

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 '*Rāshetreeya Shāyār*' – 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.

છેલ્લો કટોરો

ઝવેરચંદ મેઘાણી

છેલ્લો કટોરો ઝેરનો આ : પી જજો, બાપુ!
સાગર પીનારા! અંજલિ નવ ઢોળજો, બાપુ!

અણખૂટ વિશ્વાસે વહ્યું જીવન તમારું:
ધૂતો-દગલબાજો થકી પડિયું પનારું:
શત્રુ તણે ખોળે ઢળી સુખથી સૂનારું:
આ આખરી ઓશીકડે શિર સોંપવું, બાપુ!
કાપે ભલે ગઈન! રિપુ-મન માપવું, બાપુ!

સુર-અસુરના આ નવયુગી ઉદધિ-વલોણે,
શી છે ગતાગમ રત્નના કામી જનોને?
તું વિના, શંભુ! કોણ પીશે ઝેર દોણે!
હૈયા લગી ગળવા ગરલ ઝટ જાઓ રે, બાપુ!
ઓ સૌમ્ય-રૌદ્ર! કરાલ-કોમળ! જાઓ રે, બાપુ!

કહેશે જગત: જોગી તણા શું જોગ ખૂટ્યા?
દરિયા ગયા શોષાઈ? શું ઘન-નીર ખૂટ્યાં?
શું આભ સૂરજ-ચંદ્રમાનાં તેલ ખૂટ્યાં?
દેખી અમારા દુઃખ નવ અટકી જજો, બાપુ!
સહિયું ઘણું, સહીશું વધુ : નવ થડકજો, બાપુ!

ચાબુક, જપ્તી, દંડ, ડંડા મારના,
જીવતાં કબ્રસ્તાન કારાગારનાં,
થોડાઘણા છંટકાવ ગોળીબારના -
એ તો બધાંય જરી ગયાં, કોઠે પડ્યાં, બાપુ!
ફૂલસમાં અમ હૈડાં તમે લોઢે ઘડ્યાં, બાપુ!

શું થયું — ત્યાંથી ઢીંગલું લાવો—ન લાવો!
બોસા દઈશું — ભલે ખાલી હાથ આવો!
રોપશું તારે કંઠ રસબસતી ભુજાઓ!
દુનિયા તણે મોંઘે જરી જઈ આવજો, બાપુ!
હમદર્દીના સંદેશડા દઈ આવજો, બાપુ!

જગ મારશે મે'ણાં: ન આવ્યો આત્મજ્ઞાની!
ના'વ્યો ગુમાની — પોલ પોતાની પિછાની!
જગપ્રેમી જોયો! દાઝ દુનિયાની ન જાણી!
આજાર માનવ-જાત આકુલ થઈ રહી, બાપુ!
તારી તબીબી કાજ એ તલખી રહી, બાપુ!

જા, બાપુ! માતા આખલાને નાથવાને,
જા વિશ્વહત્યા ઉપરે જળ છાંટવાને,
જા સાત સાગર પાર સેતુ બાંધવાને —
ધનઘોર વનની વાટને અજવાળતો, બાપુ!
વિકરાળ કેસરિયાળને પંપાળતો, બાપુ!

ચાલ્યો જજો! તુજ ભોમિયો ભગવાન છે, બાપુ!
છેલ્લો કટોરો ઝેરનો પી આવજે, બાપુ!

(કવિની નોંધ : 1931. ગાંધીજી ગોળમેજી પરિષદમાં જવા નીકળ્યા ત્યારે તેમને કરેલું સંબોધન. [સાપ્તાહિક] 'સૌરાષ્ટ્ર'નો પહેલો ફરમો ગુરુવારે ચડતો; ગીત છેલ્લા કલાકમાં જ રચાયું. ગાંધીજી શનિવારે તો ઊપડવાના હતા. અમૃતલાલ શેઠે આર્ટ-કાર્ડબોર્ડ પર પ્રતો કઢાવી રવાના કરી - સ્ટીમર પર ગાંધીજીને પહોંચતી કરવા.

મહાદેવ દેસાઈની નોંધ : કુડીબંધ તારો અને કાગળો આવેલા તે [આગબોટમાં] વાંચવા માંડ્યા. ... મેઘાણીનો 'છેલ્લો કટોરો' [વાંચીને] બાપુ કહે, 'મારી સ્થિતિનું આમાં વર્ણન થયું છે તે તદ્દન સાચું છે.' કાવ્ય વાંચતા તો જાણે મેઘાણીનો આત્મા ગાંધીજીના છેલ્લા પંદર દિવસનો સતત સાક્ષી રહ્યો હોય એમ પ્રતીત થાય છે... જાણે મેઘાણીજીએ ક્યાંક છુપાઈને -- અંધારપછેડો ઓઢીને - જોયા કીધું હોય એમ લાગે છે.)

Swallow the hemlock, o *Bāpu*¹!

Jhaverchand Meghani

Translation : Ashok 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 *Dānawas* (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!*

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માતા, તારો બેટડો આવે!

ઝવેરચંદ મેઘાણી

માતા! તારો બેટડો આવે :
આશાહીન એકલો આવે.
જો જો! મારો બેટડો આવે :
સંદેશાઓ ખેપિયા લાવે.

જવાળામુખી એને કાળજે રે, એની આંખમાં અમૃતધાર -
એવો કોઈ માનવી આવે :
ભેળાં કાળ-નોતરાં લાવે. - માતા.

સૂતો રે હોય તો જાગજે, સાયર! ઘેર આવે પ્રાણાધાર,
હૈયે તારે બાંધ હિંડોળા :
મોભી મારો ખાય બે ઝોલા. - માતા.

ધૂળરોળાણા એ મુખ માથે, વીરા, છાંટજે શીતળ છોળ,
પ્રેમેથી પાહુલિયા ધોજે!
આછે આછે વાયરે લ્હોજે! - માતા.

તારા જેવાં એના આતમાનાં ગેબી હિમ, અગાધ ઊંડાણ;
ત્યાંયે આજે આગ લાગી છે :
ધુંવાધાર તોપ દાગી છે. - માતા.

સાત સિંધુ, તમે સામટા રે - એની ઓલવાશે નહિ ઝાળ,
ઠાલાં નવ ઢોળશો પાણી!
ના ના એની વેદના નાની. - માતા.

કોટકોટાન હુતાશ જલે તારા હૈયાની માંહી, ઓ આભ!
એવી કોડ આપદા ધીકે,
છાની એની છાતડી નીચે. - માતા.

માનતાં'તા ફૂડાં માનવી રે એને ફોસલાવી લેવો સે'લ!

પારધીનાં પિંજરા ખાલી :
હંસો મારો નીકળ્યો હાલી. - માતા.

ઘોર અંધેરી એ રાતમાં રે બીજાં બાળ ઘોરાણાં તમામ;
આઠે પો'ર જાગતી આંખે
બેઠો તું તો દીવડે ઝાંખે. - માતા.

બૂડ્યા બીજા ઘેલડા રે માયામોહ કેરે પારાવાર,
બેટા! તું તો પોયણું નાનું :
ઊભું એક અણભીજાણું. - માતા.

પોતાના પ્રાણપિપાસુઓનાં તેં તો ખોળવે ખેલાવ્યાં બાળ;
ચૂમી ચૂમી છાતીએ ચાંપ્યાં :
બંધુતાના બોલડા આપ્યા. - માતા.

રોમે રોમે તારે દાંત ભીંસી ઝેરી કરડ્યા કાળુડા નાગ;
ડંખે ડંખે દૂધની ધારા
રેલી તારા દેહથી, પ્યારા! - માતા.

ચીર પાંચાળીનાં ખેંચવામાં નો'તા પાંડવોએ દીધા હાથ;
આજે અધિકાઈ મેં દેખી :
બેટાઓએ માતને પીંખી! - માતા.

ફૂડ પીધાં, હીણમાન પીધાં, પીધાં ઘોળી દગાવાળાં દૂધ;
કડકડતાં તેલ તેં પીધાં :
ગાળી ગાળી લોહ પણ પીધાં. - માતા.

ગોપવીને છાના ઘાવ કલેજાના રાખજે ખૂબ ખામોશ!
વાવાઝોડાં કાળનાં વાશે,
તે દી તારી વાટ જોવાશે. - માતા.

કંપશે સાત પાતાળ, આભી જાતા ઝીંકશે સાચર લોઢ;
ખંડે ખંડે બોળશે લાવા :
બૂકમ્પોના ગાજશે પાવા. - માતા.

‘ઘાઓ ઘાઓ, ઘેનુપાળ!’ તેવા તે ઈ ઊઠશે હાહાકાર,
શાદૂળા ને સાંઢ માતેલા
ઢૂંગે ઢૂંગે ભાગશે ભેળા. – માતા.

ભાઈ વિદેશીડા! વીનવું રે – એને રોકશો મા ઝાઝી વાર;
બેઠી હું તો ઈવડો બાળું :
ક્યારે એના ગાલ પંપાળું! – માતા.

તારી કમાઈ-ગુમાઈનો મારે માગવો નો‘ય હિસાબ;
બેટા! તારી ખાકની ઝોળી
માતા કેરે મન અમોલી. . – માતા.

(1931માં ગાંધીજી હતાશ હૈયે ગોળમેજીમાંથી પાછા વળતા હતા તે અરસામાં રચાયું.)

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 *Pāṇdavas* of yore, hung their heads in shame,
As the villain proceeded to strip *Pāṅchālī*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 *Pāṅchālī* : In the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, the five *Pāṇdava* brothers lost their wife *Pāṅchālī* in a game of dice, and then watched their evil cousin *Dushāshana* 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 Cowherd⁵, 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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⁵ The Divine Cowherd: Lord Krishna, who grew up as a cowherd, is called '*Dhenupāl*' - the Protector of the Cows.

છેલ્લી સલામ

ઝવેરચંદ મેઘાણી

સો સો રે સલામું મારાં ભાંડુડાંને કે'જો રે,
ઝાઝેરા જુહાર જગને દેજો હો...જી!
મળાયું ન તેને સહુને માફમાફ કે'જો, ને
રુદિયામાં રાખી અમને રે'જો હો...જી!
— સો સો રે સલામું.

ટીપેટીપે શોણિત મારાં તોળી તોળી આપું તોયે,
પૂરાં જેનાં પ્રાછત કદીયે જડશે ન જી —
એવા પાપ-દાવાનલમાં જલે છે જનેતા મારી,
દિલડાના ડુંગર સળગ્યા — ઠરશે ન જી!
— સો સો રે સલામું.

કીધાં ખાખ ખાંડવવનને પાંડુ તણા પુત્રે તે દી
નિરદોષી નાગાં લાખો ભુંજાણાં હો...જી:
આદુનાં નિવાસી એ તો આ રે આર્ય ભોમ કેરાં,
પૂર્વજ મારાને પાપે ઓરાણાં હો...જી!
— સો સો રે સલામું.

રઘુપતિ રામ મારા રુદાનો વિસામો — એણે
ઋષિઓને વચને ખાઘેલ ખોટ્યું હો...જી:
પ્રભુનામ ભજતો એણે પારાધી સંહારિયો રે
એનું ઘોર પાતક આજે ઊમટ્યું હો...જી!
— સો સો રે સલામું.

છેદ્યાં, બાબ્યાં, ગારદ કીધાં પૃથ્વીના પેટમાં, ને
અસૂરો કહીને કાઢ્યાં વનવાસ જી:
જીવતાંને કાજે જુદી નરકું બંધાવિયું, ને
સદાનાં નરાધમ રાખ્યાં દાસીદાસ જી.
— સો સો રે સલામું.

સમર્થોની સત્તા, સંતો, ધુતારાની ધૂતણબાજી,
ફૂડિયા ગુરુની કેં કેં કરામાત જી:એની તો
વણાવી ધીંગી ધરમધજાઓ, એને
ભાંડુ કેરે રગતે રંગી ભલી ભાત જી.
— સો સો રે સલામું.

એવી એવી ઝડીઓ મારાં સહોદરો ઝીલતાં, ને
ધરમધજા કેરે ક્યારે સિંચાણાં હો...જી:
રુદામાં શમાવી સરવે રુદંપિયાલા, વા'લાં
હરિ કેરા રથડા હેઠળ પિલાણાં હો...જી.
— સો સો રે સલામું.

રથના સારથીડા — સુણજો, સાધુ ને ગુસાંઈ સરવે,
કડાકા કરે છે રથની ધરીઓ હો...જી:
જુઓ જુઓ જુગનો ભેરવ ઊભો વાટ ખાળી આજે,
ભીતર તો નિહાળો: હરિ ક્યાં પળિયો હો ...જી.
— સો સો રે સલામું.

જુગનો મહારાજા આજે મહાકાળ જાગિયો, ને
ધરમ કેરા ધારણ-કાંટા માંડે હો...જી:
સતને ત્રાજવડે મારાં કલેજાં ચડાવિયાં મેં,
શીશ તો નમાવ્યું શાશનદંડે હો...જી.
— સો સો રે સલામું.

હરિ કેરાં તેડાં અમને — આવી છે વધામણી રે,
દલિતોને ઉત્સવ હાકલ પડી છે હો...જી;
હસતાં મુખડાંની અમને વિદાયું દિયો રે, વા'લાં!
રખે કોઈ રોકે નયણાં રડીને હો...જી!
— સો સો રે સલામું.

A Thousand Farewells

Jhaverchand Meghani

Translation: Ashok 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 afire⁶,
Roasting a million innocent *Nāgas* in that pyre,
Rightful dwellers of this conquered '*Āryan*' land,
They fell preys 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 hunter⁷, 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 purgatories⁸,
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.

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, slayed Shambuk, as he hung upside down and worshipped Lord Shiva, when a Brāhmin 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 *Bhairav*⁹ 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 *Mahātma*.