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**A Critique of Jhaverchand Meghani's Anthology of
Poetry '*Sindhudo*' in light of India's Freedom Movement**

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ABSTRACT

Jhaverchand Meghani who was not just an author and folklorist but a dynamic freedom fighter who actively participated in Independence Movement of India penned nine anthologies of poetry, out of which, Sindhudo was and has remained the most popular one. Present paper aims at reviewing the poems within the anthology which had a quick but long-lasting impact on the Gujarati audience which has not ceased even till date. This paper studies the thematic, linguistic and metrical aspects of the poems anthologized in Sindhudo. Basically, Sindhudo is a kind of musical raga which has invigorating effect on the mind. Jhaverchand Meghani has aptly named it since the poems of this collection vitalized the psyche of people and increased their gusto in political gatherings held during freedom movement of India.

Keywords: Jhaverchand Meghani, Sindhudo, Patriotism, Freedom Movement



Introduction:

Jhaverchand Meghani is a bright chapter in history of Gujarati Literature. Though he is chiefly remembered as a folklorist for remarkable and cherished most collection of folktales, folksongs amongst many other anthologies of folkloric items; the continuum of his contribution is much broader. He wrote novels (chiefly historical and social), dramas, short-stories, scholarly articles, book-reviews and not to forget poetry. Except drama, he championed all the genres he touched. His fame as a poet was at its peak during his life time only. The title of *Rashtriya Shayar* (National Poet) given to him by Mahatma Gandhi is discussed by Manubhai Pancholi. These words clarify his discrete place amid other poets of Gandhian era.

Mahatma Gandhi used words very wisely. Gandhiji claimed that not a single word would slip out my tongue unconsciously. What does it mean when he addressed Meghani as *Rashtriya Shayar*? The one who sings patriotic songs full of bravery? The one who writes march-songs or battle songs? If that is the case, then many poets of that age had sung patriotic songs to revoke Gujarat. But Gandhiji must not have thought it that way. He might be thinking that our nation is divided into two—educated and uneducated—the one who can connect these two classes is *Rashtriya Shayar*. The nation cannot become one till there is a wall between these two classes. Meghani's most ardent wish was to erase that discrimination...Mahatma Gandhi certainly realized this wish of Meghani and duly conferred the title of *Rashtriya Shayar* on him. (*Jani Shabad* 6)

Era in which *Sindhudo* was written:

"The author is a product of his or her time." This quotation is the most appropriate for Jhaverchand Meghani. His personality, as well as his ability to be creative, were shaped by the time period in which he lived and wrote. The 28 years that he spent actively writing and researching are considered to be the most essential in the history of the Indian independence cause. The whole Indian leadership was united in their opposition to British rule and their desire for an independent India. The fire had spread to practically every home, and everyone, young and old, male and female, wealthy and impoverished, was pitching in to help in any way they could. Mahatma Gandhi, a liberation champion who had returned from South Africa, had magically persuaded people to fight for their freedom using completely new weapons such as *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *Asahakar* (peaceful resistance) (Noncooperation). However, it is impossible to claim that every human being or every social class was actively involved in the freedom struggle. There were just a few people who cherished this servitude for its own benefits. They didn't care about freedom as long as their lives were filled with happiness and security. In India, this has resulted in the practice of caste discrimination. However, the problem of discrimination was not a new one at the time. Caste/class/race/religion related disputes, poverty, and gender inequality were already prevalent in India at the time of independence. The poor farmers and laborer were subjected to constant repression by rulers. Until 1945, the British government did everything it could to rule India. The voices of the people were barely audible. There was no freedom to voice any point of view that was in opposition to government policy. Prisons were crammed with Satyagraha volunteers and revolutionaries who had chosen the road of violence in order to free India from the British clutches. Meghani has been involved in the fight against societal evils from



his student days. Others turned their backs on him and his comrade because they had taken beetle leaves from untouchables. Meghani began to be engaged in the fields of literature, journalism, and the independence struggle during the third decade of the twentieth century. Jhaverchand Meghani can without a doubt be described as the "child of his generation." He was a poet who had a clear grasp of his responsibilities to society and the next generation of writers.

Poems of Sindhudo:

Sindhudo (1930) is one of nine compilations of poetry by Jhaverchand Meghani and it is one of the most important, not only because of its patriotic theme, but also because of the shockwave it caused in contemporary society. Thus, *Sindhudo* is one of the most important collection of the twentieth century. It was the first book of poetry in the Gujarati language to be prohibited and captured by the British government, and it is still the only one. Rallies and protests across Gujarat were reverberated by the music of *Mot na Kankugholan*, *Veer Jatindra na Sambharana*, and, of course, the most legendary *Chhelli Prarthana*, among other songs. Meghani definitely embodies the bard of the age as he sings the following song:

“Prepare! Prepare! The colours for the feast;

The feast of new colours are appearing from mist.

Prepare the colours for this event which is rare, O soldier!

The celebration named as death has come to our door.

Aspiring grooms have marched at pace, see glittering swords they bear;

Be happy and sing for them the foes are drowned in fear”. (Trivedi 124)

Meghani himself performed this song at a Dholera Satyagraha mass protest in support of the movement. His choice this time is the bardic metre known as *Gajagati* (lit. meaning: Elephant's Pace), into which he inserts simple Gujarati words that are filled with strong energy and capable of arousing the passion of everyone. *Bik Koni Maa Tane?* is a poem from this anthology in which Meghani addresses her motherland and implores her to erase all of her anxieties from the previous generation. This poem also features a fast-paced rhythm that has a striking resemblance to a bardic metre known as *nrach*. When he writes *Swatantrata ni Meethash*, he is speaking directly to the personification of 'liberty' as a person. The poem expresses the poet's, and every human being's, desire for liberty. The cadence of this poem is derived after an old Gujarati hymn. He says of the newly freed essence.

“Ask this to a slave one day

How his heart was dancing—



*When he got his freedom
And was told 'You are free'
Such an ecstatic joy was that
His eyes were joyously flowing and
Heart with tides of blissfulness". (Trivedi 48)*

The legendary Satyagraha battle at Bardoli, which was waged under the leadership of Vallabhbai Patel, did not escape the notice of the poet. Using a bardic metre, this time a metre preferred a lot by mediaeval bards to depict bravery, *Kundaliyo*, he draws an accurate comparison between the Satyagraha and a Yajna (a sacrificial ceremony) and says:

*"Where the wood is burning? In some distant woods afar
Who's calling us in sacrifice? Where's that pious altar?
The smoke of that pious pyre is touching clouds in the sky
All the homes of Bardoli are full of warrior's cry.
We, those standing at distant place, are thrilled with joy of war;
The pyre burning there is filling sky and densifying more". (Trivedi 109)*

Using the same metre, he composes the song *Taruno nu Manorajya* (Youth's Inner Mind), which, in contrast to the preceding poem, does not address a specific event but rather aims to evoke the feeling of youth in general. Written in the same metre as the previous poem, *Veer Jatindra Na Sambharana* is a mournful poem that is one of a kind. It is attributed to Jatindra Nath Das, a revolutionary who fasted for 72 days (64 according to a few sources) before passing away on September 13, 1929, when he was only 24 years old. The poet, drawing striking parallels with mythological heroes such as Bhishma, Dadhichi, and King Mayurdhwaja, urges people not to lament the loss of the courageous combatant, but rather to vengeance his death by giving one's own life in the process. Meghani himself refers to the poem as 'bragging' in the preface to one of his later works since the poem is extremely loud in its attitude and vocabulary. The following stanza from this poem he mentioned in particular:

*"All minute details are kept in the heart and we await,
When time will come we'll ask the answers from the cruel fate.*



We'll come for answer's quest.

With a flag held close to chest.

There will be a reddish flood,

Mother's flag we'll dye with blood". (Trivedi 119)

Another poem inside this book has a raucous tone to it that is comparable to this one. The poem, named *Gaao Balva na Gaan* (Sing the Songs of Revolt), is primarily directed to oppressed and impoverished individuals. The Marxist inclination is very prominently visible in all of the stanzas, as the poet appeals to all of the poor and tormented to overcome their suffering and band together in order to rebel against any subjugator or oppressor.

Zankhanā (Desire), on the other hand, is a poem that stands out from the rest of the book. A popular Gujarati folk song serves as the basis for the cadence of this poem, which mellows out the customary vigour and robustness of the subject matter. Throughout the poem, the poet communicates his visions and, within them, a vision of a prophet based on his own imagination; his interpretation of the *yugapurusha*. It is difficult to tell where the poem is going: between a quiet melancholy that arises from a weakened society and an understated but profound faith in the messiah who will assist in eliminating all of the shortcomings. The poem ends with this fervent request:

"These little tiny steps will not suffice for motherland

For want of her is uproar that tumultuously grand

Break this old and ruinous pillars!" (Trivedi 87)

Chhelli Prathana, which translates as "last prayer," is also the title of the final poem in this collection, which is also a historical poetry. Meghani says that he was influenced by a quotation from Irish rebel leader Terence MacSwiney when writing his song. The quote is "It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most, who will prevail". When Meghani was wrongfully charged and arrested for uttering a heinous speech, and when he was defended in court at Dhandhuka, he sung this poem as part of his defence. 'Saurashtra' newspaper stated on 03/05/1930 that when Meghani sung this poetry in courtroom after obtaining permission from Magistrate Mr Isani, the entire courtroom burst into tears with each word she sang. The entire mood of the poem portrays a fighter's unwavering faith in God's plan, despite the tragic circumstances in which he finds himself. After further investigation, it is discovered that the poem depicts the same devotee's unwavering desire to liberate the country at any cost, while maintaining a humble yet resolute attitude.



Confiscation of the Anthology and Circulation:

This anthology was seized by British government as mentioned earlier. But it was successful in reaching every heart and throat in Gujarat, thanks in part to a compatriot freedom fighter named Ratubhai Adani, who replicated all poems in his wonderful handwritings and then had 50,000 copies of each poem cyclostyled at Bhavnagar and distributed freely during the Dholera Satyagraha of 1930. Many of these poems were sung by enthusiastic youth in rallies and crowd-meetings. The words and cadence of these poems worked magic each time without failure to evoke the patriotic feeling and gusto amongst audience. The confiscation of the book by British Government was not without grave concern it seems!

Critics on Meghani:

Jhaverchand Meghani's poetry may be split into two primary categories: the first category includes songs that reflect the fervour of the time, and the second category includes songs that express the emotions of the natives. To cite the first class, there really is no other poet of his generation who has so eloquently and faithfully expressed the temperament of his day. When judging Meghani, his contemporary commentators have largely taken this type of poetry into consideration. In contrast, the other type, in which subjective and emotive depictions are presented, is mostly overlooked by both contemporary and subsequent reviewers. Tribhuvandas Luhar (Sundaram), a contemporary of Meghani contestably states:

His (Meghani's) imagination takes a flight but remains on a rather flattened surface. It does not contain the depth of a diver who picks pearls or the elevation of a mountaineer. However, he reverberated nationwide voice of change to the heart of people and that, of course, is his historical contribution. (Thakar 130)

Thus, critics of Gujarati literature do not consider him as a major poet but they have accredited him as one important historical poet. Dhirubhai Thakar, a noted historian of Gujarati literature writes:

Poetry of Meghani is important in a historical sense. The fresh colours and voices of the new age were delivered by him to the people. It was his specialty that the emotions of the people were received by him in his poetry and thus, fulfilled his duty as a cultured folk-poet. (Thakar 130-131)



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As can be seen, Meghani's active role in the Indian freedom movement, as well as Meghani's expertise in folklore, have always loomed large in the minds of critics when they are evaluating his literary works. His poetry has cadences borrowed from popular folk songs and hymns from the Saurashtra region, but his prosody extends beyond that. He composes poems in Sanskrit metres, free verse, and of course the bardic metres, which is something that is lacking in many current poets.

Conclusion:

Jhaverchand Meghani's *Sindhudo* definitely stirred the hearts and minds of the audience during freedom movement of India but its impact has not vanished yet even after so many years. Many of the poems carry the historical data of freedom movement in a very poetic way while some of them beseech the people of the nation to ponder and act about the issues of the nation. Most importantly, most of the poems carry a certain amount of poetic exquisiteness. The metrical understanding and its deployment by Jhaverchand Meghani, enrooted in his study of folk and bardic poetry, is uncontested by contemporary and succeeding poets.



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