

MY MASTER

Words, explanations and summary

Stanza I

Grub: wormlike larva of insects, especially of beetles

Kin: blood relation

Renunciation: denial or rejection of something, usually for moral or religious reasons

Lowliness: simplicity, modesty and plainness in character and attitude

Sage: a person with great wisdom that is gained from long experience

Yogic (adj.): of an ascetic

As far as Gandhi is concerned, there is no difference between native and foreign lands. He considers the whole world his home. All beings, therefore, are his blood relations. Both sentient and non-sentient creatures are related to him: plants, grass and larva are his kin. He is simple, humble, unpretentious and unassuming. But these qualities elevate him to great heights and make him victorious in his pursuits. He is a wise man and possesses the wisdom usually found only in ascetics.

Stanza II

Don: wear

Gem (verb): decorate something with gem

Smirch: become dirty or ugly

Mire: thick mud

Yonder: over there

Besmear: smear something with mud; make dirty

Serene: calm, placid

Stoical: someone who is not influenced by emotions

Stay: remain, continue

In this stanza Gandhi is compared to the sky. At times there are beautiful strings of stars in the sky; at others, the sky is overcast and as a result looks unattractive. But both these are passing phases and do not permanently affect the sky. Stars and clouds appear and disappear continuously. Nothing remains with the sky and nothing makes it dirty. It is just indifferent to such happenings. Gandhi is like this. He is calm and indifferent to material changes, whether they are good or bad.

Stanza III

Uninfested: not contaminated; pure and pristine

Foul: dirty, contaminated and unpleasant

Auspicious: marked by lucky signs or good omens and therefore indicating success

Treasure trove: a collection of valuable objects

Serpents: in many tales and myths, treasure troves are guarded by fierce serpents

Lustrous: bright and shining

Ominous: indicating that something bad is going to happen

Cast shadow: cause shadow

Now Gandhi is equated with a stream and a lamp (both being symbols of dynamism, creativity and life). He is a rare, deep and pure stream. He is a lamp that produces flames without smoke and thus indicates success. He is also equated with a treasure trove and moonlight. He is a treasure trove (a collection of valuable objects) with free access to all. There are neither serpents nor ghosts to prevent you. He is the bright and shining moonlight that illuminates everything indiscriminately. Moonlight is often associated with evil spirits and vampires. However, the moonlight of Gandhi does not cast ominous shadows. That is, he is pure and immaculate.

Stanza IV

Righteous: morally correct and justifiable

Drugs: medicines

Cure: heal; bring about recovery from a disease

Sacrifice: an offering to honor or appease a god, especially of a ritually slaughtered animal or human being.

Venerable: respected, revered, impressive

He fights for morally correct and justifiable causes without weapons. He teaches virtue but does not depend on books. Like an adept doctor, he cures diseases though he never uses medicines. Like a priest he performs sacrifices for the common good of humanity without shedding a single drop of blood. Because of all these, my master, Gandhi, is highly respectable.

Stanza V

Nonviolence: the principle of refraining from violence, especially as a means of protest

Vow: a serious promise

Deity: a god, goddess or a divine being

Armor: protective clothing of metal worn by soldiers

Blunt (verb): make something less sharp

For Gandhi, commitment to nonviolence is a lifelong ideal. The deity of peace has stayed with him for a long time. He used to say that the armor of nonviolence could blunt the sword of violence.

Stanza VI

Utterance: word, saying

Soulful: deeply emotional

Outpouring: expression of emotion in an uncontrolled way; a burst of emotion

Symphony: harmonious composition of many musical instruments

Tinkling: light metallic ringing sound

Bejeweled: decorated with jewels

Moksha: the final liberation from worldly desires and the cycle of rebirths

The speeches of Gandhi are highly inspiring. They are deeply emotional outbursts of his reflections on dharma. They are like a large orchestra performed by many musicians in the court of truth. They are the jingling of the bejeweled anklets of moksha.

Stanza VII

Target: aim, destination

Refine: remove impurities; make something more effective

Take in: accept

He is a warrior who does not wield weapons but conquers the world with love. For him the *om* is the bow and his own soul the arrow. The arrow is darted to the target of Brahman. He is adamant about his vow and meticulous in its implementation. So he is not just content with *om* which has been handed down from generation to generation. He does not utter the sound without understanding its full meaning and inner sense. He accepts only the real and best spirit of the word without attaching any importance to its ritualistic dimensions. In his unquenchable thirst for truth, he constantly refines and improves the *om* sound too.

Stanza VIII

Strategy: a carefully devised plan.

Sagacity: wisdom

Compassion: sympathy with a desire to help

Dauntless: impossible to frighten or discourage

Constancy: the quality of remaining faithful to a belief or ideology

The concluding stanza of the poem presents Gandhi as the embodiment of every virtue and quality. In order to see a person with all virtues rolled into him, go and see him; if it is impossible, read his biography.

Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each

1. What does the poet say about his master's kin?

A: All beings, whether sentient or not, are related to him: plants, grass and larva are his kin.

2. How does the poet portray Gandhi's ascetic detachment?

A: Gandhi is detached from material desires and is indifferent to vicissitudes of life, just like a staunch ascetic.

3. What does the poet say about Gandhiji's faith in nonviolence?

A: Gandhiji's faith in nonviolence is unwavering and lifelong. He used to say that the armor of nonviolence could blunt the sword of violence.

4. Bring out the comparison between Gandhiji and Harischandra.

A: Gandhiji has inherited the tradition of standing firm with truth in the face of any adversity like King Harischandra. He would never deviate into falsehood for personal gains.

Answer the following questions in about 100 words each

1. Comment on the metaphors used by the poet to reveal the purity of his master's mind.

Gandhi is compared to or equated with the sky, a pure stream, a pristine lamp, a treasure trove and the moonlight. The qualities of ascetic detachment, purity, creativity, values and enlightenment are expressed and accentuated through these metaphors. Just like the passing stars and cloud make the sky neither beautiful nor ugly, Gandhiji shows an ascetic detachment from the vicissitudes of life. He is a rare, deep and pure stream and a lamp that produces flames without smoke. Both are symbols of dynamism, creativity, purity and life. He is also equated with a treasure trove without serpents and ghosts to prevent us. He is the bright and shining moonlight that illuminates everything indiscriminately and does not cast ominous shadows.

2. What does the poet say about the impact of Gandhiji's utterances?

A: Gandhiji's utterances are inspiring outbursts of his reflections on dharma. They are like a large orchestra performed by many musicians in the court of truth and the jingling of the bejeweled anklets of *moksha*. He is a warrior who conquers the world with love. For him the *om* is the bow and his own soul the arrow. The arrow is darted to the target of Brahman. He is so adamant about his vow and meticulous in its implementation. So he is not just content with *om* which has been handed down from generation to generation. He does not utter the sound without understanding its full meaning and inner sense. He accepts only the real and best spirit of the word without attaching any importance to its ritualistic dimensions. In his unquenchable thirst for truth, Gandhiji constantly refines and improves the *om* sound too.

3. How does Gandhiji combine in himself the virtues of the great souls?

A: Gandhi is the embodiment of every virtue. The qualities of renunciation, righteousness, nonviolence, sagacity, compassion, truthfulness and constancy are rolled into him. He has the renunciation of Christ and possesses Lord Krishna's strategy in defense of Dharma. The ahimsa of the Buddha, the wisdom of Sri Sankara and the compassion of Ranti Deva also find a place in Gandhiji. In truthfulness he is on a par with Harischandra and has the dauntless constancy of Mohammed.

Answer the following questions in about 300 words each

1. Evaluate 'My Master' as a hymn to the Father of the Nation. Does the poet succeed in bringing to light the unique qualities of his master?

A: 'My Master', originally written by the late Malayalam poet Vallathol, is an emotionally vibrant hymn exalting Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation. His philosophy, worldview, strategies and qualities are vividly and emphatically portrayed through a string of effective metaphors. Gandhi is compared to the sky, a pure stream, a pristine lamp, a treasure trove and the moonlight. The qualities of ascetic detachment, purity, creativity, values and enlightenment are expressed and accentuated through these metaphors.

All beings, whether sentient or not, are related to him: plants, grass and larva are his kin. For Gandhi there is no difference between native and foreign lands. He is simple, humble, unpretentious and unassuming. But these qualities elevate him to great heights and make him victorious in his pursuits. He is a wise man and possesses the wisdom found only in ascetics. Just like the stars and clouds do not change the essential nature of sky, Gandhi is detached from material desires and is indifferent to vicissitudes of life.

Gandhi is an inexhaustible source of creativity, life, dynamism, purity and enlightenment. His simple life ensures there will be nothing to hinder anyone from approaching him. He fights morally correct and justifiable causes with nonviolence. He teaches virtues, cures diseases and performs sacrifices for the common good of humanity in unconventional and indigenous ways.

Gandhi's utterances are inspiring outbursts of his reflections on dharma. They are like a large orchestra performed by many musicians in the court of truth and the jingling of the bejeweled anklets of *moksha*.

He conquers the world with love. For him the *om* is the bow and his own soul the arrow. The arrow is darted to the target of Brahman. He is so adamant about his vow and meticulous in its implementation. He accepts only the real and best spirit of the word without attaching any importance to its ritualistic dimensions. In his unquenchable thirst for truth and perfection, he constantly refines and improves the *om* sound. Gandhi is the embodiment of every virtue. The qualities of renunciation, righteousness, nonviolence, sagacity, compassion, truthfulness and constancy are rolled into him.

2. How does the poet make an adept use of the figures of speech to depict an unforgettable picture of his master?

A: It is through the adept use of figures of speech, mainly simile and metaphor, that the poet succeeds in depicting a vivid and memorable picture of Gandhi in the poem 'My Master.' Gandhi is compared to or equated with the sky, a pure stream, a pristine lamp, a

treasure trove and the moonlight. The qualities of ascetic detachment, purity, creativity, values and enlightenment are expressed and accentuated through these metaphors.

At times there are beautiful chains of stars in the sky. At other times, the sky is full of dark clouds and looks unattractive. But both these are passing phases and do not alter the essential nature of the sky. Stars and clouds appear and disappear continuously. Nothing remains with the sky and nothing makes it dirty. It is just indifferent to such happenings. Gandhi is like this. He is calm and indifferent to material changes, whether they are good or bad.

Gandhi is equated with a stream and a lamp, both symbols of dynamism, creativity and life. He is a rare, deep and pure stream. He is a lamp that produces flames without smoke and thus indicates success. He is also equated with a treasure trove and moonlight. He is a treasure trove (a collection of valuable objects) with free access to all. Unlike in mythical tales, the trove is guarded neither by serpents nor ghosts. He is like the bright and shining moonlight that illuminates everything without distinguishing between the objects. The immaculate moonlight of Gandhi does not cast ominous shadows and is free from the traditional associations of evil spirits and vampires.

The poet uses images from archery to highlight his unwavering commitment to dharma. For him the *om* is the bow and his own soul the arrow. The arrow is darted to the target of Brahman. He is so adamant about his vow and meticulous in its implementation. He accepts only the real and best spirit of the word without attaching any importance to ritualistic dimensions. In his unquenchable thirst for truth and perfection, he constantly refines and improves the *om* sound.