: A small variety of lotus
\(^4\) Pâncâli: In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, the five Pândava brothers lost their wife Pâncâli in a game of dice, and then watched their evil cousin Dushâshana try to humiliate her by trying to pull her clothes off in front of the entire royal court.
You swallowed your pride, took treachery in stride,
     Even stirred-in their poison in your cup;
You willingly opened your mouth so wide,
     For the boiling oil and molten steel they served up.
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

Bury your heartbreaks deep down beneath,
     Let none witness how badly it hurts you;
When Time’s tempest unleashes its wrath,
     Who else do we have to protect us but you?
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

The Earth will shudder to its very foundation,
     The oceans’ fury to the sky will ascend;
Fiery lava will overrun all creation,
     While earthquakes will blow their trumpets.
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

“Help, o Divine Cowherd\textsuperscript{5}, please help!”
     When the distress call goes out for Him:
Roaring lions and thundering bulls alike
     Will try to jostle and outrun one another.
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

I beg your hosts on the faraway shore,
     “Please hold him not there anymore.”
My oil lamp flickers, as does my patience,
     I long to touch your face once more.
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

What do I care if you failed or succeeded,
     Of gains and losses, I seek no tally;
O beloved son, the empty bag you fetched,
     To your mother, its riches are unmatched.

                           Your son is on his way, o mother!
     ... Forlorn he returns, o mother!

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\textsuperscript{5} The Divine Cowherd: Lord Krishna, who grew up as a cowherd, is called ‘\textit{Dhenupāl}’ - the Protector of the Cows.
છેલ્લી સલામ
જેવેરચંદ મધાણી

સો સો રે સલામુ મારા બાંકડાને કેટલો રે,
આજના જુલાના જગને કેટલો હો...જ.
માડાં ન તે હોણે માજામાક કેટલો, ને
જીવામાં જાણી અમને રચો હો...જ!
— સો સો રે સલામમુ。

ધીઘા દીજે શેકલની મારી તોની તોની આપું તોથે,
પૂરા જેની પાસે કરીને જદ્દો ન જ —
અયયા પાપ-દાવાનલ તેણે છે જાણતા મારી,
ડીલકાના જેટલો સાગ્રહ — હરેગો ન જ।
— સો સો રે સલામમુ。

ધીઘા પામ બાંકડવને પાંકડ તલાણ પૂછી તે હી
નિરીક્ષ નાગા લામો લખાણી હો...જ:
અયયા નિયમ ભે તો આ રે આધ લોમ કેટલો,
પૂર્વ મારાં પાપે ઓરાં હો...જ!
— સો સો રે સલામમુ。

સમધોની સતા, સંતા, ધૂતારાણી ધૂતારાણી,
કુલદીયા ગુરુની કે કરામલ જ:યેગો તે
વાસાણી ધીઘા ધરમધરમાં, અયયા
બાંકડ કેટલો રચો રચો વાલી વાત જ.
— સો સો રે સલામુ。

અયયા અયયા જીવાણ મારાં સહેરશે જેલાં, ને
ધરમધરમ કેટલો કેલાં સિયાળી હો...જ:
ઉડાંદી સમાવી સરકારી ઉડીખાલલા, પાણી
હરે રથડા કેટલા પટીયાલ હો...જ.
— સો સો રે સલામુ।

રથણા સારથીએ — સુસંગો, સાપુ ને સુસંગો સરતે,
કરફોતા કરી યે રથણી ધરીઓ હો...જ;
જુખુ જુખુ જુખાણી બેરા જીવો વાપ પાણી આણો,
બીતર તો નિહાળો: હરે કાંન પટલી હો...જ.
— સો સો રે સલામુ।

જુખાણી મહારાજ ચાલ મહારાજ જાગીવો, ને
ધરમ ડેર ધારા-ટાંગા બંટે હો...જ:
સતને જાણવે મારાં કેટલાં પ્રોફિસરીમાં,
શીખો તો નમાંડુ શાશવાર્દી હો...જ.
— સો સો રે સલામુ।

હરે રથકા તેના અમે અયયા કે વધામાણી રે,
પાણ કેલાં ઉખાળ હકાર પણ હો...જ;
હસતાં મુખવાળની અમે વધામાણી રિચયો રે, વાલાં!
રચે ક્રિય રચે નયાં રચે હો...જ!
— સો સો રે સલામુ।
A Thousand Farewells
Jhaverchand Meghani

(Written at the time of Gandhiji’s September 1932 ‘fast unto death’ to protest British Government’s announcement of ‘Separate Electorates for The Depressed Classes’, the untouchables. The poem is in the form of a narration coming from Gandhi. Although the Mahātmā himself said he did not put it in the same category as ‘Chhello Katoro’, some critics considered this poem to be superior in sentiment as also in its rendition.)

A thousand farewells to my brothers and sisters all,
   To the world, I bid a fond adieu from my soul;
To those I couldn’t meet, sincere apologies I send,
   Keep us in your thoughts, humbly I beseech them.

Her multiple hearts in unquenchable flames,
   My mother burns red in the inferno of her shame;
For sins so terrible, even the last drop of my blood
   Would not be enough penance to atone for them.

The day Arjuna set the Khāndav forest afire,
   Roasting a million innocent Nāgas in that pyre,
Rightful dwellers of this conquered ‘Āryan’ land,
   They fell prey to my forefathers’ heinous ire.

Even Lord Rāma, the final comfort to my soul,
   On behest of some sages, He did such wrong,
Beheaded a low-born hunter, for worshipping the divine,
   Horrors of that sin will haunt us forever long.

Butchered’em, gutted’em, pushed them into the netherworld,
   Demonized and exiled them to a life in the wilderness;
Built for them their own separate living purgatories,
   Sentenced them to slavery for the endless eternity.

The power of the mighty, the deceit of holy men and cheats,
   A hundred different tricks of all the scheming preachers,
Wove it all together into huge religious pennants,
   Dyed red with the blood of my brothers and my sisters.

These siblings mine endured such deluges of injustice,
   Their blood watering the flowerbeds ‘round those pennants;
Their agonies they buried deep inside their aching hearts,
   Quietly they laid down under the wheels of the Lord’s chariots.

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6 Mahabhārata, the Hindu epic, tells the story of Arjuna setting fire to the Khāndav forest to eradicate its cobra population. Some claim that it was the Nāga people that were burned to death.
7 Lord Rāma, for Gandhi the supreme embodiment of virtue and justice, slew Shambuk, as he hung upside down and worshipped Lord Shiva, when a Brāhmaīn complained that such sacrilegious behavior by a Shudra had caused his child’s premature death.
8 The untouchables were forced to live in segregated neighborhoods, away from where the Caste Hindus lived.
Listen, o charioteers – you holy men and priests all,
   Listen to the axles of your chariots groan beneath you;
Behold, isn’t that Bhairav⁹ blocking the way ahead?
   Look within and ask why the Lord’s forsaken you.

Mahākāl, the controller of the ages, has awakened,
   And set up his scales and standards to weigh the truth;
"I have laid down my life, upon the scales of justice"¹⁰,
   I’ve surrendered myself to the law and await its verdict.

The Lord summons me — He calls us to celebrate;
   To the festival of the oppressed, His clarion calls us;
No occasion, this, to shed for me any tears!
   Put smiles on your faces, and bid me joyous farewells!

   A thousand farewells to you all, and
   To the world, a fond adieu from my soul.

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⁹ Bhairav: the awesome, terrible form of Lord Shiva.
¹⁰ A quote from the Mahātmā.