Refrain, 2019

Do you remember yesteryears
When the truth was not a lie?
When fabricated fiction was
Distinguished from fact by

People just like you and me
Who cared not for tall rhetoric
Who ventured past the raw emotion
Of sentimental politics

And listened to the voices true
That rose above the din
Imploring us to think beyond
Our friends, acquaintances and kin.

Somewhere we have lost our way;
Today these voices cannot say
What occupies their rational minds,
Which are, for now, confined behind

High walls of feigned intellect,
Built of bricks of caste and sect,
Rooted in myopic thought
That lets the Other be forgot

And thrives on measured, shallow gain
Meant to ensure, once again,
That power does not propagate
To those who do not love to hate.

Can we just bystanders be,
And witness such atrocity
Against the few who dare to think
And express, with voice or ink,

Dissent, Debate, Diversity
The engines of democracy,
The pillars of plurality
The bane of insularity?

Friend, remember yesteryear
And know that freedom still can reign.
If we will, we can persevere
To weather this tempestuous rain

For clouds of narrow thought shall clear
And reason rise again;
Lessons learnt in the darkest times
Are seldom learnt in vain.

-Nissim Gore-Datar
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Poet’s Note: The title alludes to the fact that the poem is a poignant end-verse or refrain to the year 2019, a year in which we as a people often refrained from compassion and consideration for those who are different from us in some way or the other. It is also a warning that we should refrain from repeating the mistakes of the past, of which 2019 had plenty.