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### 3.3.3 Number of books and chapters in edited volumes/books published and papers published in national/international conference proceedings per teacher during last five years.

Sl. No.	Name of the Teacher/ Author	Title of the book/chapter published	Title of the Paper	Title of the proceedings of the conference	Name of the conference	National / International	Year of publication	ISBN/ISSN number of the proceeding	Name of the publisher
1	Dr.I.K.Mansuri	Dalit Writing in India	Reading of Castein Neerav Patel's Poetry	NA	NA	NA	2015	ISBN 97893830099481	Paradise Publishers, Jaipur
2	Dr.I.K.Mansuri	SamatanaSena niDr. Ambedakar	Bapu, Bapa ane Babasaheb: Rasta alag, laxyaek	NA	NA	NA	2015	ISBN 9789383815647	Editor: AtulkumarParmar
3	Dr.D.K.Patel	ADVANCED FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING	NA	NA	NA	NA	2016-17	ISBN : 978-9384432-23-2	Kumar Prakashan, Ahmedabad
4	Dr.D.K.Patel	FINANCIAL MARKETS	NA	NA	NA	NA	2016-17	ISBN : 978-9384432-31-7	Kumar Prakashan, Ahmedabad
5	Dr.D.K.Patel	TAXATION-1	NA	NA	NA	NA	2016-17	ISBN : 81-8416-083-6	Kumar Prakashan, Ahmedabad

6	Dr. P. G. Sherathiya	Economic Development of Gujarat (Since LastDecade)	Comparative Study of Farming and Production in Junagadh District	NA	NA	NA	First Edition 2018	ISBN: 978-93-86598-38-7	Mark Publishers, Jaipur - INDIA.
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7	Dr. PritiLavkesh Patel	BharatiyaNatyaSahitya: A Collection of Drama Based Articles	Gender Based Injustice in Mahesh Dattani's <i>TARA</i>	NA	NA	NA	18 <sup>th</sup> January, 2019	ISBN 978-93- 87988-46-0	Editor: Pri. Dr. K. L. Patel, Publisher: Green Flag Foundation, Sonasan,Gujarat( <a href="http://www.eternityzxy.com">www.eternityzxy.com</a> ) P. No: 165-169
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# *Dalit Writing in India*

## A Critical Evaluation

PARADISE

**Dalit Writing in India:  
A Critical Evaluation**

*Editor:* Atul Kumar Parmar



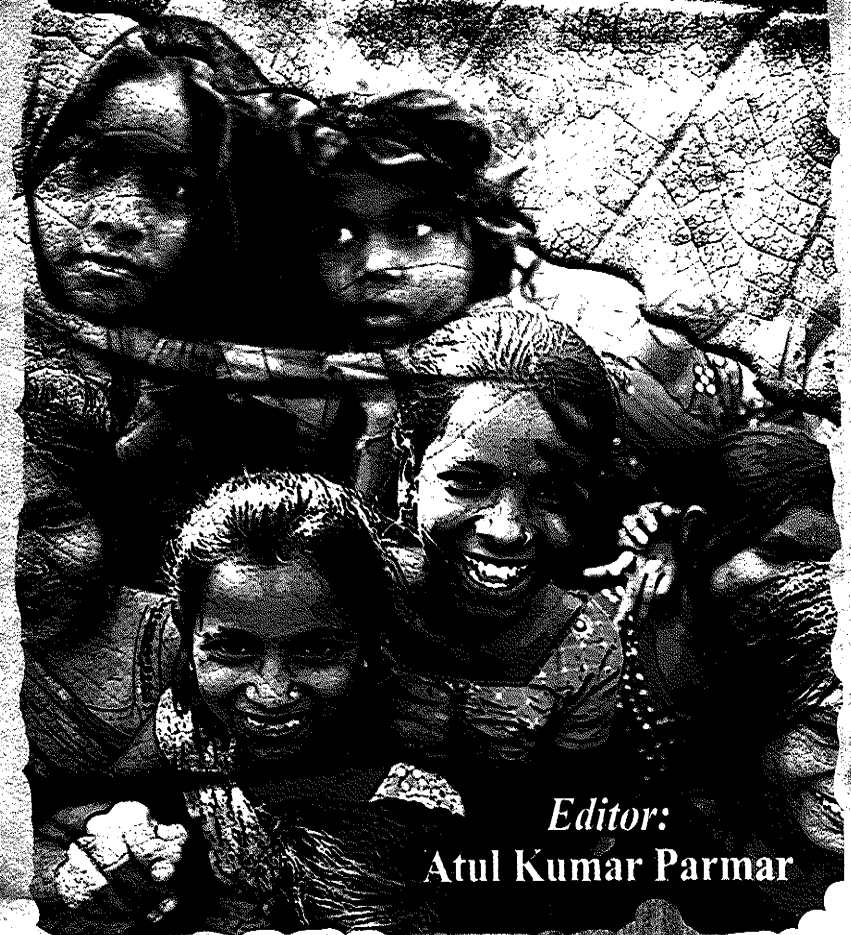
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*Editor:*  
**Atul Kumar Parmar**

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# **DALIT WRITING IN INDIA: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**

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**Atulkumar Parmar**



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*Dedicated To*  
**My wife Devika**  
&  
**My son Aditya**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*Dalit Writing in India: A Critical Evaluation* is a collection of research articles on Dalit writing in India. I hope these articles will be welcomed by the readers.

I am grateful to my research guide Pro. Deeptha Achar for her laborious efforts to cultivate my knowledge in the field of Dalit writing in India. She has not only guided me but also allowed me work freely in my research area. Because of her freedom I am able to learn an art of editing. To edit a book on Dalit writing in India is not an easy task but her efforts have helped me a lot in my learning process.

I am also thankful to Shri Pravin Gadhvi and Shri Harish Mangalam for their articles. Both of these stalwarts are quite busy in their literary activities but still they have contributed and made the book quite rich.

I am also thankful to Dr. Chandrakant Langare to spread the message in not Maharashtra but also in other parts of India and thus many research scholars have contributed their papers.

I am also thankful to all the other contributors for their valuable literary support whose articles are also equally important for this book.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the people who mean world to me. I owe and respectfully offer my thanks to my noble parents for their constant moral support and mellifluous love which helped me to achieve success in every sphere of life.

At the end I would like express appreciation to my beloved wife Devika and son Aditya who have always supported me.

I express my gratitude to my publisher Paradise Publishers, Jaipur for publishing *Dalit Writing in India: A Critical Evaluation*.

I am hopeful that these articles will boost the research as well as critical evaluation of Dalit writing in India.

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Atulkumar Parmar  
(Death Anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar)  
Gujarat Vidyapith, Randheja, Gandhinagar,  
Gujarat, India.

## PREFACE

Dalit Literature is primarily a literature of protest against the age old oppression and humiliation that was suffered by the Dalits in India. Literature is used as a weapon to come out from casteist agony and sufferings. If we talk of the Dalit writing in India, it began to sprout in Maharashtra but in a very short time the flames of Dalit literature spread to other parts of the country.

*Dalit Writing in India: A Critical Evaluation* talks about Dalit literature in India and how it is received by the society. There are 15 articles and 10 of these articles talk about Gujarati Dalit writing. Three of them talk about Marathi Dalit literature while two articles give an overview of Kannada Dalit writing.

Pravin Gadhvi's article "Gujarati Dalit Literature – An Overview" talks about the beginning and development of Gujarati Dalit Literature. He has charted out how Gujarati Dalit literature carved out its path and struggled to reach its present position. He has also pointed out the limitations of Gujarati Dalit literature and thus he has tried to improve the Gujarati Dalit literature.

Harish Mangalam's article "The Genesis of Gujarati Dalit Literature: A Different Perspective" gives a different historical perspective of the beginning of Gujarati Dalit literature. He has divided Gujarati Dalit literature into three phases and talked about the development of Gujarati Dalit literature in each phase. He has talked about Gujarati Dalit literature written in all the genres.

Atulkumar Parmar's article "Dalit World as Depicted in Gujarati and Marathi Dalit Poetry" presents a comparative study of Gujarati and Marathi Dalit poetry. He has shown how the life of Dalit is same in both the state through poetry. Dalit writing is a new sunrise in the Indian literary world and nobody can stop the sunrise.

Iliyas Mansuri's "Reading of Caste in Neerav Patel's Poetry" illustrates how caste plays an important role in the life of an Indian. Especially for Dalit caste is like a curse which does not allow him/her to develop. Caste is an overwhelming hindrance which is almost impossible to cross. Iliyas Mansuri has shown through Neerav Patel's poetry how bizarre is the world of a Dalit because of his caste.

M.B Gaijan's article "Harish Mangalam's *The Light of Darkness: A Microscopic Vision of Truth*" talks about the social milieu of the Dalits as

presented in the short story collection *The Light of Darkness* by Harish Mangalam. He has talked about all the short stories in the collection and thus tried to explain Mangalam's creative canvas. The problems faced by the Dalits are very well captured by Mangalam in his short stories.

Madhukant Macwan's article "Voice of Voiceless: A Study of the Anguish of Characters in the Works of Mulk Raj Anand, Uma Shankar Joshi and Joseph Macwan" talks about anguish of Dalits. In order to present his ideas the researcher has chosen two upper caste writers and a Christian but Dalit writer. Through their creative work he has shown how the upper caste writers failed to capture the agony of the Dalits of being a Dalit while a non-Hindu but Dalit is able to capture the agony very easily. Mulk Raj Anand and Uma Shankar Joshi are stalwarts in their field still Dalit's world is miles away from their imagination.

B.M. Vaghela's "Dalit Literature and Its Impact on Society" talks about impact of Dalit literature on Indian society. He has talked about the beginning and development of Dalit writing in India and how it is associated with the Dalit movement also. Dalit writing exposes the hypocritical nature of the Indian society and thus it is not well received by the society.

Vipulkumar Solanki's "Dalit Literature: Alternative Aesthetic with Social Commitment" presents aesthetic importance of the Dalit literature and how does it differ from mainstream literature. With the reading of Arjun Dangle and Sharan Kumar Limbale he has successfully presented the goal and aim of Dalit literature is not to entertain but to change unequal world into an equal for all.

Kirit Talati's "Dalit Identity as Presented in B. Kesharshivam's autobiography *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth*" deals the autobiography of B. Kesharshivam. In this paper, the researcher has critically evaluated *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth* and presented Dalit identity. Though the writer is a class-1 officer but he has to face all the odds in his life as faced by an illiterate Dalit in a village. Thus, educational or economic development does not bring any kind of social change in the life of a Dalit. Atulkumar Parmar's "Gujarati Dalit Female Protagonist: A Study of *Shelbala I.A.S.*" talks about a Dalit female protagonist who climbs the ladder of education and achieves a position of an I.A.S. officer but still she is a Dalit for the upper caste people.

Dr. P. S. Subrahmanya Bhat's "Depiction of Dalit Life in Shivaram Karanth's *Choma's Drum*" talks about a Dalit life in Karnataka through Shivaram Karanth's *Choma's Drum*. Through *Choma's Drum* the novelist attempts to depict the actual life of a Dalit community during the pre-independent India. It has been considered as the first Kannada Dalith novel to provide an account of the

life of Dalith community by a non-Dalit writer. It has been compared to Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* while reading *Choma's Drum* one is reminded of Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*, which too was published in 1930s.

S. B. Biradar's "Caste Radicalism in Kannada Revolt and Dalit Fiction" talks about the social concerns shown by Kannada writers through their revolt literature both by Dalits and non-Dalits. Baragur Ramachandrappa, Mullur Nagaraj, M. N. Javaraih, Aravind Malagatti, and Devnur Mahadev are the writers discussed by the researcher. He has also talked about the contribution of women writers like Geeta Nagbhushan, Rekharani, B. T. Lalitanayak and Veena Shanteshwar who have presented their views on burning issues related to contemporary social conditions.

Dr. Charu C. Mishra and Mani Ram Banjare's "Narratives of Dalit Suffering and Resistance in Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan*" deals with the Dalit women's world. Through this article the writers have portrayed the conditions of a subhuman existence of an entire Mahar community, shamelessly exploited by the upper castes, extremely marginalized and reduced to the status of beasts of burden.

Dr. Dipti H. Mehta's "Protest of Social Group and Class in Annabhau Sathe's *Fakira* And Baburao Bagul's *Jeehva Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti*" is a comparative study of a novel and short story collection. The works of Baburao Bagul and Annabhau Sathe reflects that Ambedkarism and Marxism both the ideologies reflect social inequalities going in the society and insists on emancipation and freedom.

Dr. Chandrakant A. Langare's "Re-Visiting the Issues of Gender and Caste Discrimination in Indian Dalit Autobiographies" talks about Indian Dalit life through the genre of autobiography. Both Dalit men's and women's autobiographies have emerged as an epitome of protest and rebel and gathered wider and global critical acclaim for their proactive writing. They can be referred to as epitomes of protest and rebel and gathered a wider critical acclaim for their proactive writing.

I have just completed my research on Gujarati Dalit writing and thus it has provoked me to write more on Gujarati Dalit writing. Thus, through this collection of research articles *Dalit Writing in India: A Critical Evaluation* I have tried to accelerate the discussion of Dalit literature across India. I hope this collection will help to all the research scholars who have chosen Dalit writing for their research.

Atulkumar Parmar  
Jai Bhim.  
Randheja, Gandhinagar.1

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## INTRODUCTION

Dalit Literature is primarily a literature of protest against the age old oppression and humiliation that was suffered by the Dalits in India. Literature is used as a weapon to come out from casteist agony and sufferings. If we talk of the Dalit writing in India, it began to sprout in Maharashtra but in a very short time the flames of Dalit literature spread to other parts of the country.

Dalit writing in India has served two important functions for the Dalits. First, it has documented their emotions and feelings and secondly it has mobilized the Dalit consciousness. The use of literature as a tool has gained pace after 1970 as a means to respond to the violent actions of the upper castes. Through literature the Dalits have tried to find answers of the following questions: How does the concept of the "other" operate in the context of Dalits in the Indian society? What are the different ways in which the Dalits have been conceived of as subhuman? How the trope of animal/beast has been important in this conception. Is Dalit literature in India able to shape the Dalit consciousness? Is Dalit literature in India able to reshape the upper caste psyche against their oppressive and exploitative systems? I have also examined how an experience works as a text for a Dalit writer and its success in formulating Dalit assertion of their identity through narrative.

Dalit consciousness in Gujarat first stirred in 1975 with atrocities against Dalits and it gained expression in Dalit literature. Neerav Patel and Harish Mangalam, both Gujarati Dalit literary stalwarts, had opined that Gujarati Dalit literature received its momentum from the socio-political actions of the Dalits of Maharashtra. In Maharashtra Dalits had started to pen down their experiences of painful life, the Dalit writers of Gujarat also started to present the oppressive society of Gujarat. In 1975, Dalit Panthers' Gujarat unit had started *Akrosh* and this was the new beginning for the young and educated Dalit writers. In Maharashtra the Dalit intellectuals namely Baburao Bagul, Arjun Dangle, Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, Dr. M.N.Wankhede and many



others stressed on the cultural core of the Dalit existence i.e. on values and norms, which deeply influenced and governed the mindset of the people. Baburao Bagul reflected a glimpse of such thinking that is quoted by Daya Pawar,

Even if democracy has been placed over government power, even if Manu has been thrown into darkness, he did not die. He is living today in books, in holy scripture, in temple after temple. He lives in mind after mind. The structure of society he created is what we have today. He is so great that society's arrangements are under his control. And only his loving people are at the center of power. So in India at this time there are two worlds, two powers, two life traditions, two scriptures. He who wants victory, he who wants influence, must take a role in determining the future. We must bring our role to completion with literature and art. (22-4)

In the light of the above statement, I could say that it is only through literature and other forms of art Dalits could defeat Manu; defeating not by destroying Manu's ideology but through creation of a parallel Dalit world that contested caste claims. Not only untouchability but Dalits also faced a variety of other equally demeaning situations like poverty, misery, hunger, starvation, homelessness, economic exploitation, sexual abuse, and physical torture. Bagul directed his attention to the hollowness and infirmities of the social and economic system. S.P. Punalekar quoted Baburao Bagul in his article "Dalit Literature and Dalit Identity" where he opined,

The question of identity is embedded in the social (economic) and cultural matrix and cannot be countered by paying exclusive attention to one at the cost of other. Both the socio-economic and cultural issues must be confronted together with unified struggle and on the basis of solidarity of all oppressed classes. He considered Dalit literature as a potent medium of raising this suppressed consciousness for freedom and liberation, and for self-identity and humanism. (2001, 235-6)

Thus, Dalit literature is a creative and constructive way to overcome socio-economic obstacles through mass awakening and raising consciousness. There is an appeal in Dalit writings to become conscious of rights and demands. Dalit writers want Dalits to become brave, shed their diffidence and inferiority complex. They want them to realize the duplicity and hollowness of the ruling ideas of hegemonic classes including Brahmins and their cultural stratagems.

Sharankumar Limbale defines Dalit literature in his book thus,

...precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief. Every human being must find liberty, honour, security, and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society. These values are now being articulated in a particular kind of literature – its name being Dalit literature. Recognizing the centrality of the human being, this literature is thoroughly saturated with humanity's joys and sorrows. It regards human beings as supreme, and leads them towards total revolution. (30)

Manishi Jani has also expressed his views on the origin and development of Gujarati Dalit literature. In his view, "A Dalit writer must be in a position to give answer of the following questions that are always raised by mainstream writers. These two questions are: (i) what is the aim of the Dalit literature. (Why and for whom does the Dalit literature stand for?), and (ii) How does it differ from mainstream literature? What is the standard of the Dalit literature?" (1989, 157)

Thus, based on Baburao Bagul's, Sharan Kumar Limbale's and Manishi Jani's idea of Dalit literature one could easily perceive that Dalit literature is deeply concerned with identity formation, self-confidence and self-worth of marginalized sections of society. Most of their creative imagination is structured around these premises. They propose to rebuild society on values, which promote honor and dignity, justice and equity. It is in this respect that there is a difference between Dalit writers and other writers. The difference is not only in ideas but also in experience, content, subject matter, style, and language. The reason for this is that there is a great difference in the life and characters they are writing about. That is why they have thrown off the values, principles, purpose and aesthetic criteria of middle-class writers and critics. Eleanor Zelliot has outlined Dalit literature in her essay "Dalit Sahitya: The Historical Background" thus, "new language, new experiences, new sources of poetic inspiration, and new entrants into a field previously dominated by high castes – these are all non-controversial accomplishments of Dalit Sahitya (18)."

Because of anti-reservation agitation of 1981 and 1985, the crystallization of the upper castes and the Dalits has become more distinct. The small section of the educated Dalits has examined the role of the upper castes as well as the government. This section has been unsatisfied with the attitude of the upper castes and the government. It has concluded that this situation would change and society that is more equitable could be established with the help of Dalit literature. Thus, the two anti-reservation agitations accelerated the pace of Dalit writing in Gujarat.



However, Gujarati mainstream literature was not ready to accept the Dalit literary point of view. The same is the case of Marathi and other regional languages of India, which led Sharankumar Limbale to say in his book, "Indian literary history and theory as well as the teaching of Indian literatures are spectacularly silent about Dalit literature. Yet, Dalit cultural and critical productions make a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture, and literature (1)."

As I have mentioned earlier, Dalit literature in India has received step-fatherly treatment by mainstream or canonical literature. The binary opposition is essentially between 'Dalitism' and 'Brahmanism' and is even more pronounced in Gujarat as I have discussed in the first section. In order to understand the above-mentioned binary it is very essential to have an overview of Gujarati *lalit kala* i.e. mainstream literature (having derived the name from its obsession with the 'beautiful').

The medieval Gujarati literature was pre-dominantly occupied with notions of 'purity', 'pleasure' and 'aesthetic', which had been grown out of the legacy of Sanskrit literature. Writers in this age were chiefly saints (Bhakti poets) who wrote poetry on devotional and philosophical themes. Like all devotional literature, the literature of this phase was God-centric. Western education, ideas, and missionary activities led to a reformist attitude in the writers of the Sudharak Yuga or Age of Reformation. Social evils such as the practice of sati, child-marriage, female infanticide, superstitions were attacked and widow-remarriages, education of the girl-child, etc. were applauded in the literature of this period. Here were writers who were reformers, who used social, mythological, and historical themes in poetry, drama, and fiction with the sole motive to circulate reformist ideas. Durgaram Mehta, Dalapat Ram, Naval Ram, Manilal N. Dwivedi, Goverdhanram Tripathi, Ichharam Desai and D.B. Ambalal Desai were the leading literary figures of this age. The early writing of Narmadashankar who was popularly known as Narmad was a passionate crusader for reform. His poem entitled *The Degradation of the Hindus* described the fallen state of the Hindus who were a great nation. Narmad opined in this poem that the caste-hierarchy was one of the causes of the fall of the Hindus.

The Pandit Yuga or Age of Scholars, the counterpart of the Victorian age, followed the age of reform. In this period, scholar writers whose recipient readers were highly educated and cultured wrote literature. Themes of social reform were pushed aside to make way for lofty themes of love, nature and divinity (satyam, shivam, sundaram). However, we did not have in this age particularly noticeable protest against the evil of untouchability with the exception of Ramanbhai Nilkanth who criticized the scourge of untouchability, casteism, etc.

The age of Gandhi that roughly comprised the period from 1920 to 1960 is dominated by Gandhian ideology. Addressing the 12<sup>th</sup> convention of *Gujarati Sahitya Parishad* in 1936 Gandhi who was also the president of *Gujarati Sahitya*

*Parishad* said, "I tell our writers that instead of writing for the people of cities; let us start writing for our dumb population. I am the self-appointed representative of this dumb population. On behalf of them I say, enter that sphere with enthusiasm (1936, 2)." The underprivileged and deprived common person occupied centre-stage in the literature of this period. Gandhi denounced literature created for entertainment. It was the beauty of truth that was sacred to him. Strong and non-violent nationalism, love of Hinduism and pacifist dreams of realizing ultimately the whole humanity as one single fraternity appeared in Gujarati literature.

In the Anu-Gandhi Yuga (Post Gandhian Age) i.e. after 1960, Modernism gradually consolidated its presence on mainstream Gujarati writings. As a result, traditional concepts of literature changed. The writers of this age did not write in the traditional meter of prosody. They preferred rhythmic prose instead. The writers of this age ignored society and its problems. They started to follow western style of writing, which had no symbiotic relationship with Gujarat and its society. The literature of this period had created a literary vacuum in which one can find lapse of treatment of Gujarati life of which caste is an important parameter. Gandhian influence on the mainstream Gujarati literature gradually lost its grip.

Thus, based on the above overview one could easily say that the Brahmin writers dominate mainstream literature. It is against this backdrop of Gujarati mainstream literature was and still considered central/mainstream, great/aesthetic, while the Dalit literature was and still considered marginal/peripheral, little/unaesthetic. Thus, this vicious situation led Dalit literature to define itself as being essentially different in nature, scope, implications, and direction.

The Dalit literature which was and still swimming against the current received composite responses from mainstream writers. Some believed that Dalit literature should be appraised as literature and not be worshipped simply because Dalits write it. In their view, the criticism of Dalit literature should draw on eternal values of literature while some felt that there should be different standards for the evaluation of Dalit literature.

It is through Dalit literature, their very own literature that the Dalits have found a rightful place and authentic voice in the literature and history of Gujarat. One of the characteristics of the Gujarati Dalit literature as stated by Harish Mangalam,

Dalit literature is a movement to arrange the social order. In his views human values change according to the time and thus the Dalit literature which keeps 'Human' as a centre and to understand it one has to understand the Dalit society and its various facts. Thus, one has to understand the meaning of two words 'Anger' and 'Movement' not just as an awakening of the age-old sufferers and the

contempt against the exploiters. Movement is also not the frequent impatient violent street struggles but it is a trembling agitation which takes place in the heart of the people of the Dalit society and thus to awaken the Dalits. It is not fight of swords and bullets but it is a revolution of thought and thus to bring complete change in the thinking patterns. This is the aim of Dalit literature. (1987, 198-99)

Thus, literature as an irresistible driving force for the social upliftment movement and thus it is inevitable.

The editor of the *Lokpadkar* has also noted some of the characteristic features of the Gujarati Dalit literature in his editorial article that,

The body of the Dalit literature is constructed through five basic elements. First, it is against religious factionalism, fanaticism and Varna Vyavastha thus it is secular. Second, it is a literature for the establishment of new values thus, it is progressive. Third, it destructs what is rotten and worn out and investigates thoroughly literary concepts thus it is radical. Fourth, it is a promoter of the scientific attitude thus it is rational, and fifth it yearns for revolution and thus it is revolutionary. (1)

Harish Mangalam has quoted Surendra Doshi who opined, "One will not find even he will search for it very hard an equal of the blindness and insensibility of the so-called intellectual, sovereign, great poet, pundit, philosopher, saint and sect of the upper caste people. Thus, Dalit literature in Gujarati was born as a reaction to such upper caste attitude for the Dalits." (1987, 197)

Harish Mangalam has talked about the allegations raised against Dalit literature in the same article such as "Dalit poetry or short story did not have any form but there is only rebuke (199)." The editors of non-Dalit literary magazines have considered Dalit literature as a reactionary literature and thus ignored it totally. It has become difficult for Gujarati Dalit literature to acquire acceptance of mainstream, which led Mangal Rathod to say,

Our Gujarati writers are pretentious. Not only this, most of our editors are afraid of any revolutionary creation and give excuses of different taste to hide their cowardice of not able to publish it." This is the pity of Gujarati literature but the Dalit writers have to continue their work. They have to extend the spread of the Dalit literature through creation of mediums. As Ambedkar has rightly pointed out "Do not forget that in our country there is a huge world of neglected and Dalits. You have to understand their sorrow, pain and to make their life prosperous you

have to work diligently. There lies true humanity. This is possible only when an egalitarian society will be constructed in our country. (1)

Dalpat Chauhan has criticized mainstream literary writers for their castiest as well as capitalist attitude

Dalits are marginalized in Gujarati mainstream literature as they are in mainstream society. The Second World War did not move the mainstream literary writers. There was some impact of Gandhi on their literary output but it was set out with his death. They were silent during the Maha-Gujarat Aandolan, 1962, 1965 and 1971 Indian wars with Pakistan and China, 1969 communal riots in Ahmedabad and 1974 Navnirman Aandolan. However, when emergency was imposed then all these mainstream writers' heart cried a lot because their leaders were imprisoned which they could not bear. During the 1981 and 1985 anti-reservation agitations, they have again kept silence as usual. This shows how the mainstream writers were also castiest as well as capitalist in their attitude. It is natural that the exposure of the ugly side of society in Dalit literature is not well received. Why, he asks, should not the mutual hatred that the Savarnas and Dalits share surface in literature? Why should the Dalits not pay Savarnas in their own coin, if not with weapons, at least with words? His most attention catching statement is that most critics are not well informed about the ground reality of the Dalit community and rural society. (2008, 5)

Dalit society is the subject matter of the Dalit literature. Dalit literature portrays the pain and agony, ambitions and wishes, lifestyle, human nature, language or speech and social consciousness of the Dalits. The reactionary action as one finds in the Dalit literature against the injustice is constructed in revolution. From the quotation above, we can say that in the early phase of Gujarati Dalit writing the central objective was to rebel against the traditions, values, religion, culture, and social structure responsible for the slavery of the Dalits and to extirpate all these inhuman factors.

Dalit literature does not only provoke or instigate writers to destroy the imbalanced and inhuman society but it also appeals for the creation of an egalitarian society. It is not that the mainstream writers are not aware about the imbalanced social structure and exploitation of this section of the society. However, when it is not reflected one could say ignored in their writings then it is the duty of the exploited section itself to engage these issues. In addition, if this engagement is called a revolt then this kind of revolt should be welcomed. To portray or describe a Dalit life, which do they not derive but a

kind of an imposition on them by the upper castes, will lead the non-Dalit reader to become more conscious about the imbalance and inhuman behaviour of the upper castes towards the Dalits. Thus, this literature will inspire the non-Dalit reader to be such a human being who believes in equality, fraternity, and liberty. All the Dalit writers appear to achieve this goal only. Gujarati Dalit literature has in fact the upper castes enjoy such sadistic pleasure as they believe that it is their birthright to have dominance over someone and thus to rule over them. Because of such prejudiced society, there are invisible walls between different castes and these walls are tight. To break these invisible tight walls one should have a composed commitment. Neerav Patel in his article has also outlined principles of Dalit literature in Gujarati. In his views,

The basic principle of Dalit literature is "commitment"—complete, matured and boundless commitment is the precondition of the Dalit literature. Only an honest and fearless literary writer could be a committed writer. In his views, the second important principle is proper ideology. Proper ideology means to prohibit and oppose the exploitative and oppressive ideology and the goal of this ideology is to develop just, humane and equitable social structure. Compassion, righteous indignation and rebuke, Dalit history and Dalit folk literature, Dalit life and struggle for Dalit identity are the basic constituent components of the Dalit Sahitya. (1989, 152)

Before producing, a piece of writing a Dalit writer should acquire the composed commitment, be ideologically strong, and firm. The ideology is derived from the life of Phule and Ambedkar who believed to have an egalitarian society. Many times the ideological principles of Dalit literature are not conveyed as they are. However, during the writing process the writer becomes conscious about the ideology, which helps him out in the further literary output. In my view, if Dalit writer can present a Dalit life that rebel against the exploitation and appeals for human liberation then he/she will give proper justice to the concept of Dalit literature. Manishi Jani has pointed out in his article that "the important work of the Dalit literature is to identify, to carve and to expose the Brahminical ideology which have given them disrespect and slavery (160)." He has also suggested that Dalit writers should not only talk about the past history which presents the atrocities faced but they should also strive to change the present which tries to protect Brahminical ideology. He has cited an example of *Saarth Jodani Kosh* for Gujarati in which the Dalits as well as Shudras are presented quite obnoxiously. In Manishi Jani's view, Dalit literature has to create his own dictionary in parallel to the established literature so that they can advise the reader to refer it for the correct meaning of the word in the Dalit context. Thus, it will construct the readers psyche not as per the upper caste writer's ideology but as per the

Dalit writers' who want to have an egalitarian society. Dalpat Chauhan has accepted this call and has compiled Dalit vocabulary in a dictionary form as *Tal Ni Boli* in 2009, which contains around 8000 Dalit words.

B.N.Vankar has also outlined certain characteristics of Gujarati Dalit literature in his book *Pratyayan*. Harish Mangalam has outlined mainly the three aspects of the Gujarati Dalit literature among others in his article. They are: "(i) Rejection of superstitious caste system, inhumanity, injustice and oppression, (ii) Protest against the factors that come in the way of human welfare, and (iii) Revolt against caste discrimination." (1996, 59)

Every literary form has its specific characteristics and it can be evaluated on its basis. Dalit short stories, novels and poetry have their own peculiarities, yet Dalit literature has adapted to all new tides in literature, which occur with the passage of time. Dalit writers of fiction are well acquainted with such changes and have made conscious attempts to accommodate them in their works; weaving together the traditional and the modern; Dalit writers have written non-Dalit fiction too. The Dalit writer Mohan Parmar in his essay describes the basic characteristics of Dalit fiction. They are: "(i) Dalit life, (ii) Expression of the basic problems of Dalits in context of the thematic content, (iii) Speech and behaviour patterns as well as customs of Dalit characters, and (iv) Dalit sensibility and contextual meaning of the entire work (2001, 9)."

Out of these four characteristics, the use of Dalit speech is very important as well as distinct. The Dalit writers have deliberately used it. The use of Dalit dialect serves two purposes. First is to create an alternate voice on the one hand, and second to be heard as the spokespersons of the community. There may be millions of Dalits who want to articulate their lives but they cannot because of lack of literacy, circumstances, etc. Native dialects are an inherent part of the identity of the Dalits and they choose to articulate their story in their own language. Dalit dialects lend themselves to aesthetic treatment.

Some of the mainstream critics tried to evaluate Dalit literature on the ground of aesthetics. They have taken the aesthetic point of view, stressed on the issue of form, style, and have tried to show the meanness of the individual and the meaninglessness of life. The reason for this is that our writers have taken their inspiration more from foreign sources and not from the Indian. They have imitated the meaninglessness and despair brought about in the western life by industrialization, mechanization and the two World Wars. They have not realized that the problems in our social life have not come out of industrialization and mechanization. Therefore, the Dalit writers have rejected tradition as well as norms of mainstream aesthetics, and attempted to develop a separate tradition as well as norms of aesthetics of their own because they have been inspired by the social inadequacies of our own society.

Mainstream literary critics did not consider Dalit literature as literature because they did not find artistic feature—an intellectual freedom—in Dalit literature. The question of intellectual freedom was originated in the concept of art for art's sake. The idea of art for art's sake first developed out of Hegel's

philosophy and later out of Croche's idea that art is autonomous. As a result, art was divorced from life. Art was severed from the society also. Beauty became the only aim while form and style became of paramount importance in which content had no importance. Suresh Joshi was the leading figure in Gujarati literature who worshipped the concept of art for art sake. Jayant Kothari presented Suresh Joshi's views on literature in his book,

- (i) In literature or art we do not understand the feeling but the form of the feeling. (ii) The generalization of the object should not take place but it should be absorbed in the art.
- (iii) It is desired while flaming a fire that -ghee, wick etc- the material which are used to have a flame are additional in the same way it is also desired that the material of the art should also remain additional. (62-3)

These norms led the Gujarati literary writers to believe that the writer writes for himself. As a result, there developed in the literary world small, mutual admiration circles of writers and poets who wrote for themselves. Thus, this concept had made the writers devoid of social consciousness, which is not only the responsibility of a writer, but also it is his duty. M. N. Wankhede quoted Jean-Paul Sartre in his speech who had explained about the social responsibility of the writer: "Writing is not simply writing, it is an act, and in man's continual fight against evil, writing must be deliberately used as a weapon. It is necessary that he understands this (2009, 324)."

In the light of the Sartre's views on art, I could say that writing and people are mutually interdependent, but because of this self-imposed isolation, there developed a great gulf between people and writing. The writing that emerged to forge friendship and harmony between people and literature is Dalit writing.

Another aspect for which the Dalit and non-Dalit writers differed is the concept of tradition. The Dalit literary intellectuals totally rejected tradition while the non-Dalit maintains that tradition cannot be rejected and only what is not required should be thrown out. Arjun Dangle asserted his views on tradition,

Whenever Dalit intellectuals reject tradition, the point raised is that tradition has to be enriched, not rejected. It is necessary to know what it means to maintain or enrich tradition. A tradition is born and lived on the strong foundations of thoughts and principles. It is these thoughts or principles, which enrich or sustain a tradition. The base that a tradition gets is subject to the then existing social system and the sum total of the conditions. The established class always tries to establish a convenient tradition that does not damage its stakes. The weak groups in society are tied to

this tradition. In fact, all our traditions so far, whether religious, social, literary, or cultural, have been imposed on the majority by a handful in India. (xlix)

Sharan Kumar Limbale also gave the least importance to tradition. For him, Ambedkarite thought is the main source of inspiration for the Dalit writers. He stated his views on tradition

The standard of a work of literature depends on how much and in what way an artist's ideas – embedded in the work – affect the reader. Dalit writers will have to decide how best to express Ambedkarite thought in their literature. That work of Dalit literature will be recognized as beautiful, and therefore 'good', which causes the greatest awakening of Dalit consciousness in the reader. (117)

Further, he mentioned,

The artist, the artistic creation, and the reader – all three are important components of this process. The artist's personality is reflected in the work, and the reader's personality is unified with this reflection. The artist and the reader become one in the artistic creation. This meeting of the two depends on their possessing common values. The intensity with which Dalit readers will feel the Dalit writers' experience, will not be shared by non-Dalit readers. On the other hand, there will also be a difference in the degree to which non-Dalit and Dalit readers will find the Dalit writers' experience unique, because the experience is a part of the Dalit readers' daily life. It should also be kept in mind that while the concept of beauty in Dalit literature cannot be a universal concept, the Ambedkarite inspiration expressed in it can be of universal value. (117)

Thus, for Limbale Ambedkar's thoughts are the inspiration for Dalit literature which will produce the Dalit consciousness. Dalit consciousness is a consciousness against slavery. Values of equality, freedom, justice and solidarity are inherent to this literature. The Dalit consciousness motivated by Ambedkarite thought occupies a central place in the aesthetics of Dalit literature. Limbale has set down in the same book a few standards, which can be used for the evaluation of Dalit literature. They are: "(i) Artists must be motivated by their experience, (ii) Artists must socialize their experiences, (iii) Artists' experiences must have the strength to cross provincial boundaries, and (iv) Artists' experiences must seem relevant to all time (120)."

In the light of the above standards if we evaluate Dalit literature then the terms used by mainstream critics such as – propagandist, unaesthetic,

monotonous and aggressive – are very wrong. The chief aim of the Dalit writer is to assert his/her caste identity. Sharankumar Limbale's statement in the same book explains the manner in which Dalit literature is instrumental in the identity formation and assertion of the Dalit.

Dalit literature seeks to transform Savarna society, to bring about change in the heart and mind of the Savarna individual, Dalit literature should have two dimensions. One will be to familiarize Dalits with their past, to explain to them that they are enslaved, to show them that they are human beings and it is their duty and their right to fight for the rights of a human being. The other dimension of Dalit literature will be to involve working on the hearts and minds of Savarna society in order to persuade them about the rights and entitlements of Dalits, to make them see that these are human beings and have been suppressed, and convince them that they must change. (125)

Thus, based on the above discussion on the aesthetic of Dalit literature I can certainly say this that the aesthetics of Dalit literature rests on: first, the artist's social commitment; second, the life-affirming values presented in the artistic creation; and third, and the ability to raise the reader's consciousness of fundamental values like equality, freedom, justice and fraternity. Om Prakash Valmiki has argued that, "... the Sanskrit critical theories are not applicable to literature of protest and social commitment. At the centre of the Dalit literature is human being who has been suffering the ugly inhuman treatment by the upper caste people. This ugliness is not theirs but of the society and it has every right to be expressed in literature. (2001,45)

Thus, Dalit literature is an attempt to cut the umbilical cord from mainstream literature and its tradition, which may seem to some like a separatist step. However, I feel that Dalit writers are not separatist, it is mainstream literature, and writers are separatist. If we look at the history of Indian literature, we cannot find the depiction of the Dalits in mainstream literature. The lives of Dalits, their experiences and feelings and emotions cannot become the subject of literature. In Dalit literature, a common person has made an entry as a protagonist.

One can cite a number of such examples where myths accepted by traditional mainstream literature are not acceptable to Dalit literature and its ideology. Based on the discussion I agree with Satish Vyas who has talked about the need of different standards of evaluation for Dalit literature, "... it is correct that if we evaluate Dalit literature with the standards of literary art then sometimes there will be some basic differences. The aesthetics for the evaluation of socially committed literature must be different.... A critic of Dalit literature has to create a separate aesthetics for the evaluation of Dalit literature of its own." (10)

Neerav Patel has talked about separate aesthetics for Dalit literature almost twenty-five years ago in his article, "In his view, a society in which only white and fair skin is considered as the only standard of beauty and other colours are considered ugly then the literature of revolt has to establish the beauty of the other colours. This literature has to popularize the slogan of 'Black is beautiful' instead of 'Black is also beautiful.'" (1989, 154) Dalit aesthetics does not believe in the transformation of literature into an artistic piece and put into the museum but its principle is to fulfil the needs of the lived life. Joseph Macwan has warned the Dalit poets and advised them just to ignore mainstream literary critics to achieve their goal,

Dalit poetry is free of all these troubles as discussed or raised by the mainstream writers because it is a product of self agony. It does not require to wear the clothes of the established norms or to wear clothes as per the dictum of mainstream literature. The anguish of their lived life makes the rhetoric of aesthetics quite weak. The Dalit poet should not think and present his emotions and feelings. His pain is represented through his own vocabulary. He does not have to select words and also not to worry for rhyme schemes as it comes naturally. Because of this it does not have to follow the metres of prosody, absurdism will create indigestion, cubism will lead it towards untimely illness, and surrealism will lead it towards its catastrophe. Whatever is present try to know it only? Whatever is absent do not try to find it and waste your time. Thus, a Dalit writer has to use the weapon which is just in front of him. His life experiences are wider than the spectrum of an epic. He has to reject the tradition and create a new one which is generated out of his agonized life experiences. Thus, the Dalit poetry and the Dalit poet have to follow his own dictums and not to move on the wrong tracks. (1984,12-3)

Thus, Dalit literature is attached with the Dalit society as a non-separatist. It is a literature based on incidents occurred in one's life.

Mohan Parmar has described his views on the Dalit aesthetics,

It is true that Dalit problem is the basic theme of the Dalit short story but it should not become a tool of propaganda but it has to leave an eternal imprint then only its success could be proved. Experimentation will not suit to the Dalit short story because it is moving towards life values. Dalit short story will not bear the burden of effortful style of writing. It has to give a shock to the heart of the readers. It has to give power of steel to the indolent and helpless man. Thus, the structure of the Dalit short story appeared very

different from the contemporary Gujarati Sahitya. (1987,185)

Manishi Jani also suggests in his article that

Dalit writers' have also to search for the Dalit culture, so that they can present it against the dominant culture. They have to concentrate on the dialect, idioms, proverbs, historical events, contemporary events, legends, customs and manners, values, concepts, folk literature, folk dance, folk drama, prominent figures. The Dalit writer has to give place to all these aspects in their writing and project it as "Dalitmoolya" with pride. "Dalitmoolya" has to be used as a standard for the critical evaluation of Dalit literature. (1989,162)

Dalit consciousness is an essential component of the Dalit literature. If Dalit consciousness is portrayed in a literary piece then it is part of Dalit literature. Ajit Thakor has stressed Dalit consciousness in his article, "the literary piece which talks about Dalit life and Dalit society can be termed as Dalit literature" (1995, 5). I partially agree with Ajit Thakor but in my view, only depiction of Dalit life and Dalit society is not enough but it should also include struggle of the Dalits to overthrow the Brahminical ideological regime and commitment for the Dalit society. Further Ajit Thakor has noted in the same article, "Dalit literature means a transformation of the Dalit consciousness into art of literature.... without transformation of Dalit consciousness into art it can't be termed as Dalit literature" (1995, 5). Here, Ajit Thakor has given equal importance to commitment for Dalit consciousness as well as commitment for art. Mafat Oza has also talked about the concept of art in his book "for the evaluation of a literary piece all the standards are secondary except art. Does the literary piece become an art or not?" (28) Thus, Thakor and Oza both have given prime importance to the features of art. For both of these critics standards of literary art should be maintained – as all the followers of art for art sake do – if anyone wants to use the term Dalit literature for the writings of Dalit society and Dalit life.

However, I do not agree with both of these critics, as I believe that Dalit writers are following the norms of art for life's sake. For Dalit writers the prime goal is to make conscious his/her Dalit brethrens of their exploitation in every field of life and thus to inspire them to launch a movement for the creation of an egalitarian society. Om Prakash Valmiki also has asserted, "Without dalit consciousness (an essential component of dalit literature) dalit literature become superficial and fictitious" (2001, 30). Dalit writers are concerned about the lives of Dalits and thus their goal is to expose the source of oppression in their lives from where it originates. It is not a Dalit who decide about his/her development, status, lifestyle but it is the social structure, which always makes him, or her conscious of his/her birth in a particular

category. Dalit writers are making an effort to expose this virile social structure and if they achieve their goal without attaining the standards of art then it will be a literary piece for me.

Thus, if we start evaluating Dalit literature from the perspective of "art for art sake" then there are full chances of injustice to the Dalit literature as it is based on the concept of art for life sake so the standards of evaluation for Dalit literature should be based on art life's sake. The interviews of eminent Gujarati Dalit writers – Joseph Macwan and B. Kesharshivam – by Girishkumar Rohit offer useful information on the current powerful status of Gujarati Dalit literature. Joseph Macwan is of the firm opinion that commitment is the pre-requisite to being a Dalit writer. Joseph Macwan explained his views on Dalit literature in his talk with Girishkumar Rohit, "mainstream literature is based on aesthetics whereas Dalit literature is expressive of such intense pain that it renders all definitions of aesthetics ineffective" (370). B. Kesharshivam shared the same views as Joseph Macwan. In his views, "pain, anger, and consciousness converge to give birth to Dalit literature. He also laments that Dalit literature has to face stiff opposition from mainstream literature" (383).

A creative attitude is a pre-condition to fiction writing. Creative aspects have found ready acceptance in Gujarati Dalit fiction. Those Dalit writers of fiction who are not able to sculpt their stories intricately have become almost invisible. Such intricacies are actually the backbone of Dalit problems. On the other hand, if a writer's work embodies all the desired fineries but if he does not touch the basic Dalit problems, he is no good either.

Radheshyam Sharma has highlighted the reasons for the inefficacy of those short stories, which fail to meet the standards of good fiction. The reasons are: "(i) The monotony of themes, (ii) in a scenario where there is exploitation and retaliation to match with it, there is more scope for loquacious priorities, and (iii) extremely dramatic predominance of events by smoldering declarations of sentiments that may be genuine fetter the literary achievement of the works and the writers" (1987, 217-18).

Further Radheshyam Sharma has said, "Mohan Parmar's *Nakalank* is an excellent short story that has found place in this collection and may add to the pride of any other. The tendency of Dalit writers of no learning from such works may prove suicidal." (1987, 219)

To conclude I must say that one of the most important achievements of the Gujarati Dalit literature is that it has brought back the freshness of native Gujarat, its dialects and realistic representation of the lives of the Dalits. Gujarati Dalit short stories have depicted the problems of Dalit life, their hopes, and fears. The stories are written in typical Dalit dialects spoken in various parts of Gujarat. These stories have opened a new direction in short story writing in Gujarati. The Dalit writers have remained insulated from so-called foreign influence that harmed Gujarati literature to certain extent in the name of modernism.

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# 1

## Gujarati Dalit Literature – An Overview

*Pravin Gadhvi*

First poet of Gujarati language Narsinh Mehta whom Gandhi made world famous through his devotional song 'Vaishnav jan to tene Kahie' (A noble person is he who knows others' pain) was a high caste Brahmin by birth, yet he many times sang devotional songs in Dalit Mohallas. He has urged for 'samdrishti' (equal sight) in his bhajan and has told in another bhajan that all efforts for salvation are in vain if the soul is not known? 'What beneficial happens if one believes in caste? Divisions of Varna/castes are useless.' Thus, he may be considered first Dalit poet of Gujarat.

Poet Akha has also condemned caste discrimination. He has said: 'Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras are all part and parcel of God. Now to whom we may call Shudra?'

Dasi Jivan who was born in 18<sup>th</sup> century in Dalit community has written: 'Ganga and Gomti flow in my home. Why should I go to river Reva?' He also added: 'What do you know about high and low? How could one differ between high and low?'

First two poets of modern Gujarati poetry - Dalpatram and Narmad were not merely poets, but were social reformers also. They used to express their anguish against social bad traditions in their poems.

After arrival of Gandhi, Gujarati literature breathed new air. Gandhi urged to write such literature which can be understood even by a poor farmer. As a result, Sundaram and Umashankar Joshi emerged, they



attacked with satires on discriminations due to caste and wealth. Aam Admi (common man) first time appeared in Gujarati poetry. Umashankar Joshi also warned against 'Bukhya janono jatharagni (Fire of hunger of hungry men is stomach). He gave us 'songs of poor'. Indulal Gandhi also joined in the same tradition.

Zaverchand Meghani was a folklorist, but he was deeply touched by philosophy of Gandhi and communist revolution and he wrote songs of independence and revolution, songs of depressed. When Gandhi was on fast against communal award declared by Ramsey MacDonald, Meghani mixed up Gandhi's woe in the woes of Dalits in his poem 'Chhelli Salaam' (The Last Salute). The poem can be considered first Dalit poem in Gujarati. However, the poet could not understand the pain of Ambedkar. Meghani says that: 'If I weigh each and every drop of my blood, even though I cannot repent completely for the injustices my ancestors did to Shudras.' In his poem 'Kodaliwalo' (A man with spade), he has narrated sufferings of a poor farmer.'

After that, Karsandas Manek, Himmat Khatsuria etc, expressed emotions and pains of downtrodden. Meantime, Gandhi era ended and Gujarati Poetry became beauty loving, rather to say beauty-oriented. Social concern-commitment evaporated from the poetry. Movement of progressive literature in Gujarat ended.

After a long interval, in 1978, Dalit Panther published an issue of *Akrosh* (The Anguish) – a stream of poems with which social concern started to flow. Under influence of Dalit Literature in Marathi, Neerav Patel wrote Dalit Poetry. Afterwards Pravin Gadhvi, Harish Mangalam. Sahil Parmar, Shankar Painter, B. N. Vankar, Purushottam Jadav, A. K. Dodia, Madhukant Kalpit, Chandu Mehria and many poets joined in the stream. Today, number of existing Dalit poets is not less than 100.

As has been said above, Literature showing sympathy towards Dalits was created in Gujarat, but the writers were not from Dalit community. They were simply observers. They had not undergone pains and sufferings of Dalits themselves, but they had felt it. However, the sufferer himself knows the pains better than the person who feels sympathy with sufferer and imbibes it as the experience of sufferings is firsthand experience for the sufferer. There is a saying that he who wears the shoe, knows where it pinches.

### Dalit poetry:

Dalit literature is a unique literature whose writers are almost from Dalits. Downtrodden they are expressing their pains. It is peculiarity of Dalit literature. This peculiarity equally applies to Black Literature of America. First, poetry emerged in Gujarati Dalit literature. First poetry was without meter. Then forms like geet (Song), Ghazal, Muktak (Quadra-cuplets), Doha joined Dalit poetry. Now Dalit poetry is written in meter also.

Dalits Poets had written elegies (poems of showing grief) at the time of death of Ambedkar. It is also a root of Dalit literature. So long, In 1929, a poet named Manor Gangera had written:

Became lofty due to hatred shown to us,  
life is like that of an animal,  
we born in India, Is it our mistake?

As River Ganges does not have one root, but it unceasingly flows from many streams and becomes the Gangasagar, a literary movement has also many roots and many causes as the Gangasagar has.

Second, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Marx appeared parallel in Gujarati Dalit literature. Gandhi also had contributed in removal of untouchability; so many poems addressed to Gandhi are found. There are some satirical poems on Gandhi. Gandhi and his followers are rebuked in such poems. Though their opinions and beliefs were different, Gandhi and Ambedkar had contributed great to add Dalit issue in national agenda during nationalist movement. The real source of inspiration in Dalit literature is Ambedkar. Influence and Impact of Ambedkar on Dalit poetry is more than that of Gandhi. Respect, faith, and reverence are expressed for Ambedkar. There is also a great impact of communist philosophy. There seems use of known characters like Karna, Eklavya, Sita, and Draupadi from Indian mythology in great deal.

Third, so many non-Dalit writers have been associated with Gujarati Dalit writing movement from the very beginning of the movement. I think it is rarely found in other regional Dalit literary movement. In addition, many non-Dalit writers, though not directly part of the movement, but wrote novels and stories on the Dalit theme. Gujarati

Dalit Literature is not only for Dalits, but it allows others (i.e. non-Dalits) to talk about the weaker section of the society.

However, most of the writers are from Dalit community.

Fourth, Dalit literature has been included in mainstream literature after struggle of more than two decades. Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi etc have published many books of Dalit literature and it has been accepted in seminars. However, it has been included in textbooks in less quantity. Many students have undertaken research programmes like M. Phil. and Ph.D. on Dalit literature.

Central and State Academies have accorded awards to many Dalit Writers. Government of Gujarat also accords awards to Dalit writers and literature that is unique, I think. I do not know of other states according special awards to Dalit literature.

Gujarati Dalit literature has not been advantaged with English translation as Marathi Dalit literature has. Hindi being a widely spoken language has advantage and acceptance. Gujarati Dalit literature is considerably deprived. It is pitiable that translations from Marathi, Bengali is wide spread phenomena, but translations from Gujarati to Marathi, Bengali are very rare.

Dalit writers have established Gujarat Dalit Sahitya Akademi in 1997 in Gujarat. Its first president was renowned Dalit novelist late Joseph Macwan. Now I have been honored with the president ship. Prominent Dalit poet, storywriter, novelist and critic Harish Mangalam is the general secretary of the academy. The academy has published more than 70 books so far of Dalit literature with laborious efforts of Harish Mangalam. Even in Hindi or Bengali, no such work has emerged as per my knowledge. I do know what progress has been made in Marathi in this matter. It is a notably historical phenomenon in the history of Dalit Literature.

There are some limitations of Gujarati Dalit literature, which also I would like to mention here.

First, struggle for Dalit rights is not depicted so much as insults and sufferings of Dalits are depicted in Dalit poems, stories, novels. Anguish is there, but struggle is absent. There happen frequent events of murder, rape, boycott, forced migration, but their influensive reflection is not focused in Dalit literature in remarkable quantum.

Second, Dalit literature is still confined only to more literate and advanced castes of Dalit community. These are mainly Vankar (weavers), Rohit (tanners), Valmiki (sweeper) and other most backward sub-castes in Gujarat.

Third, there are a few (one, two, three or four) women writers in Gujarati Dalit literature. Dalit women have not yet picked poetry.

Fourth, the Gujarati Dalit literature started with poetry. Then came short stories, novel, dramas, and then autobiographies. However, the genre of autobiography is not as rich as those of Marathi Dalit literature are. Struggle faced in childhood and youthful days by persons who are more literate and on top position in government jobs is there. The childhood is full of insults and poverty but then easy life with full facilities commences. Autobiography by Aam aadmi i.e. Safai Karmi is yet to come. Women also are still silent.

Fifth, there is internal untouchability in social system of Dalit communities. Valmiki i.e. sweeper and cleaner is the last person on ladder of sub castes in Scheduled Castes. He is the most depressed person and yet is silent. Dalit literature is preserving silence against internal untouchability. Not only have that, but sorrows and pains of the most depressed castes in Dalits not been still expressed in Dalit literature.

Sixth, Majority of Dalit writers are only writers and not activists like those of Marathi Dalit Literature. Dalit literature had gained momentum after the two anti-reservation riots in 1981 and 1985 in Gujarat. Literate Dalits who have forgotten their deprived caste fellows were shaken and awakened by the two anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985. Dalit literature got tremendous momentum after these two agitations. Neerav Patel, Pravin Gadhvi, Harish Mangalam, Sahil Parmar, Dalpat Chauhan, Raman Vaghela, Arvind Vegda, Nilesh Kathad, Shamat Parmar, Kisan Sosa, Mangal Rathod etc. are prominent writers in second generation.

To conclude I would say that now Gujarati Dalit literature is quite rich and it has status and stability. Every form of literature like poem, short story, sketch, essay, play, autobiography has powerful expression and it has remarkably been emerged. It is accepted as a powerful literary genre in Gujarat though mainstream literary writers still maintain a distance from it.

## 2

## The Genesis of Gujarati Dalit Literature: A Different Perspective

*Harish Mangalam*

In the contemporary period, the Dalit literature is written in all the regional languages of India. Many national and international conferences, workshops, seminars and symposium are also organized on the theme of Dalit literature. Many research students have chosen Dalit literature as a subject for their research. If we look at the last five years scenario of research in Gujarat, most of the students have shown inclination to prefer the subject of Dalit literature for their research. Thus, the Dalit literature in Gujarat has flourished profusely. The Dalit literature has impacted largely on Gujarati literature, in the last three decades i.e. from 1980s to 2010.

The first Mahatma of our nation, Mahatma Jotiba Phule and the emancipator of the Dalits of India Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had inspired the Dalit youth to write their life experiences. Thus, they played a pivotal role in the beginning of the Dalit literature. The Gujarat State is a neighboring state of Maharashtra so it is natural that the Marathi literary movement has influenced the Dalits of Gujarat. The first song 'A Folksong of Dalits' written by Ranjitbhai Vavabhai Maheta in the compilation 'Folksong' was published in 1912 in Surat. In this 'Folksong', the poet had depicted how the upper caste fellow named Chunilal had exploited the downtrodden people. The 'Folksong':

A Folksong of Dalits

Hey! in digging boundary-stones

My shoulders are full of pains

Chunilal pierced in my chest  
Chunilal Surveyor, no end of your boundary-stones yet  
There is a hookah in hand, a shoe in foot  
Chunilal Surveyor Goes to get digging boundary-stones  
No end of your boundary-stones yet.  
There is a hookah in hand, a shoe in foot  
Chunilal Surveyor goes to the street of Dalits  
A Dalit says how can I do ?  
He does not pay our salary  
He embezzles our money  
And I have no cloth to wear  
How he would give a cloth to me ?  
Chunilal Surveyor, no end of your boundary-stones yet.<sup>1</sup>

The hymn of praise Antyajstotra (hymn of untouchable) was written by Amrutlal Sundarji Padhiyar, published in 1918. At that time, Gandhi had written a preface to this hymn: "it electrifies the reader and it is heart piercing one and Bhai Padhiyar has painted the exact picture. In this poem, pain of Dalits has been depicted. Just like lakh of male - female remember Bhagvat, they ought to have remembrance of this poem". (*Gandhiji no Akshardeh*, Vol. XIV, p. 299). After that a poem titled *Antarvedana* (Inner Pain) was written by Manor Jivram Gangera, which was published in 1929 is as under:

Inner Pain

O Ma, in your lap, today, I am miserable

Degraded by the names Antyaja, Untouchable Dalit

I am in distress.

I worship Rama and Krishna, perform an eve-oblation  
(Vedic worship of the Sun to be done in the morning, evening  
and afternoon)

Sacrifice, recite the Bhagavadgita

I take care of cow as mother, but still my misery is not over

I am delighted to get this human-birth, but-

I am internally uncomfortable owing to disturbance caused by  
untouchability

I am weakened by the hateful dismissal, the life is like the life of  
animal

To be born in Hind-India-is that my mistake?  
 And, there is no trace of Untouchability in the Vedas or Vedantas  
 (Then) O Mother! This blind rigidity of custom in Hind has come  
 from where?  
 With the cruelty of your (other) children (these)  
 Children of yours are shaken  
 Giving up tuft of hair and a sacred thread, those dear to me  
 have embraced other faiths.  
 Now limits of endurance are crossed. I am unable to maintain  
 patience  
 I, a child of yours, appeal to you:  
 Save us O Mother India!<sup>2</sup>

In 1930 Lallubhai Dudhabhai Makwana had started which was the first journal of Gujarati Dalit journalism *Navyuvak* from Gulam Husain Street of Rajpur area in Ahmedabad. Lallubhai Makwana was a resident of Vadodara City. At that time, father of Gujarati Dalit journalism was a Dalit leader Mr. Nagjibhai Arya, a resident of Vadodara. He was editor of *Dalit Gujarat* (weekly), in which the poem of Babaldas Chavda was published in 1939. His poem *Antyaj* was published in *Antyaj Bandhu* magazine whose editor was Mithabhai Ramjibhai Chauhan. Till today, Babaldas Chavda is an active Dalit literary writer. Like such magazines, other Dalit magazines *Tankar* (1953, edited by Khemchand Chavda) *Tamanna* (1956, edited by Jayanti Subodh) and *Jyoti* (1956 edited by L.G. Parmar) also started to express Dalit thoughts. In these magazines, poems of Himmatsinh Vaghela were published. In my view, poems of Himmatsinh Vaghela must be included in the history of Gujarati Dalit literature:

I do not fight with a sword  
 Fight only with a journal  
 Want to push aside the clouds of wickedness  
 Dying untouchables, not untouchability.<sup>3</sup>

Briefly, the poet has depicted how a witch of untouchability victimizes the Dalits putting them in unspeakable horrors of social and cultural brutality.

After 1938, P.B. Baraiya's poem titled *Dr. Ambedkar* is available. Other poets named Sadhu Muldas Manordas, Krishna Deva, Nathuram

Sharma, Deshguru Amarsing, S.B. Bandhaniya, U.M. Solanki and L.J. Pravasi, were the main poets during that time. Over and above, approximately, there were 25 to 30 Gujarati Dalit magazines were published in which Dalit literature was published. This period may be considered as a first phase of Gujarati Dalit literature (First phase means before independence to the demise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1956). In addition, it is obvious that in the case of Dalit writings by non-Dalit writers, there was direct influence of Gandhian ideology and in the case of Dalit writings by Dalit writers, there was direct influence of Ambedkar.

On sudden death of Ambedkar on 6 December 1956, the illiterate mill workers and other less educated people felt an electric shock. They paid their homage by writing mourn poems. Dr. Rameshchandra Parmar, a leader of Dalit Panthers had compiled all these poems and published an anthology titled *Anjali Kavyo* which comprised 167 poems. In this anthology, the poems of Vishrambhai Solanki, Kasturbhai Shah, Jivrambhai Becharbhai Maheriya, Purushottamdas Vaghela, Mafatlal S. Parmar, Himmatsinh Vaghela and many more are included. So far, the Gujarati Dalit literature is concerned, the importance of the anthology *Anjali Kavyo* is invaluable in the history of the Gujarati Dalit literature movement because all these poems are written on the emancipator of Dalits who had sacrificed his whole life not only for the cause of Dalits but also for the cause of the whole nation.

During the period from 1956 to 1980, near about 30 journals of Gujarati Dalit literature were published which magazines played an important role to aware the downtrodden community shaping, building and strengthening the Dalit literary movement in Gujarat. Thus, Gujarati Dalit literature was not emerged in 1975 or 1978. But it was emerged quite early with the publication of poems like *A Folksong of Dalits* (1912) by Ranjitbhai Vavabhai Mehta and *Antyajstotra* (hymn of praise) by Amrutlal Sundarji Padhiyar in 1918, and *Antarvedana* (Inner Pain) by Manor Jivram Gangera in 1929. The Dalit poems published during this period were not of that artistic standard but of primary level.<sup>4</sup>

We all should remember vividly the struggle of Ambedkar, who has spent his entire life for the upliftment of the downtrodden people. Ambedkar's revolt has been one, devoid of swords and guns. His wish is to have an ideological revolution- an ideological change and this is the aim of the Gujarati Dalit literature. The purpose is to awake the

Dalits for an ideological revolution which makes it literature of anguish and injustice. Ambedkar's life is full of overwhelming struggles. He is the originator of novel, progressive and radical thoughts. There is a deep impact of an ideology of Ambedkar on the educated young generation. They are now aware of their rights and atmosphere of awareness is very effectively widespread among the educated Dalits of Gujarat. Many Dalit writers have started to depict their feelings and new stream of Dalit poems blossomed in a full swing. This period, particularly is of consciousness-spreading among the Dalits of Gujarat. Hence, it is to be considered as a second phase of the Gujarati Dalit literature.

In the year of 1981, there was a caste-war in Gujarat under the guise of 'Anti-reservation Agitation'. It was pre-planned as well as well-planned direct attacks raged against Dalits. The attacks were violent and within a short period the murderous attacks were spread across the state and numbers of innocent Dalits lost their lives. Not only they set on fire many houses but they neglected humanity and alienated creating the frightened situation to live for Dalits in their own nation!! In such a scuffling period, the highly educated Dalits became furious against inhuman and monstrous cruelty. In the whole Gujarat, flames of the insurrection and a curse were sprouted in the minds of young Dalits. They started to express their agony through all the genres of literature – poetry, short story, novel, drama, autobiography, essays and criticism. There was a constant flow of Dalit literature against injustice, inhuman treatment, varnashram, untouchability, atrocities and to protect the human rights etc. At that time, an anthology of Dalit poems first of its kind *Dalit Kavita* was edited and published by Manishi Jani and Ganpat Parmar in 1981. This trajectory of Gujarati Dalit literature has now reached to curriculum of the many universities of the state as well as other states too. Near about 100 independent anthologies of poems including compilations have been published till the day. The prominent Gujarati Dalit poets are: Dr. Pathik Parmar, Pravin Gadhvi, Dalpat Chauhan, Arvind Vegda, Madhukant Kalpit, Sahil Parmar, Raju Solanki, Kantilal Katil, Harish Mangalam, Dr. Maheshchandra Pandya, Mukesh Boricha, Chandu Maheriya, Balkrishna Anand, A.K. Dodiya, Saroop Dhruv, Bipin Gohel, Pro. Yashvant Vaghela, Neerav Patel, Pro. Ratilal Rohit, Priyanka Kalpit, Manilal N. Patel 'Jagatmitra', Jivan Thakor, Chandraben Shrimali, Shanker Painter, Dr. Vinod Gandhi,

Purushottam Jadav, Bharat Kavi, B.N. Vankar, Dr. Mansukh Gaijan, Daksha Damodara, Brahm Chamar, Kisan Sosa, Bharat Vala and Dr. Rajendra Rohit etc.

*Chingari* is the first Gujarati collection of poetry by Kalidas Pandya, published in 1982.

Now the Dalit intelligent artists will not let loose any stone unturned against social pollution prevalent in our country for ages. Being well educated, he would not tolerate any kind of atrocity, inhuman treatment, injustice, untouchability, inequality, poverty, anguish and exploitation. Against all these circumstances, the Dalit writer will make furious revolt, the ire and make sharp expression to annihilate the religion based social pollution. In one of his poems, Bharat Vala presents his pungent experience as a scavenger which constantly piercing heart:

Dogs are barking  
See! While walking on path, at once, dogs are barking!  
When we enter the temple, at once, dogs are barking!  
We sacrifice our own life for cleanliness, but  
While sweeping and cleansing courtyard, at once, dogs are barking!  
Who brought down these dogs of such a caste?  
Though our good relationship, at once, dogs are barking!  
Worshiping and reciting, feel good in our inner heart  
Sowing the best seeds, at once, dogs are barking!  
By now, anybody may give a true advice to these dogs  
While pouring water to a tree, at once, dogs are barking!<sup>5</sup>

Pravin Gadhvi is one of the dominant voices in Gujarati Dalit poetry. He presents his logic of equality and raises the real and heart piercing question before the four fold varnashram:

If your Draupadi  
Garlands our Galiya in swayamvar?  
Would your Arjun accept our Raili  
Like Chitrageda?<sup>6</sup>

Here, Pravin Gadhvi exposes the so-called high caste people and their dual standard of living. They are hypocrites as they say something and do something.

Dr. Pathik Parmar is a powerful Dalit poet and critic. In Gujarati Dalit literature, it was said that Dalit experiences cannot be woven or presented properly in a Gazal form, but Dr. Pathik Parmar published a collection of Gazals *Bahishkrut* (expelled). Except one song, all are Gazals of high standard

I am the father of all, O my child!  
There was no caste but I was there,  
Religion, language, region- what's all this?  
There was not class but I am there.<sup>7</sup>

In one of his Gazals, he completely follows the ideology of Ambedkar

No bread can be availed by following rituals,  
No bread can be availed by chanting mantras,  
Whether you say truth is God or God is truth,  
No bread comes by discussing such a thing<sup>8</sup>

Jeevan Thakor has created very effective Dalit poems and raised his strong voice against untouchability

The shadow of untouchability  
Follow me day and night<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Maheshchandra Pandya, in his poem 'Let us sow guns', depicts revolutionary action to achieve his social goal for equality, justice, humanity, freedom of all etc. The poet uses Dalits dialect making the poem very piercing through the hearts of the readers:

Poor Revali  
Don't you know  
That Nathava (Nathuram Godse)  
Shot Mahatma Gandhi  
In the chest  
And then  
These Nathavas  
Have  
Sprouted  
In man Homes?<sup>10</sup>

Ramchanadra Patel 'Sukrit' also resuscitates humanity in his poem:

Come let us sow a man in the field  
I am tired of sowing seeds<sup>11</sup>

Pro. B.S. Nimavat, a well known critic has focused on the Dalit poems of Harish Mangalam. In his recent book *Gujarati Dalit Literature: A Critical Study*, he has quoted his 'Arth' (meaning) poem:

Look, the finger that groans in mud huts  
are waiting on the dilapidated  
rooftops removing the tiles below?  
And  
your ears have been accustomed  
to hear sweet melodies  
Have you ever heard human  
Cries of agony?<sup>12</sup>

Harish Mangalam is a dedicated Dalit literary writer. He has attempted gazals, songs and free verse poems. He uses the mythological characters like Karna, Eklavya, and Shambook to highlight the inequality and oppressions of age old Indian culture. The poet gives a clarion call for privilege as human beings for Dalits. He further says:

Give us  
Give us our right  
Give it back to us  
Give us the touch of  
A creeper on cactus fence  
Only warm touch.<sup>13</sup>

In this poem 'Will it be replaced?' he says that human beings have turned icy cold as they have lost the feeling for co-existence. He wants us to bury the corpse of the very action of being frozen. The poet has a deep faith that the blood will be replaced some day and it will boil for total revolution."

The genre of short story is very well experimented by the Gujarati Dalit writers. Many creative works have flourished and it has been proved to be one step ahead of Lalit Short Stories in Gujarati literature in general. The first Dalit short story is said to be Mohanlal Patel's

*Bhootkal Vina no Manavi* (Man without past) was published in 1954. In 1987, *Gujarati Dalit Varta* (edited by Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam) was published. All the Gujarati Dalit short stories included in the compilation were highly acclaimed by all the leading Gujarati critics. *The Midwife* short story written by Harish Mangalam was selected in Indian classic for documentary film and the same documentary film was released on DD National channel. This compilation was included in the course of studies in graduation and post graduation level in Gujarat University, Mumbai University and at present the same book is in the curriculum of the Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan (North Gujarat). The Dalit short stories included in this collection have puffed a fresh air. The monotonous atmosphere prevailed in the field of short Dalit stories has been removed with the arrival of *Gujarati Dalit Varta*. In 1995, Prof. Ajit Thakor compiled *Dalit Gujarati Varta* i.e. 'Dalit Gujarati Short Stories'. In 1999, the special issue of *Hayati* for Gujarati Dalit short stories was published in the year 2000. *Hayati* is a well known quarterly magazine and mouth organ of 'Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy, Ahmedabad.' Numerous anthologies of Gujarati Dalit short stories have been published and many Dalit short stories have created very deep impact and have earned a place in the history of Gujarati literature. Harish Mangalam's best short stories were translated by Rupalee Burke and is published as *The Light of Darkness* in 2013. *The Light of Darkness* is also selected for translation in to European languages especially in German. Some of the excellent anthologies of Dalit short stories are: Pravin Gadhvi's *Antar Vyatha* (1996), Harish Mangalam's *Talap* (2001), B. Kesharshivam's *Rati Rayan ni Ratash* (2001), B. N. Vankar's *Vilopan* (2001), Dharmabhai Shrimali's *Narak* (2003), Amrut Makwana's *Lisoto* (2003), Joseph Macwan's *Pannabhathi* (1994), Chandrabai Shrimali's *Chanibor ane biji Vartao* (1998), Anil Vaghela's *Nilmani*, Hasmukh Vaghela's *Zal* and Dr. Raman Madhav's *Toran* etc.

In Gujarati Dalit literature, we prefer to make broad definition of Dalit literature rather than narrow-minded definition. We firmly believe in commitment and the Dalit writer has to adhere to the ideology of the first Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Even if a writer belongs to Dalit community who use to write in both the streams i.e. in 'Dalit' and 'lalit' literature and does not care for commitment of social concern, his literature has no value for the Dalits. This is the first and the foremost requirement for Dalit literature in Gujarati Dalit

literature. There are some other Dalit short stories writers but yet they have not published their own independent anthologies, such as Hari Par, Dr. Pathik Parmar, Dr. Vinod Gandhi, Madhukant Kalpit, Arvind Vegda, Dinu Bhadresariya, Raghavji Madhad, Dinesh Hadiyal, Satyam Barot, Indu Rao, Mavji Maheshwari, Dr. Hasyada Pandya, Shailesh Christi, Shirish Parmar, Raman Waghela, Sanjay Chauhan, My dear Jyu and Dr. Keshubhai Desai etc. In Gujarati Dalit literature, the first independent anthology of Dalit short stories is *Talap* (2001) by Harish Mangalam.

In comparison to autobiographies published in Marathi Dalit literature, many Dalit novels have been published in Gujarati Dalit literature. Approximately 30 Dalit novels have been published. Some of them are very excellent Dalit novels such as *Angaliyat* (1986) by Joseph Macwan. It has been translated into English by Prof. Rita Kothari as *The Stepchild*, published by Oxford University Press. This novel has been awarded by Sahitya Academy, New Delhi. Over and above, Joseph Macwan has written the other five novels too. Dalpat Chauhan has also written novels namely *Malak*, *Gidh*, *Bhalbhankhlu*, and *Rashvan Suraj*. Daksha Damodara has written very good novels *Shosh* (2003) and *Savitri* (2009). *Diwali na Divaso* (2004) by Pragjibhai Bhambhi, *Kidi e Khonkharo Khadho* (2005) by Dinu Bhadresariya, *Shul* (1995) *Dhul and Mul* (1999) by B. Kesharshivam, *Tirad*, *Chowki* (1992) and *Aganzal* (2007) by Harish Mangalam. His *Aganzal* novel is totally based on the real life of the writer. *Gnatijantu* by Anil Vaghela is also an excellent novel.

Very few autobiographies have been written in Gujarati Dalit literature. Some of them are *Purna Satya* Part-I & II', (2001) by B. Kesharshivam, *Thor nu Phool* Part I to IV' (2007 to 2014) by P.K. Valera. *Purna Satya* has been translated into English as *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth* by Prof. Geeta Chaudhari and it is in the curriculum of York University, Canada. Some autobiographies written by politicians and other writers are not up to the mark so far a literary genre is concerned. However, their experiences as an untouchable are much more important to the readers as well as to researchers also.

Other Dalit writings such as Essays and biographical sketches have also been tried by the Gujarati Dalit writers. Essays and biographical sketches are excellent as illiterate Dalit mothers and fathers of Dalit writers who have moulded the lives of these writers to fight for their



rights. *Madi Mane Sambhare Re* is an excellent collection of 21 essays edited by Chandu Maheriya. Joseph Macwan has been a master of art and reality in depicting sketches and biographical sketches of his folks and rural characters. He has cultivated this genre well and published such as *Janam Jala*, *Jivotarna Nata Rang*, *Na ye Chand Hoga*, *Manas Hova ni Yantrana*, *Mari Bhillu*, *Ram Na Rakhopa*, *Vyatha na Vitak*, and *Vahal na Valkha* etc. Amidst all these collections, sketches depicted in *Vyatha na Vitak* are incomparable with any of the sketches by any writer of Gujarati literature. In my view he is one step ahead of Swami Anand who has been considered to be the best writer of sketches by the Gujarati critics.

In essay writing, *Gay-jo-Dero* a collection of essays by B.Kesharshivam and *Bhandariyu* a collection of essays by Dharmabhai Shrimali are notable collections wherein reminiscences of Dalit lives have been delineated.

This period should be considered to be Phase-III in Gujarati Dalit literature. At the outset of the Gujarati Dalit literature, it was opposed by non-Dalit writers and the Dalit writers started to focus their views based on the ideology of Phule and Ambedkar to justify the Dalit literature. So many ideological articles and thereafter books were published in support of Dalit literature. The first article of criticism was 'Gujarati Dalit Varta : Aitihāsik Pariprekshya', presented by Harish Mangalam in Mount Abu Workshop organized by Yuvak Seva Sanskritik Vibhag, Government of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. In this workshop, prominent Gujarati writers were present, such as Yashvant Shukla, Raghuveer Chaudhari, Narottam Palan, Prasad Brahmabhat, Kirit Dudhat, Pragna Patel, Kanu Khadadiya, etc. At that time also there was an oppose for the usage of the word 'Dalit' and I had faced it and made them convinced that the word 'Dalit' is not used for particular caste, but it is used as an 'adjective'.

Thereafter, the books of criticism of Dalit literature were published, such as *Samviti* (1989) by Harish Mangalam with Mohan Parmar, *Vidit* (1989) by Harish Mangalam. *Vidit* a collection of critical essays of Dalit literature is the first book of criticism in Gujarati Dalit literature. *Ekvachan* (2003), *Pratidhvani* (2006) and *Panachh* by Harish Mangalam. *Samyak* (2000) by Prof. Yashvant Vaghela, *Darpan* (2005) by Arvind Vegda, *Padchinha* by Dalpat Chauhan *Gujarati Dalit Sahitya: Swadhyay ane Samiksha* (1991) compiled by Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam, *Samprat Dalit Sahitya Pravah* and *Gujarati Dalit Kavita Na Char Dayka*

edited by Dr. Pathik Parmar. *Pratyakshya* by Madhukant Kalpit are very important in Gujarati Dalit criticism.

For the last 17 years, 'Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy, Ahmedabad' is working for the advancement of the Gujarati Dalit literature. Harish Mangalam is General Secretary and the Editor of its mouth organ *Hayati* from its very inception in 1996. Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy' has published 70 titles till today in various languages, such as English, Hindi and Gujarati. Some of the important books of Gujarati have been translated into English and Hindi vis-à-vis. *Tongues of Fire*, *The Silver Lining*, *Pristine Land*, *Gujarati Dalit Literature: A Critical Study*, and *Dalit Literary Tradition in Gujarat: A Critical Study* etc. have been published in English language by Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy. *Taledand* the English drama of very famous writer Girish Karnad has been translated into Gujarati and published as *Shirechchhed*, *Balut* the Marathi Autobiography of very prominent writer Daya Pawar has been translated into Gujarati and published as *Achhut*, *Dalit* Hindi drama of Nag Boddas has been translated into Gujarati and published as *Dalit* in Gujarati language. *Dalit Sahitya Aandolan* the Marathi criticism book of Dr. Chandrakumar Varthe has been translated into Gujarati and published as *Dalit Sahitya nu Aandolan* in Gujarati language. Recently a representative collection of Gujarati Dalit poems has been published in Hindi as *Brainwash*.

Over and above, Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy gives awards to the Dalit writers for their best creative works in all the genres of Dalit literature. One award is also given to non-Dalit writer who writes Dalit literature with full commitment and extends his full support to Gujarati Dalit literature. By all such sincere and committed efforts, Gujarati Dalit literature has now reached to an acme. But let me emphasize here that it is the prime duty of all the Indian Dalit writers to work for the social cause of Dalits so that a pace could be maintained and thus Dalit literature can march on in the perfect direction to achieve its goal as described by Ambedkar.

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## Dalit World as Depicted in Gujarati and Marathi Dalit Poetry

Atulkumar Parmar

The 1970s were the most turbulent years in the history of Gujarat. Social and political both the domains were filled up to brim with the agony of the middle class people. However, the middle class was compartmentalized as Savarnas and Avarnas. Avarnas or popularly and proudly known as Dalits have a very little share demographically in this compartment of middle class. This educated Dalits have started to raise their voice against caste violence which was quite visible in every facet of their life. With the advent of Dalit panthers in Maharashtra in Gujarat also its wing was started to unite and conglomerate the Dalit youth. The Gujarat government was quite enthusiastic to take steps to uplift the OBCs. Various commissions were set in 1960s and 1970s by the central and state government has proved the fact that the social, educational and economic condition of the OBCs is below average level. All the commissions have given their view that reservation should be given to the OBCs in proportion of their population. But the shrewd government officials and the law interpreters both were Brahmanical; they have shake hands and passed the resolution in the supreme court of India that the reservation percentile should not exceed more than 50 percent. Thus, the government can not give more than 27 percent reservation to the OBCs though their population more than 50 percent. While whose population is less than 20 percent are enjoying 51 percent seats.

In this scenario, the Gujarat government has also constituted two commissions –Rane and Baxi—for the upliftment of the OBCs. Both of

them have also suggested the same remedies as the earlier commissions have. Therefore, the then Gujarat chief minister Mr. Madhav Sinh Solanki and his government have decided to give 5 percent reservation to the OBCs. The middle class populace of Gujarat could not bear the reservation that was given to the OBCs. However, they have so much hatred for Ambedkar and the Dalits who talk about self-respect and self-sufficiency that they targeted not the OBCs and STs but the SCs which were receiving the least benefit of the reservation policy of the government. The reason for this hatred is the Gujarati Dalit has read Ambedkar and enlightened himself and understood the value of education. Therefore, he has entered his children into school and colleges and thus started to occupy the mainstream space. This, occupying of space and an effort to sit among the high castes Hindus was not acceptable to the orthodox Gujarati people whose minds are governed by the Manu's dictum. The Manu was shouting in their psyche and thus, they have started agitation against the reservation policy itself which was a constitutional right given to the SCs and STs.

The first anti-reservation agitation began in 1981. During this agitation Dalits were harassed and tortured very violently. Across Gujarat Dalits were segregated. Their property was looted and burnt. Rapes and killings were committed by the upper caste Gujarati with the help of police and government machinery. Dalits have to migrate forcefully from their homeland to the safe place. Zeenabhai Darji who was a veteran Gandhian and a leading political leader has said in the preface of *Asmita* (a collection of Dalit poetry) in 1984 that

"In Gandhi's Gujarat, after three and a half decade of independence a Dalit can be killed violently, their houses can be set to fire, alas.... he can be also set to fire. If they failed to achieve this, they were boycotted socially and economically so that they become helpless. An Indian who is now settled in a foreign country is willing to come back because of his/her love for the motherland while the Dalits have to forcefully vacate their houses and villages and to migrate to a safer place. His love for the motherland is crushed by the upper caste people. .... Now the Dalit has received education, his conscience has enlightened. He is rebelling. When his agony comes out either in the poem or any writing then the government shows its unhappiness towards this presentation of agony.<sup>1</sup>

Further, he said quite satirically and vehemently,

"Slogans like 'law and order situation is in danger' .... 'It is spreading violence' gherraoed the government. And the government immediately takes an action against the Dalits. But when the Dalits were killed brutally the government did not move a budge. It has to be shaken up. Orders of investigation are given, investigation is also carried out but the investigating officers could not remain neutral forever. The established forces bring many types of pressures and able to make the investigation quite poor. Sometimes a murder takes a form of an accident or a suicide. Sometimes the barrel of the gun which was used in the murder is broken up. The choice of the witness is also such that he/she can be easily induced. ....

The youth who is grown and educated amidst such a society, if he is showing his agony let him represent. Don't beat him. Try to understand his feelings. He wants love of the society. He doesn't understand why does society behave in such a way with him? He is educated, intelligent in his work, wants to move ahead enthusiastically but he is defeated.... He bursts his head with the Varna (Caste) wall which is created by the society.... loses his track."<sup>2</sup>

These statements of Zeenabhai Darji make the Dalit argument more powerful. It presents the real situation of Dalits in Gujarat.

Thus, the Dalit literature that was written during these turbulent times shows agony and pain of the Dalits of which they are infinite sufferers. One can certainly that in Dalit poetry there is a no glare of the popular features of the poetry as recognized by the mainstream writers but it has certainly captured the self experienced agony of various facets of a Dalit life. Because of this, there are questions raised against the Dalit poetry such as Dalit poetry is merely a rebuke, a product of the Dalit movement, a special activity, a tendency, a prejudicial sloganeering or a determination of the lover's of anarchy. Those who raise such questions have never tried to understand it in its nutshell. The relation of these questions is directly associated with the Dalit poetry as well as with the Dalit issues also. In the past years also Dalit poetry was written and was welcome with respect. It has been successful to change mindset of few of the mainstream critics who were not willing to accept it as a literature. But still these questions which I mentioned earlier still remain

the same. This shows the poor efficiency of thinking patterns of the mainstream writers as well as critics who are always raising the flag of established Brahmanical norms of aesthetics and form. Does it not certainly show that these questions are associated with the political parties and their hidden agendas? Have we ever seen that the mainstream literature has seriously discussed the entire spectrum of Dalit literature? Has it received willingly the Dalit literature as a literature the way mainstream literature is received? Wherever it is discussed or received it has been discussed to inquire what is not present in it but it is not discussed in the periphery of what is presented in it. It shows the pretence of the mainstream writers and critics.

Joseph Macwan a well known Dalit writer warned the Dalit poets and advised them:

Dalit poetry is free of all these troubles as discussed or raised by the mainstream writers because it is a product of self agony. It does not require to wear the clothes of the established norms or to wear clothes as per the dictum of mainstream literature. The anguish of their lived life makes the rhetoric of aesthetics quite weak. The Dalit poet should not think and present his emotions and feelings. His pain is represented through his own vocabulary. He does not have to select words and also not to worry for rhyme schemes as it comes naturally. Because of this it does not have to follow the metres of prosody, absurdism will create indigestion, cubism will lead it towards untimely illness, and surrealism will lead it towards its catastrophe. Whatever is present try to know it only? Whatever is absent do not try to find it and waste your time. Thus, a Dalit writer has to use the weapon which is just in front of him. His life experiences are wider than the spectrum of an epic. He has to reject the tradition and create a new one that is generated out of his agonized life experiences. Thus, the Dalit poetry and the Dalit poet have to follow his own dictums and not to move on the wrong tracks.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most peculiar characteristics of Dalit poems is that they talk of human values; which keep changing with times, by keeping man at the center of its creativity. To comprehend and appreciate such a creation which as mentioned earlier is backed by a revolution, and so it becomes essential for anyone to acquaint himself with all the aspect of

Dalit society. So that one is not mistaken to consider "Akrosh" as a violent verbal attack, but as a boiling agitation in every Dalit poet's heart. How, why and what are the forces that led to this agitation among the Dalit society, is the main aim of every Dalit poem and through the presentation of these poetry the Dalit writers want to awaken the world at large.

Ambedkar's struggle was not marked by swords but by his verbosity. It is this strange and rare amalgam of Ambedkar's verbosity and Dalit poets' creativity that is indeed the very essence of Dalit poetry.

Space does not permit me to dwell into the entire genre of Dalit poetry; however I have tried my best to explore some of the most striking poems in Gujarati and Marathi written between 1975 to 1985 and try to give an overview of Dalit sensitivity.

Thus, on following his own dictums whatever the poet has achieved is more important. He has drawn his own path. He does not have to worship any one. Whatever he has it is special. Madhur Anand's poem "Suraj Ugyo Chhe" (The Sun has Risen) shows how the powerful upper caste people have crushed the untouchables to achieve its selfish motives. Look at the following lines:

You need a leather bag for your crops  
So you have made a tanner.  
To cover your body  
You made one of us a weaver.  
To clean your filthy streets  
You held a broom and made a scavenger.<sup>4</sup>

These lines clearly show how the casteist people have usurped and oppressed the Dalits to fulfill their daily needs. Not only this, while fulfilling their needs, Dalits have not only lost their societal status but also self-respect. They have received nothing for their kind services. Instead, in turn they have been rebuked and insulted publically. Now, the educated Dalit youth has started to raise their voice and they inquire in the following way, the way Madhur Anand has further presented his views in the same above mentioned poem.

Now our successors of the coming century  
Will leave this hereditary occupation,

Will become an officer....  
 When you come to know this  
 Your eyes were widely opened.  
 But don't you forget  
 Self respect is our birth right  
 If you will not give us  
 We will snatch it.  
 Look there,  
 A black sun has risen in the cemetery.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the poet is quite poignant to present his agony. When we Dalits try to clean the excreta of your psyche you cannot bear it. If you believe that, we are your servants and have to serve you like a bonded labour then its big mistake. Now, we aware of the value of self-respect and we will get it any cost. The black sun represents the utmost debacle of the upper caste Brahmanical ideology and its followers.

Neerav Patel's poem *Jetalpur Hatyakand* (Jetalpur Massacre) on the killing of Shakrabhai – a Dalit youth is quite famous. After reading, this poem Chandu Maheriya has written a poem "Hye! Jetalpur" in which he talks about the upper caste mentality towards the atrocities committed on the Dalits by them. He writes:

Nothing has happened  
 One is added more  
 in the list of Dalit massacres.<sup>6</sup>

Dalpat Chauhan rejects the upper notions quite emphatically in his poem "Hun Eklavya" (I am Eklavya) thus:

I am a warrior  
 Ready to have an existence  
 Will not give anything to the cheater  
 Not even a tinge of dust.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the whole concept of Guru-Shishya tradition was waved aside. Not only the tradition but also the concept of guru as a god is also thrown away. It was done deliberately because the concept of Guru-Shishya was usurped by the Brahmins to propagate the caste system. Therefore, the Dalit poets want to throw away the concept of Guru-Shishya tradition so that Dalits will not have one more Eklavya.

The same treatment received by Gandhi also. Gandhi followed very high but his followers were orthodox and Brahmanical in their nature. They have made Gandhi also orthodox and thus, Gandhi is not received as a liberal person but as an orthodox by the Dalits. It was not because of his errors but because of errors but because of errors of his followers. The pretence committed in the name of Gandhi and the decay of truth and non-violence led a Dalit poet to rebuke the decadence. Gandhian values do not carry value now in the practical life. Gandhi is live only on papers. See, how Philip Clarke talks about the Gandhi and his philosophy.

Somebody please tell to Gandhi  
 We have built over-bridges  
 on the roads of truth and non-violence.<sup>8</sup>

Dalpat Chauhan tells,

Gandhi must be alive  
 otherwise  
 why do so many Godses  
 are roaming around here  
 with guns?<sup>9</sup>

Professor Vishnubhai Raval talks about the Gandhi's Gujarat thus:

On the right moment you have comeback  
 Nine killings, thirty five injured, fifty five loots  
 Forty five incidents of fire!  
 Yes, Bapu  
 This is your Gujarat...  
 This is  
 Vadodara of (14<sup>th</sup> December 1982)<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi's will to take a next birth as a Harijan (Dalit) in India is also a subject matter of Dalit poetry. Pravin Gadhvi warns Gandhi not to have a birth as a Dalit in India thus:

Don't commit an error  
 of taking a birth even as  
 A bug or a mosquito  
 in this country.<sup>11</sup>

Pravin Gadhvi wants to tell that the status of Dalit is lower than a bug or a mosquito. So please do not dare to become a Dalit in this country.

Dalits have also made fun of democracy. Look at Philip Clarke's views in his poem "Dukhavo" (pain):

Yesterday  
there was  
a severe pain  
in the abdomen  
of democracy.  
After examining,  
doctor said:  
"there is a tumour of power  
in the abdomen."<sup>12</sup>

Even after his death, also a Dalit poet wants to carry on his struggle against the caste system. Bal Krishna Anand says:

If I die tomorrow morning  
then  
tell the new generation  
to burn  
the ancient modern *Bhagvad Gita*  
which contains the  
laws of caste system.<sup>13</sup>

Professor Vishnubhai Raval talks about the commissions that set to inquire the atrocities committed on the Dalits during the reservation riots. The attitude of the members of the inquiry commission is represented thus:

Alas! What have we done  
We have to play the game of  
human - human  
But  
Not to become  
a human.<sup>14</sup>

This shows how the inquiry commission investigates the case and what could be intended results of such inquiries.

The upper caste Hindus have never welcomed the social upliftment remedies given by Ambedkar in the constitution. They have always

questioned the relevance of such policies. So in order to have equal status i.e. of human being Pravin Gadhvi offers a new gamut of mutual understanding to the upper caste people.

Do you want to break the wall  
Constructed in the village?  
If your Draupadi offers a  
Offers a wedding tie  
To our Galiya  
Will you bear it?  
And if our Raili comes in the guise of  
Chitrangda  
Will your Arjun accept her?  
Let us,  
We will decide turns  
To pull the dead animals,  
Are you happy?<sup>15</sup>

For whom these lines are written, they are not ready to accept the proposal given by the Dalits and this is known to the world. That is why the struggle of existence and struggle to maintain the existence will continue. Thus, the Gujarati Dalit poet has very strongly presented his identity and forced the Savarnas to accept their identity with respect. In the following section I have talked about Marathi Dalit poet's views and analyzed how they have demanded for self-respect and human rights.

In the poem "To be or not to be Born" we find that by dint of his poor status, L. S. Rokade candidly quibbles his birth itself:

I, still in you womb, was wandering  
Do I want to be born-  
Do I want to be born at all  
In this land?<sup>16</sup>

The repetition of the two middle lines accentuates his obvious quail as well as his apprehension about his journey that is of every escalating ordeal.

The sky has a prop, a prop  
Your body covered

With generations of dire poverty  
Your head pillowed  
On constant need.<sup>17</sup>

The above phrases very starkly acknowledges the reader with some of the tribulations that the Dalits go through, however they still have that strange complacency or the simplicity with which they accept their mores. As the poet says:

Here you are not supposed to say  
That every human being comes  
From the union of man and woman.<sup>18</sup>

This is because the Hindu mythology believed in re-birth and those who were sinners in their earlier birth were entitled to such suffering. Therefore, even their copulation was considered sinful, while that of others was pious:

Here, nobody dare  
"Broaden the beaten track."<sup>19</sup>

This reveals how the society was vigilant towards their every act and they dare not break their rules. However, Dalits were expected to passively follow the upper caste commands as well as to endure their abject poverty and suffering. Further, he expresses their pitiful dependence over the upper caste even for a glass of water. Although the mother earth has abundant water supply for everyone it was deliberately denied to him or her.

Rivers break their banks  
Lakes brim over  
And you, one of the human race  
Must shed blood  
Struggle and strike  
for a palm-full of water.<sup>20</sup>

And the poet does not scruple in saying 'I spit on this great civilization'.

He rejects candidly to take the land as his own, just because his mother was born there. The innuendo here is that if the "land" wants me to "love it" and "sing its glory" the she (land) must feed, nurture and nourish him impartially as she does for her other children.

Sorry, mother, but truth to tell  
I must confess I wandered  
Should I be born?  
Should I be born into this land? <sup>21</sup>

The poem ends with a note of a dreary reality that keeps haunting the Dalit until today.

The poem "Caves" by Jyoti Langewar anticipates change. The poet here sketches a promising and feasible revolt, which is likely to bear the fruits of freedom. The poetry opens with a voice of grievances through a simile:

Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves  
in the rock of my heart.<sup>22</sup>

However, by the next line, she fiercely asserts of the "Changing times" and the reader is being prepared for an expected revolt that has been much awaited since ages. It is this revolt which is about to change their life from misery and sorrow to joy and acceptance.

Protests spark  
now here  
now there.<sup>23</sup>

They (Dalits) have been contemplating about true and false; right and wrong since long but now are the ripest time to raise their voice a loud:

But now I will fan the flames  
for human rights.<sup>24</sup>

Until now, they knew what was 'wrong' but now they also know what is 'right'. The poet once again unveils those eternal questions for every Dalit:

How did we ever get to this place  
this land which was never mother to us?<sup>25</sup>

The above lines are so sensitive that they open a plethora of questions in the readers mind. Moreover, the disappointing part of it is that the reader is unable to find any plausible answers. It is in a way quite frustrating and so it precipitates animosity with an acrimonious remark:

Which never gave us even  
the life of cats and dogs?<sup>26</sup>

Finally ending the poetry with the justification of their action and holds the establishment responsible for committing all those brutality and ruthlessness; as "Unpardonable sings" against a community which till today are in a dilemma about the reason behind their ostracism. Thus in a way they have compelled the Dalit to

..... turn, here and now,  
a rebel.<sup>27</sup>

The poem "This Country is Broken" by Baburao Jagtap presents startling echoes of a separate land where in the Dalits could stand as an equal to all the living beings on this planet. It begins with a very desolate picture of the country in which the poet was born. It starkly points its fragmented state, geographically as well as in its overall perspective to its religion, castes and people.

In this country, each day burns  
scorching each moment of our lives.  
We bear it all, and stand solid as hills.<sup>28</sup>

Each day of their lives is indeed an ordeal they pass through. They have been enduring this pain, insult and segregation by a country that they have been serving since centuries. Now its time to put an end to this savage tradition that has crumpled their senses of a human being.

..... our life  
that we do not accept.<sup>29</sup>

It is not that they have not attempted to revive it, but the country and its people are so cold blooded, that they callously refuse to hear their screams.

Brother, our screams are only an attempt  
to write the chronicle of this country  
this naked country.<sup>30</sup>

The poet's deliberate use of the adjective "naked country" speaks volumes about the brutality that breeds in every mind of this country and about its lack of compassion. Then comes a very bitter remark, which sums up his frustration.

The people have rejoice in their black laws  
and deny that we were ever born.<sup>31</sup>

What can one expect from those who do not even have the courage to admit, that no matter what; they have been sharing the same soil with the Dalits. All sorts of measures have been taken to awake this country towards their plight, but all has gone in vain. Now the only way left for the poet and his people to escape from this misery is to anticipate about a new world, wherein:

where, while you live, you will have  
a roof above your head,  
and where, when you die, there will at least be  
a cemetery to receive you.<sup>32</sup>

Thus in a way the poem echoes the alienation – which a Dalit feels towards his motherland – working like a salt over his wounds.

The "White Paper" by Sharankumar Limbale is a poignant verse that opens new vistas of the ways in which the Dalits have been demanding for their deserved rights. However, it is not in that usual insurgent tone. One of the peculiar characteristic of this verse is the poet always refers to the establishment as "My Friends" This is because the Dalits are not against them as individual but they are against their ideology. The first eight lines express this concept and leave no ambiguity about what Dalit man wants:

I do not ask for gods or rituals,  
castes or sects  
Or even for your mother, sister, daughters,  
I ask for  
my rights as a man.<sup>33</sup>

The next line deals with the ideal of pollution which keeps haunting the other classes. The idea is made more precise and explicit when he says:

Each breath from my lungs  
sets off a violent trembling  
in your texts and traditions  
your hells and heavens.<sup>34</sup>

The idea of pollution here is most beautifully wrapped up in the most simple, sincere and sparkling words. Simplicity here seems to be more perilous than astringent words.

You'll beat me, break me.  
loot and burn my habitation  
But my friends!  
How will you tear down my words.<sup>35</sup>

The Dalits have tolerated this physical torture and atrocities as mute spectators since long. Now Dalits are aware of the fact that a pen is always mightier than a sword. Their pain and suffering has been given voice through written words and as the poet says they are:

planted like a sun in the east?<sup>36</sup>

His comparison with the "sun" shows the degree of intensity of their movement. Like the sun it is inevitable and invincible.

Towards the end of the poem, however the poet turns fierce in demanding his rights:

Will you deny this incendiary state of things?  
I'll uproot the scriptures like railway tracks.  
Burn like a city bus your lawless laws.<sup>37</sup>

This clearly shows that it is now high time of the movement that can turn violent at anytime. The Dalit class is ready now to face any consequences. They are desperate to acquire their rights either by pen or by sword. Moreover, it is indeed as the poet says:

My rights are rising like the sun  
Will you deny this sunrise?<sup>38</sup>

Any force in the world cannot deny a "Sunrise". The poem ends with a beautiful optimistic note that is very essential in providing unity and strength to their struggle.

This few drops from the clouds of Dalit poetry are enough to drench a heart, if not much, it will certainly help a reader to acknowledge this form of literature. As Mulk Raj Anand Says: "Let them be judged from the impact of their anguish, their aspiration to breath freely the air, without praying to be allowed to crawl on earth ..... let them lift their heads-up to the sun, the moon and the stars, looking for light."<sup>39</sup>

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## 4

## Reading of Caste in Neerav Patel's Poetry

*Iliyas Mansuri*

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 1978, on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, *Akrosh*, a poetry journal by Dalit Panthers, Gujarat, published a special issue of Dalit poetry. It is difficult to track the commencement of Dalit writing in Gujarat but that issue of *Akrosh* is often considered as a significant moment that marks the beginning of Dalit poetry in Gujarati. Neerav Patel was one of its editors along with Dalpat Chauhan, Pravin Gadhvi and Yogesh Dave. Before that in 1974, on 14<sup>th</sup> April, the Ambedkarite youths invited a Dalit Panthers' leader from Mumbai, Raja Dhale to Ahmedabad and organised a large procession to celebrate B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary. Thus, 'the seeds of the Dalit Panthers were sown in Gujarat' (Franco: 376). The Dalit Panthers gave shape to the Dalit identity and magazines like *Garud*, *Panther* and the newsletter *Dalit* also contributed significantly. Later, the anti-reservation riots in Gujarat in 1981 and 1985 consolidated made the Dalits aware of their rights and through creative literature; they began to express their agony and anguish.

Neerav Patel, during his study in Ahmedabad, came into contact with the Dalit Panthers activities and its leaders –Rameshchandra Parmar, Narayanbhai Vora and Valjibhai Patel; and with many creative writers. His involvement in Dalit Panthers' programmes nurtured his creative power towards social concern and provided him a new identity 'Dalit'. Later the Dalit Panther published of his two anthologies of poetry in English, *Burning from both the ends* (1980) and *What did I do to be so Black and Blue* (1987). He also edited '*Swaman*', '*Vacha*', and '*Kalosuraj*'.

His Gujarati poems also are published in various magazines like '*Naya Marg*', '*Ahvan*' and '*DalitMitra*' etc. He, as an activist, worked for 'Swaman Foundation for Dalit Literature'. (Vankar: 2003)

Neerav Patel has changed his caste name and changed his personal name. Earlier he was Soma Hira Chamar, now he is Neerav Patel. He belongs to the Chamar caste, the Rohit community which is considered low in the social hierarchy. The Rohits were mostly engaged in their traditional occupations of tanning. His changing of caste name and personal name has proved to be an 'empty signifier' for him. Neither 'Patel' nor 'Neerav' is able to discard his caste identity and these names fail to serve as a 'non-signifying face'. People often dig up his caste identity. Patel expresses his anguish in a poem, 'The vestige':

Who was the Satan sculptor  
Who carved my name upon my forehead?  
O Why do you deep in my veins to revive my name  
Like tattooing into the bark of the tree  
With a knife?  
I wanted to forget my name-  
And at midnight  
I migrated to the city  
Leaving my hut and hamlet behind

.....  
You like the vulture  
Why is the bill of your eyes  
Pecking the carcass of my name perennially?  
Alas! I am doubtful -  
My name will survive even after I die. (Patel: 1980:05)

His choosing of new caste name 'Patel' was not an idle choice. There may be some reason behind it. Actually, Patel community, whose caste name Neerav adopted, in Gujarat is a tiller community and now they are dominant in every field; economic, politics, religious, and education. The Patidars or Kunabis have achieved the vertical mobility, as they were earlier called. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century they were considered as Shudras, now they enjoy, largely, upper caste status. They have mostly benefited from land reforms and the milk revolution in Gujarat. Their early access to modern education ensures them chances to settle in America and many other European countries. Their economic power

and caste solidarity has helped them to achieve both political power and upward social mobility. The same thing has not happened to the Dalits.

In the 1970s and 80s Vankars (weavers), Chamars (leather workers) and Bhangis (sweepers) were working together in cotton mills in Ahmadabad and other places. They were mostly allotted the same work in the mills, weaving or spinning. They were drawing 'higher salaries than those on offer at that time in other trades' (Bremen: 2001). Their economic condition provided them chances to liberate themselves from severe deprivation. They could spend on their children's education. They could take the benefit of government schools earlier than the other Dalit castes. A group of researchers rightly observes it:

It was a promise of release from conditions of extreme wretchedness, both economic and social, in the villages, of possible if partial anonymity from crippling caste identities that held them down in their homes. Work in the textile mills of Gujarat is strenuous and hard, and yet waves after waves of Dalits have left their villages and gone to the mills of the town and cities. (Franco: 144)

The jobs in mills conferred on them a new identity and promised them a significant horizontal mobility. They were no more engaged in the occupations which were considered polluted. They were working along with upper caste workers and though their works were different they shared a common identity, the 'mill worker' (Bremen: 2001). Moreover, working in mills and in urban locations offered them 'an escape from enforced drudgery and humiliation, and the chance of better life and opportunities' (Franco: 168).

But after the closure of mills in the late 80s and in the 90s, the Vankars and Chamars both had to face an equal state of economic crisis. The Bhangis, who were mostly engaged in low jobs in mills, could be absorbed into sweepers' jobs in government offices or in private firms, which was their traditional occupation but Vankars and Chamars had to face a more acute challenge because they could not fall back upon their ancestor's occupation of weaving or leather work in that changed economic and industrial atmosphere. Moreover, they did not want to go back to their villages where caste discrimination and atrocities were a matter of everyday business. Consequently, they had to work in various industrial units or they started their small businesses with the

compensation they got from the mill owners. Their children largely concentrated on education and this made them qualified enough to exploit the reservation policy benefits and government welfare schemes. Thus, the next generation has reaped such fruits. A significant number of Vankars and Chamars are in government jobs. They are also politically active and often work as pressure groups. However, their economic progress has not led to upward social mobility.

On the other hand, the Bhangis that is Valmiki are there where they had been a century before. They haven't changed their occupations 'because they feel powerless to resist, and because alternative occupations are either not available or not remunerative occupations and secure. In some cases, the weight of oppression also means that they may accept their caste role without any resistance' (Shah: 110).

The 1892 report of the Bombay Revenue Department gives a close picture of the condition of what we today call Dalits a century ago:

The condition of the out-classes, the Bhangis, Dheds and Chamars is the most hopeless. They are ignorant as they are superstitious, as indolent as they are filthy; they are generally dependent on the charity of their richer neighbours. They show no signs of improvement but seem to sink lower and lower. (quoted in Lobo: 19)

The report mentions three major castes of Dalits, but after a century we can witness a drastic change in socioeconomic conditions of Vankars and Chamars but the Bhangis are still lagging behind very far in each and every field; social, economic and educational. Moreover, the sub-caste consciousness divides the whole Dalit community 'vertically and horizontally'. (Chinnaiah: 2009).

Patel often expresses joys and sorrows of such neglected Dalits. At one level, he does not miss any chance to celebrate all positive incidents which may encourage the 'Dalit' spirit and subdue the sub-caste consciousness among Dalits. He writes in his poem 'Kalchakra'

.....  
At the gate of Jodhpur castle,  
King Gajarajsinh is standing with garlands,  
To welcome the vice chancellor Dr. Shyamlal

.....  
The statue of Manu is burning with shame-  
a valmiki has become a vice chancellor

a charmarin has become the queen of ayodhya  
(and) a Dalit, Narayan is the king of nation.  
(Patel: 2003: 24; translation mine)

Patel acknowledges the progress of Dalit that they have achieved amidst adverse social and economic conditions. Dr. Shyamlal, Mayavati or the president K.R. Narayanan are the representatives of that a long struggle has achieved for the Dalits. The image of the Kshatriya king standing with garlands to receive a Bhangi vice-chancellor is a pleasing and soothing symbol of gradual transformation that a long battle has brought.

At another level, Patel does not forget to express his deep sense of agony for a Bhangi woman, a symbol of severe deprivation, inequality and suffering. She represents those who are deprived of the benefits that a modern democracy offers. A Bhangi woman is still there, where she has been since ages. In the journey of economic mobility, she is still most deprived and wretched of all Dalits. Patel in his poem, 'My Lord' expresses his concern for such conditions:

My lord honoured my hundi-  
How shall I perform Gagli's wedding ceremonies otherwise?  
My oath to deity chavanda bore fruits  
And the young garasani died.  
They draped her corpse with a shroud of red gavan.  
Flames of her funeral pyre are burning red  
And the red gavan is waving at the akda bush!  
Gagli's mother is smiling bitchy!  
Let them turn their back  
And I shall run to the funeral ghat.  
My lord honoured my hundi. (Patel: 1987:08)

Patel here expresses a horrid and stark image and makes us think by juxtaposing two pathetic scenes, a death of a young Kshatriya woman and the life of a destitute Bhangi woman. Generally, in a small village, the death of a young woman is a matter of sorrow for all villagers but here, this death becomes an opportunity for a deprived woman to get a red sari used as the shroud for the use of her daughter. She is smiling, may be laughing at all humanity. Her emotions are complex. A reader is torn between two different human conditions, a pathetic death and a

pathetic life. Thus, his poem addresses both upper caste Hindus and the Dalits who have already achieved a considerable economic progress. He compels the elites of Dalit to look at those who are lagging far behind.

In Gujarat, the hierarchy within the Dalits is very sharp and narrow. It is a major hindrance in achieving unity to wage war against the larger evil, the caste system. The identity 'Dalit' has not been able to eradicate the sub-caste consciousness. It has just remained a political identity. At the social level, it has lots more to do. The main castes which constitute the Dalit community are Vankar, Chamar and Bhangi. The Vankars consider themselves higher than the other Dalit castes. Their traditional occupation, weaving was not considered as impure or polluted as that of Chamars' or Bhangis'. Vankars are at the top of the Dalit caste hierarchy. They are elites among the Dalits. Most of the leading Gujarati Dalit writers, such as Dalapat Chauhan, Mohan Parmar, Harish Manglam, Ganapat Parmar, B.N. Vanakar etc., come from this community. Neerav Patel opines, while discussing on novels by five Gujarati Dalit novelists: 'The Dalit experience portrayed in these novels can hardly be considered as complete. All the five novelists incidentally belong to one gender and come from the predominant vankar caste that is at the top of the Dalit pyramid and more backward castes like chamar and bhangi and many others are yet to articulate. One shade cannot create rainbows: let hundred flowers bloom to bring the spring' (quoted in Kothari: 2001). Here Neerav clearly indicates the prevailing graded inequality among the Dalits. The fruit of education is still a dream for many. Their voice in literature is yet to be articulated. Like Bhangis, the Toories, Ravaliyas, Vagharis and many more do not have any opportunity to bring any significant progress in their socioeconomic spheres.

Ambedkar was also against such type of 'graded inequality' within the dominated castes. He argued that the dominated who remain divided cannot fight effectively against the oppressors. Ambedkar analyses the graded inequality and warns:

"In a system of graded inequality, the aggrieved parties are not on a common level [...]. In a system of grade inequality there are the highest (the Brahmins). Below the highest are the higher (the Kshatriyas). Below the higher are those who are high (Vishya). Below the high are the low (Shudra) and below the low are those who are lower

(the Untouchables). .... The high wants to over-throw the higher who is above him but does not want to join hands with the low and the lower, lest they should rise to his status and become equal to him in rank. The low is anxious to pull down the highest, the higher and the high but he would not make a common cause with the lower for fear of the lower gaining a higher status and becoming his equal." (quoted in Jaffrelot: 21)

The condition, which Ambedkar described still, exists. The elites of the Dalit in Gujarat are the Vankars and Chamars. Their attitude towards the other downtrodden caste is not justifiable in any way. The 'graded inequality' or sub-caste consciousness has proved to be a curse on the lowest of the low castes. They have been facing multilayered discrimination. This caste system, as Ambedkar puts it, 'has given rise to mutual rivalry and jealousy and it has made common action impossible'. (Jaffrelot: 22). He put his introspection and deep study before his people with concern.

Umashankar Joshi, a well-known writer and Gandhian gave voice to this sub-caste consciousness in his controversial play, *Dhed na Dhed Bhangi* (1933) (Bhangis, the Outcast even among the outcasts). Joshi wrote this play in 1933 when the nation was discussing the relation between upper castes and the Dalits after the Poona Pact event in 1932. By publishing this drama, Joshi tried to locate the argument within the Dalit domain by indicating sub-caste consciousness within the Dalit community. His intention and time of writing this play is debatable. Around 1933, Gandhi started an anti-untouchability movement. Joshi might have been influenced by that movement. But as Ambedkar noted about that movement, 'Removal of Untouchability had only a nominal place in the programme' (Ambedkar: 366) Joshi also, it seems that, moves away from the social reform motives and indulges in petty caste politics by showing Dalits their faults instead of looking within. In the play, a Bhangi character named Balo complains:

These Vankars have dug out a well within ten days, but these big brothers! they consider themselves even purer than Brahmins. It is possible to fetch water from the pond but if we take water from these Vankar's well their well becomes polluted! (Joshi: 153)

The scene reveals the existing distance within a community where Bhangis are discriminated by the Vankars that shows vertical and horizontal layers within the community. In another scene, an old

Brahmin named Omkar justifies the Vankars' position and reveals his fear.

If the distance between Vanakar and Bhagi decreases it will certainly decrease the distance between the upper caste and the Vankars. That is why I say the Bhangis have touched Banakars' well, it has become polluted so now make new well and let the old well be filled. Go and tell this sermon to all in the early morning. (Joshi: 160)

Joshi gives a picture of the time by stating the relation between the upper caste and the Dalits at one level and between Vankars and Bhangis within the Dalit community at another level. Indirectly he advises the Dalits to overcome the sub-caste consciousness. It is true that some specific castes have been benefited disproportionately from the reservation policy and it has created a rift between those who are lagging behind and those who have achieved some upward mobility but it seems that his critique offers an excuse to the upper caste Hindus to justify their position towards the low castes. Moreover, it is also seen that the non-Dalits often exploit this faction among the Dalits. As of now, in Gujarat, it has not emerged as conflicts between Mahars and Matangs in Maharashtra, Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh.

The democratisation of education provided an opportunity to some of Dalit castes to progress. Many others could not benefit from it. The benefited few have created a new Dalit middle class that is torn between mainstream ethos and their past. The urge for identity leads them mostly to change their names, occupations and localities. However, all these practices have been proved futile efforts for the Dalits. On one hand, Dalits are tired of segregation and humiliation; try to hide their caste identity. On the other hand, they want to maintain their relation with their past and caste identity. As Rita Kothari argues: 'Disassociation from the community results in non-participation in building an infrastructure for other suffering members of the Dalit community (Kothari: 2001).' Neerav Patel, it seems that, to save himself from being marked as Chamar by upper castes changed his caste name and personal name and shifted to an urban area but hasn't dissociated with his past and his concerns. Instead, he has sought to problematize his situation. He reveals his confusion in his poem, 'Mess':

When you call me dher  
I am hurt  
and wish to kick you in the belly  
When you call me an untouchable

I am offended  
and wish to slap you on the face  
When you call me harijan  
I am humiliated  
and wish to spit upon you back  
.....  
When you call me Neerav Patel  
I suspect you called me convert  
(a crow that dyed his feathers white to be called a swan)  
and wish to turn away my face  
.....  
Yes, it's all mess since beginning  
like the tale of seven-tailed mouse. (Patel: 1987: 46-47)

Patel knows well that by any name he or his people carry the load of the past. It has been quite common among Gujarati Dalits to adopt the caste names of the upper caste Hindu. Some sociologists smell it as an act of 'sanskritisation' but it is not as simple as it sounds. The whole process of changing names and surnames requires deeper understanding. Patel in his poem, 'A collegian Shabri', reveals the complexity behind so-called 'sanskritisation'. He writes:

What could she do to protect her chastity  
Molested by your imprudent rams in the street?  
How could she put aside her indigenous individuality?  
By changing name?  
By changing surname?  
By draping gujarati sari bengallee style?  
By converting to Christianity?  
By changing her desi culture to hippiesm?  
But alas, history can't be changed and poverty can't be banished instantly.  
(Patel: 1980:11)

Here, the title of the poem, 'A Collegian Shabri' suggests the dilemma of a tribal girl in particular and the Dalits in general. The poet knows from his personal experiences that changing of name, surname, or religion will not confer Dalits equality in treatment. The untouchability is 'widely prevalent and deeply entrenched' in our society. (Shah: 14). He believes that a Dalit can progress economically but the curse of untouchability does not spare him.

In his poem 'Anguish', Patel raises few questions and demands answers. He demands equality for the Dalits based on their contribution in the society. The questions that he puts forward are inclusive which represents the Dalit identity as a whole. He writes:

.....  
 What is our fault?  
 And what is our folly?  
 It is our fault  
 That we scavenged your streets?  
 It is our folly that we shouldered your dead cattle?  
 It is our sin that we dressed your adams and eves?  
 It is fault that we drudge for you from dawn to dusk?  
 It is our fault that we washed your bottoms?  
 ..... (Patel: 1987: 36-37)

The Valmikis, Rohits and Vankars can find their voices in his poetry. He enriches the caste solidarity and strengthens Dalit identity. Patel often suggests violent ways to fight against inequality. His anger and pain is expressed in many poems which shows influence of the Dalit Panthers' militant attitude on him. In his poem, 'The Hormones', he declares his intentions;

I am the son of my father-  
 Why the blood of a panther howls in my veins?  
 .....  
 My father was a poor servant in the cemetery.  
 He buried many a corpse.  
 I am the son of my father  
 and will bury them alive. (Patel: 1980: 09)

Before I conclude, let me say, within the Gujarati Dalit writings there are many voices and shades they need enough attention. Neerav Patel is a peculiar voice among the Gujarati Dalit poets. His expressions are inclusive which represent almost all strata of the Dalit identity. Scavengers, leather workers, weavers, tribals, deprived women, and many more find their voice in his poetry. He also composes poems, out of 'catholic sympathies', on the issues other than related to the Dalit. His diversion and digression does not take him far away from Dalit causes but he successfully addresses other issues of concern in Dalit

literary domain. However, for him, the unjust caste system that injures more the lowest among the low is a major area of concern.

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## 5

# Harish Mangalam's *The Light of Darkness: A Microscopic Vision of Truth*

Dr. M. B. Gaijan

"Oh! Divine Muse of poetry!

I want to have you dance on the screen of reality....

It is easier to wander about in the fairy land.

The wings to fly may naturally come to you there.

But come alone with me to tread the thorny path....

Here the children wanting slates and pens

are staring you in the face."<sup>1</sup>

Harish Mangalam is a versatile Dalit genius of Gujarat. As a creative genius, he has given Dalit poems, Dalit stories, Dalit novels, Dalit dramas, and Dalit criticism. He writes whenever Dalits are exploited, they became/become the victims of cruelty. It is not his newly developed ability. Right from his childhood, he tries to raise his voice against cruelty and injustice whenever committed on Dalits. In his autobiographical novel, *Aganzal* (The Flame) he gives the detailed account of his activities. He firmly believes that Dalit's emancipation is only possible through Dalit's empowerment and Dalit can be a powered class if they are provided education, quality education. Quality education for Dalits is the burning issue. In rural areas due to caste-based orthodoxy, the teachers of rural society do not properly care the children of Dalits. Mangalam notes in his novel *Aganzal* (The Flame) about upper caste attitudes in Gujarat for Dalits;

"After getting education if Dalits' children will get jobs who will labour in our farms? A few children were going to schools. Intentionally they were beaten as they were beasts. So they may leave the school. They had hatred towards Dalits. They treated Dalits worse than animals."<sup>2</sup>

"Upper castes, raise the weapon to stop butter-milk, water and farm labour to the Dalits, thus they boycott them. This weapon proved highly effective. Dalits became helpless. "Dalits should not progress" and thus they wish Dalit should remain illiterate. Therefore, Dalits remain ignorant about their rights, progress. Lack of understanding has control the houses. Dalits were living in the stage of vacuum-empty-minded. They cannot use their own brains. Everything was considered as innocence. It was believed; "We are here because the village! If the village is happy, we become happy! Village is our parents! How can we be against of the village? Thus Dalits were living in age of darkness."<sup>3</sup>

To come out from this dark stage Mangalam knows, right from his childhood, education is the only means. Thus, he followed the path of rationalists. He has matured his thoughts and thinking by his reading of rationalists and Ambedkar's writings. He uses his pen to raise issues against injustice and cruelty heaped on Dalits. In his works, he presents stark reality where Dalits suffer and upper castes exploit them. *The Light of Darkness* is one of the examples of his works.

*The Light of Darkness* is the collection Gujarati Dalit stories. Each story is the presentation of different Dalit issues of Gujarat; the issues are very sensitive, appealing and unbearable for Dalits. Fourteen stories are included in the collection.

*Dalo Alias Dalsinh* is the first story of the collection. The story presents live social reality of the first half of the 20th century. From the end of 19th century, Gujarati Dalit had started migration from their villages to Ahmadabad. Ahmadabad, at that time, was known as the Manchester because of the different textiles mills. To get work in the textile industries with that hope they had come to Ahmadabad and settled down there. In Gujarat, weavers are Dalits. Traditionally they do the work at their houses.

Earlier, in Ahmadabad their life was better in comparison of their respective villages. But as time changed in the early 20th century, with the decline of textiles industries, Dalits' misery started again; "the

closure of one mill after another had robbed the mill-workers' faces of their smiles." (Dalo Alias Dalsinh). Majority of the workers were Dalits. They could not go back to their villages. Anyhow, they had to live in adverse situation. Dalo, a Dalit youth is presented as the protagonist of the story. He is brave and bold. By looking at him, nobody can identify him as a Dalit. Dala's caste-fellow and worker Shiva talks to him when the mills were closed down;

"What will happen to me? And my children?(Dalo Alias Dalsinh).

In this sort of critical condition, survival was the major issue. "A die-hard struggle for survival had begun once again." (Dalo Alias Dalsinh). Family life was shattered;

"Children having dropped out of school and wives would with a tattered gunny-sack thrown over their shoulders set out to pick waste paper, broken pieces of glass, rags, plastic waste and iron scrap. Rummaging through head-splitting stinking garbage heaps had made life miserable for them." (Dalo Alias Dalsinh).

No Dalit family was exception from this sort of condition. Their social life was also disturbed. Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram was established in Ahmadabad. Term Harijan was used for Dalits at that time. However, nobody was ready to keep Harijan as a worker; even today upper caste people prefer worker from other caste than Dalit. In this story to come out from the critical time, Dalo changes his name, from Dalo to Dalsinh Parmar. "Sinh" is only used by Kshatriya in Gujarat. Dalo was "Swarthy, muscular physique, gruff voice, eyes blazing with menace and an enormous sickle shaped moustache". (Dalo Alias Dalsinh). He looks like a Kshatriya. Then there is no problem to get job as a guard. He gets a job as a security guard in Dhansukhlal Mehta's shop on Anand Bazaar. Here he performs his job sincerely. Once he has also caught a culprit who stole a sari from the shop. The owner Dhansukhlal became happy. He is a Jain. Observing Dalasinh's commitment to his duty, he sends him to Kirtidham Jain Tirth. Dalo has caught red-handed Ratansinh and Bhavanisinh, from stealing the idol from the temple. Thus Dalo becomes their enemy of both the Kshatriyas. Dalo's village is near the Tirth. Once Dalo's relative identifies him as Dalo, a Dalit, then confusion starts. Bhavanisinh and Ratansinh have rushed to the Tirth with a view to harm him but before their reaching Dalo has safely escaped from the place. The story indicates Dalit's tragedy and to adjust with change their changing names and surnames.

Even today, in Gujarat Dalits try to mix with the mainstream by changing their names/surnames but the people from upper castes identify them and treat them as unwanted beings, in rural as well as in urban areas.

*Whooping Cough* is the second story. The story brings social reality of rural Gujarat. It is the story of Dalit couple Kachara and his wife Ratan. They live at the outskirts of the village and whenever a domestic animal from upper caste people dies, they drag it and sell the skin and bones of the animal. Death of a domestic animal was matter of sorrow for the upper castes while this brought some money to the Dalit family. In this story, because of the unknown disease many animals died, at that time Ratan tells to her husband; "We will get more money for the dead cattle-skin this year. We will also have more grains than usual." (*Whooping Cough*) However, her husband kindly explains her; "Oh! Innocent woman, we can't think of anybody's ill for our gains....The Patels are deprived and you are talking about profit?" What is the such money?" (*Whooping Cough*). In the village, untouchability was practiced. However, when the children became the victims of whooping cough, parents brought to their children to Kachara's place, to touch the water of the pit where leather is tanned." (*Whooping Cough*) In villages, upper castes do not want to go near the pit as they have nausea at the sight. In this story when an old woman Shivi Dosi has advised to go the pit and have drops from that water. The parents whose children were suffering from whooping cough brought there; "Kachara shoved his fingers deep into boy's throat". (*Whooping Cough*) In addition, the child is cured. Rural Indian is quite different from urban India. Orthodoxy and blind faith on the name of miracle still follow by the people. They use technology not to strengthen rational attitude but their orthodoxy! Miracle, by accident may happen! In this story, children are cured. Their condition is improved.

Dalits were/are not accepted with human dignity. In this story, under the Land Ceiling Act Kachara gets land from Hargovindbhai's land, a leading Patel and leader of the village. Government employee, the village secretary informs him and tells to give a thumbprint on the concerned papers. However, the villagers are not ready to give the land from Hargovind's land. Ratan has already explained her husband to avoid conflict with the villagers avoid to get the land. At the end when Kachara does not leave his right on the land given to him under the government policy. Collectively the villagers have attacked on him and



killed by showing the reason that the boy who had suffered whooping cough was polluted. To commit injustice on Dalit, many times, trivial reasons are found out and then attacked on them to remove them forever. The story is the example of this fact.

The story *The Midwife* presets truth about rural Gujarat. Benima is a widow. After the death of her husband, during the mango season, she works for sorting mangoes and then sells them. She has also the inborn knowledge of midwifery. None taught her. Her skill is well known among the village women. Upper caste women call her when a pregnant woman is in labour. In this story Pashi, Patel woman feels her pain. Doctor has already given her injection but the medicine did not work. Then they call Benima. She goes to their house. She helps the woman and a male child is born. Both are healthy and free from danger. When Dalit's help was essential at that time, untouchability or nausea was not considered. However, as the work is finished again Dalit is treated as an unwanted being.

In this story, as they passed, Pashi's son became one and half years old when Benima has seen the boy she tries to give him a mango but Pashi behaves and talks strangely; "she stopped him in his stride. "Dear don't touch Benima!" (*The Midwife*) Women of both upper castes and Dalit community knew that because of Benima's help Pashi and her son were saved, at that time untouchability was not considered. Pashi and her family members did not thank Benima but declared that is Ramkabir, the God they worship saved them. Most of children born in the village at that time were born with the help of Benima. However, when they grew up, poison of untouchability was inculcated in their delicate minds. The playing boys insult her, this is the example of that prejudice; "Hey! You scavenger woman, go away. You will pollute us. Can't you look where you are going?" (*The Midwife*)

The story *Abortion* presents struggle of Dalit couple, Dinesh and Indu. When Indu was a student of Primary Teachers Training College, she was pregnant. However, according to the college rules, she could not stay and study at the college. In order to become financial independent, she prefers to abort her child.

As time passed, she could successfully complete her study and became a schoolteacher. Both, husband and wife, have jobs so they do not have financial crisis. After some time with the consultation of doctor Kulkarni she became pregnant. At that time, a housemaid was required but because of their caste nobody become ready to work at their house.

Because those who are working as housemaid, even they think, it is an inferior job to work at Dalit's house as a housemaid. If a housemaid who works at Dalit's houses was/ is considered as a degraded housemaid. Upper castes do not call them for work to their houses. And housemaids, due to their castes, are thinking that they are superior to Dalits. In this story Dinesh her husband tries to get housemaid from other backward castes but they are not ready to work at Dalit's house. Generally, other backward castes women work as housemaids. They are also exploited class but this story presents crude reality of other backwards castes' hatred towards Dalits.

The couple becomes the parents of male child but they could not enjoy the happiness properly. Because of untouchability, nobody comes as a housemaid to their home. The housemaid tell; "...they belong to lower caste! How can we work for them?" (Abortion) Discrimination is the deeply rooted evil, for healthy society, it should be removed.

*Love is truth* is the story presents Gujarati Dalit's attempt to come out from caste-stigma they embrace Christian faith. However, even after embracing Christianity their issues are not solved, this fact is truly presented. In this story, Philip was born in illiterate Dalit family of Thane district, Maharashtra. He is working as a public relation officer at Mansukhlal Khambhat's laboratory. Here he meets upper caste young woman Hetal. He falls in love with her. However, caste creates confusion in his relationship with Hetal. They got marriage. Became parents of two kids but their colleagues try to spoil their family life. At last Hetal informs Philip that their colleagues, Bharati and Kaushik try to spoil their family life because of envy and caste hatred. At the hot discussion Hetal tells Philip what Bharati has told her; "Philip is originally a Dalit. Dalits will remain low caste even if they have converted to Christianity. Is there a dearth of Savarna boys, that you have chosen a Dalit as your spouse...." (*Love is truth*) Thus, caste-based envy and its adverse effect are realistically presented in this story.

*The Exorcist*, the story, brings us back to early 20th century Gujarat when textile industry was the heart of Ahmedabad. Simultaneously the story presets rural Gujarat of that time. Dharmendra, a Dalit young man gets job as a worker in the textile mill and his family lives in village. Dharmendra works hard to meet financial condition of his family. He works a proxy worker in the mill. However, when he goes to his village he brings something for family members, as a result; "Everybody would be happy as they could be." (*The Exorcist*) His wife Hansa is also happy

when her husband comes to village. However, when she is at her parents' home for her first childbirth, there she becomes psychologically disturbed. People during that time were very innocent, believed in evil spirit or black magic. So Madhobha, her father in law goes to her village with expert exorcist Jago Rabari to treat her so she can get her health back. The exorcists have techniques to befool the innocent. Here in the story Jago says after performing mysterious tricks; "There's no cause to worry! It is a bad spirit, but it will have to go because I have made it take the oath of Eehal Ma. Even it means tearing its mother apart it will have to leave!" (*The Exorcist*) The people worship Eehal Ma, the goddess.

Due to Dalit's ignorance and orthodoxy, Hansa's health is not recovered. She dies. When with anger Madhobha asks Jago the exorcist, why his magic did not work on his daughter in law Jago replies; "how could Mother, Eehal ma enter the body of a Dalit? Moreover, until she did not enter how the evil spirit would be exorcised?" (*The Exorcist*) The statement indicates even the goddess of Jago follows untouchability as he says. This indicates belief of untouchability was deeply rooted devil. Madhobha does not tolerate this, he runs after Jago to heat him. He also demolished a deri, a little temple in anger and hatred. It suggests that Dalit tries to come out from blind faith though after loss.

*Vortex* is the story presents life of Harji who has completed his matriculation and gets job. When he leaves first time his home his mother, Methima, advised; "Look upon somebody's daughter as your sister and somebody's wife as your mother." (*Vortex*) cat crossing the path is ill omen she believes but Natha, Harji's father doesn't believe that. He say; "What is all this fuss? Let the boy go! Good omen, bad omen, it's all humbug!" (*Vortex*) His approach is rationalist. Parents' advice is the great wealth for the Dalit youth when he leaves for job. After a year, Harji's marriage is decided. After the wedding of Harji, his younger brother Deva gets job, thus wedding brings delight to the family. Harji get educated life partner.

Once when the couple was returning to home; "a girl on bicycle coming from the opposite direction smiled at Harji." (*Vortex*) Then again and aging whenever Harji comes the girl crosses his way. This creates confusion in the family. His wife Sarla says, "She couldn't have smiled at you without knowing you, could she?" (*Vortex*) The confusion becomes critical in the family. She becomes suspicious about her

husband's character. She also asks about his colleagues; "Why are you so late today? Hope that Bhavsar wasn't giving you company, was she?" (*Vortex*) She quarrels with her husband when guests come to his home. When Harji says his wife to make the tea, she angrily she replies; "Why don't you ask Jeen's wife Veena to make tea for you?" (*Vortex*) Harji cannot tolerate any more. Therefore, he asks why has she asked such question. Sarla replies with tears in her eyes, "I know everything. Mita tells me everything. Otherwise how am I to know? And she has been saying that you and Veena are planning to elope and get married...." (*Vortex*) However, Harji explains that Mita is an envious of their happy family life. On the issue of Veena both the friends' friendship ends. Sarla does not stop to suspect. Her family disturbs, and Harji remains sufferer.

*Buttress* is the story presents crude reality of contemporary time, corruption. Ishwar, a married Dalit man from village becomes a victim of T. B. The disease has controlled his body. However, his family members think that in city hospital with good treatment he will be cured. Therefore, in city after consulting the doctor in the hospital, the hospital is on the sixth floor of the building when they, Reva his wife and Mathur, are retuning, they have a painful experience. The liftman does not pay attention to the sick Dalit patient and his family. However, when bribe is given thing works smoothly, it is known as "for chai-pani" (*Buttress*). The story indicates bribe from helpless is nothing new.

In urban areas Dalit are living in unhealthy accommodation because they cannot get comfortable accommodation due to caste nausea and poor financial condition. They have to manage with the rented house, especially in Dalit colony; "The three brothers lived in a small dingy room that they had rented in the city." (*Buttress*) House is given on rent after collecting information of customer's castes. In most of cases, Dalits do not get house on rent in "good areas" due to caste nausea. In this story, when the family return after that the climate changes. Rain, thunder and wind create havoc in the city. This proves deadly to Ishwar;

".... he vomited blood, blackened blood with bits of flashy substance. The spittoon filled with sand and phlegm was brimming with blood. His inner world turned head over heels...he felt as if he was coming apart. Inside something writhed." (*Buttress*)

Thus, death was the certain for him. Moreover, family member were helplessly looking at the death of one of their family member. After Ishwar's death about cremation Reva declared; "Reva firmly announced that Ishwar would be buried in their native village. Be it night or be it pouring rain!" (*Buttress*) It was very challenging to bring dead body during rainy night when water was everywhere. Taxi driver refused to come, similarly camel cart-owner has also refused to go, and "at last, the three men picked up courage and made up their mind to transport the corpse on their own." As the time passed; "the corpse grew heavier, the faster they walked, the longer the journey seemed." (*Buttress*) thus when dead body was brought at home in their vas; "everyone was lamenting." (*Buttress*) Jethubha, his father helplessly cries;

"That son of mine, my Ishwar. A real brave man he was....Willingly he had shouldered all the responsibilities of the house, from getting his sisters married to spending after their simant....He had also spent after the education of his younger brothers....today...today the buttress of my house has collapsed....." (*Buttress*)

End of the story is very touchy. It is the microscopic picture of Dalit community where the elder brother shoulders major responsibilities of the family.

*The Good Samaritan* is presented in autobiographical style. It is story of Maganbapa who is about seventy-five to eighty. He had big family, his son Devji had a job in the Gujarat Electricity Board, but because of cancer, he died at thirty-eight. His wife Manjula was given job at his place.

In the story, the old man Maganbapa becomes a victim of diarrhea so all the relatives and castes fellows come to ask about his health and worry that when he will recover his health. The people gathered have started to talk about the reason of Maganbapa's illness;

"His wife gives him tea before she goes to work in the fields. She returns only at two-thirty or tree in the noon. By then the old man loses his appetite. Forcibly he eats the cold millet rotlo and shredded onion that she gives him." (*The Good Samaritan*)

The protagonist has gone to ask about Maganbapa's health. He observed that; "the main factor responsible for Maganbapa's failing

health was lack of proper food at proper times." (*The Good Samaritan*) One by one those who have come to ask Maganbapa's health have gone. One has told; "Start saying your prayers, he has barely a week to live...." (*The Good Samaritan*) the protagonist knows that if something would happen to Maganbapa it would be due to starvation and lack of medical support. Who will bring Maganbapa to the hospital in cities? This was question. The protagonist thinks;

"My constant feeling was that what had to happen would happen, but wasn't it one's duty to get an ailing man treated? Was there no difference between a human being and an animal? The poor villagers tilled the soil by the sweat of their brow. What would they eat if they didn't? How could they nurse a sick person?" (*The Good Samaritan*)

Thinking thus, he brings the old man to city, Himatnagar. Dr. Joshi checks him, gives medicine, and advised to take proper food. After medicine and food Maganbapa has recovered his health. Maganbapa's wife Vallamma blessed the protagonist; "May you live a hundred years. You are indeed my Devji." (*The Good Samaritan*) the protagonist and his wife Madhu, treat the old couple on humanitarian ground.

*Faith*, the story presents reality of Dalit family in rural Gujarat. Manekba is an old woman. After her marriage with Shankarbha her son Bachu was born after long delay. When Bachu reached at his youth and got marriage Dhani, after ten days of Bachu's marriage he had left the home without informing any. This was the unbearable blow on the family. There was no anyone in the family who could labour and earn for livelihood. However, Manekba has great faith that her son would come back and lord Shiva will protect him anywhere wherever he may. At the evening, aarti (evening prayer) she calls children of the vas and make them speak; "Praise be to Bachu." She has profound faith in god that her son will back one day.

In this story, Bachu is unemployed. Therefore, the children of the vas tease him. Shankarbha, his father, also rebukes him. Dalits from the vas blame Dhani her for Bachu's leaving home; "what with such a nagging, quarrelsome wife, there couldn't have been any other way for Bachu, but to run away from house!" (*Faith*). She suffers without her husband and people's criticism and addition to that; "the responsibility of looking after her in-laws was now solely hers." (*Faith*).

Four years have passed in waiting for Bachu but he does not return. Dhani has to work for the family. She works as a farm labour and manages livelihood for the family. Sunderlal Sheth is a lecherous man. He goes to the vas to get women workers for making bundles of tobacco leaves. In the vas, he especially goes to Dhani's house because he knows that her family is helpless and needy. He exploits her. He pays her double wages. However, the fellow Dalit women workers from the vas notice this thing.

Sunderlal Sheth had love marriage with a blacksmith's daughter Pratima, and love marriage in village was the challenging thing at that time. Pratima was beautiful;

"But ever since she has been paralysed he doesn't look at her....She can neither speak nor walk. She keeps suffering mutely. This is the time that she really needs his support. However, he is not bothered. He is busy in ruining the life of one woman after another. Even dogs are better than him." (Faith)

Takhima co-worker in the farm and an old woman from the vas advises Dhani. Dhani realized the fact at last. When she returns her home, it was the time of worship. She joined with the children she felt; "the aarati drew her into a world completely new to her." (Faith) Thus, change comes in her life with a hope to regain her love back. Dhani is not a bad woman but a helpless person. When the truth comes before her, she selects the right path. The story ends with purified stage of Dhani's mind.

The story *The Flame* is highly symbolical and suggestive. It does not only present injustice committed on Dalits of Gujarat but Dalit victimized from other states too. The writer has used autobiographical style. The protagonist suffers from eczema. Eczema is a kind of skin disease that creates great trouble to the patient. In this story, cruelty is committed on Dalits and Dalits get the wound like eczema. This wound is unbearable to them.

The protagonist is telling that he used many medicine, tables and creams. However, none worked. He thinks; "what didn't the doctors treat it carefully? Why was eczema so difficult to cure an age when fatal diseases like cancer were conquered and heart-valves were replaced so easily? (The Flame) The writer has skillfully presents cruelty committed

to Dalits on the base of caste nausea. He further said; "the doctor had told me that it would take some time before it was cured because it had been there since long. ....almost forty-five years has passed since then..." (The Flame)

The protagonist said the eczema based on castes nausea and cruelty is not the product of this time, centuries old issue that is. It is highly symbolical. Dalits are born with this sort of unbearable, even not immediate totally curable, stigma. As a citizen of democratic India, the protagonist cannot bear the cruelty whenever committed on Dalits. Like a strong desire to scratch the wound, the protagonist protests. It indicates the protagonist's protest; "It continued to itch. He scratched, applied cream, but the itching just wouldn't subside. It made him restless. .... His entire existence had blended with the eczema." (The Flame) The protagonist got eczema on his knee so he cannot walk or cannot do any work properly.

Whenever any cruelty committed on Dalit, anywhere in India, he strongly protested. Because of his extremist thoughts and action, his friends warned him that fatal consequences would come. For social change, different ideologies are discussed, like itching; "Art and Ideology", "Art and Reality," "Materialism," "Equality etc." (The Flame) With his friends, he tries to find out solution, emancipation from eczema like caste-based cruelty. He cannot explain his wife about the issue of eczema. Because there is no solution to remove it forever.

The protagonist said he has consulted all the doctors. It also suggests traditional as well, as contemporary medicine to cure the disease proved meaningless. Traditional as well as modern ideologies prove weaker to remove caste-based discrimination.

When the protagonist is meeting to friends he speaks loudly about his wound, others remain silent. Later on, they have replied one by one. Each one is victimized by the injustice and cruelty at different places and time. In 1981 in Gujarat, anti- reservation agitation took place and many Dalits suffered. Another told him about Jetalpur, that is the small village of Gujarat. Here Dalit faced inhuman cruelty; a man from Bihar has also told that he suffered because he got marriage with a Savarna girl. Thus, each has wound. Each suffers.

To come out from the disease they go the expert of the disease. The expert is no more. However, his statue is there;

"This is the statue of a world famous physician, an authority on eczema....he had discovered the cure for eczema ...but ... this extremely caring and industrious doctor died under mysterious circumstances...! that's why, this disease has gone out of hand now." (*The Flame*)

Then they all have gone to the statue of the B. R. Ambedkar. End of the story is highly suggestive; "a tremor shook the statue. There was a deafening explosion and a flame leapt up. The tongues of fire licked the air hungrily. The heaven glowed fiercely like hot sphere." (*The Flame*) The story creates unique impression because of theme and writer's style.

All the stories included in this collection are the selected stories of Harish Mangalam. A few of these stories are also translated in other regional languages. Mangalam always tries to expose truth and reality of contemporary society through his creative art. He brings unpleasant cruelty with a view to stop it and tries to create egalitarian India. At the end of the first decade of 21st century in Gujarat, still Dalits have pains, sighs and sorrows to tell somebody. Mangalam's stories are nothing but the expression of truth. Dalit issues and agonies are different according to states, regions, languages, and cultures. To understand Dalit issues in a better way, the collection will remain highly useful to the enlightened readers, scholars and critics.

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## 6

### Voice of Voiceless: A Study of the Anguish of Characters in the Works of Mulk Raj Anand, Uma Shankar Joshi and Joseph Macwan

*Madhukant A. Macwan*

In this research article, I have tried to search in the inner conscious of the characters and their reactions to the exploitations in the name of caste system prevailing in India. If one looks into the anguish of these characters ranging from the pre- independent era to the present scenario, we will have a shocking revelation.

I have taken as my study the works – *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand, *Saap na Bhaara* (1936) – by Uma Shankar Joshi, and some short stories – *Ramraj*, *Azaadi na Ladva*, *Baap nu Lohi* by Joseph Macwan. (1986 –2010)

All the works deal with problem of untouchability prevailing in the society and its outcome. For decades, the social reformers have tried to find out the ways and means of abolishing the social blot and reform the society.

This paper highlights the plights of the Dalits in the post-independence era that is not quite different from that of pre independence. The works of Mulk Raj Anand and Uma Shankar Joshi highlights the plights of Dalits in the pre independence era. Many critics do not consider these works as Dalit literature. However, let me discuss

them as the paper compares and contrasts the situation of Dalits and their status in our society. As I view it, there is no change.

The term 'Untouchable' means

1. Untouchable - a person who belongs to lowest social and ritual class in India Harijan, castaway, outcast, pariah;
2. beyond the reach of criticism or attack or impeachment;
3. invulnerable - immune to attack; impregnable;
4. impossible to assail;
5. forbidden to the touch;

Martin Macwan defines the term Dalit in the following words –

I am a Dalit if

- I cannot roam around in my village freely.
- I cannot easily get a house or rent a house to live in at the place of my choice.
- I cannot fetch water from the village well.
- I cannot enter a religious place freely.
- I cannot do the work of my choice.
- As of female, I cannot have equal rights as male.
- A Dalit is a person who constantly strives for freedom, equality and justice.

(Martin Macwan, *Maari Katha*).

"Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law – Article 17, Constitution of India.

Gandhi himself wrote about the problem of untouchability in Gujarat when he set about establishing a base in Ahmedabad. He said in his writings that when he insisted on keeping a Dalit in his ashram here, people started shying away. Even sponsors developed cold feet and funds started drying up. Gandhi put his foot down and had his way.

Almost 95 years later, Gujarat is still not listening to the Mahatma even as the world tuned in. The bar for Dalits is felt not only at temples

but also 'satsangs' and 'kathas'. Not being able to sit on a cot or a chair with other upper castes has been clearly established as a sign of untouchability.

However, the bubble of Vibrant Gujarat needs a prick in the bottom. At the lowest level of the society, Gujarat is not happy. Untouchability still exists in various parts in various forms.

*Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand is one of the first novels in the pre-independence time to deal with such a theme. It deals with the central character of the novel Bakha and his experiences throughout the day. Mulk Raj Anand provides three solutions to eradicate the social taboo – untouchability in the Indian society. Mulk Raj Anand was impressed with the philosophy of Gandhi. It was a kind of revolutionary novel in those days. Bakha undergoes many insults due to untouchability. Everyone he meets abuses him.

There are two major incidents in the novel. Bakha touches an upper caste person and pollutes him. While eating Jalebi he forgot to announce "Posh, posh, sweeper coming" and defiled him by touching.

You swine, you dog, why didn't you shout and warn me of your approach... Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! The offspring of a pig! ... This dirty dog bumped right into me! (Anand, 38).

At the end, Bakha saves an injured boy, hurt by a stone. The mother of the boy instead of being thankful, scolds Bakha for touching her son.

'You eater of your masters, you dirty sweeper!' She shouted, 'what have you done to my son?' 'you have killed my son' she wailed.

Mother mother, what are you saying? Interposed her elder son. It was not he. He did not wound him.

The incident of 'touching' spoils the whole day of Bakha. Bakha feels like taking revenge, strike back, but he is helpless. He cannot touch that person, otherwise he will be accused of defiling that man again.

The second is the temple incidence. Pundit Kalinath tries to molest Sohini, the untouchable. Pundit Kalinath drew water from the village well and gave water first to Sohini. He also asks her to come to the temple to clean the compound. The village temple priest, the holiman, Pundit Kalinath tries to rape Sohini, and when she resists, he shouts 'polluted, polluted.' Sohini also comes out weeping. She meets Bakha

at the temple and informs him about the incident. Bakha gets angry, he feels like killing the pundit.

Bakha asks Sohini,

Tell me, Sohini, how far did he go?

She sobbed and did not reply.

'Tell me! Tell me! I will kill him if....'

She said, 'He just teased me, and then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breast.

'The son of a pig! I will go and kill him.'

And Bakha rushed blindly towards the courtyard. (Anand, 54).

Bakha does express his anguish at the Pundit but Sohini stops him.

This incident underlines the social hypocrisy of the upper castes, which make much of their high caste, their purity and their separateness from the Dalits in public by practicing covert untouchability and yet in private exploit the same people sexually and otherwise.

Bakha feels like killing the pundit but he is helpless. His father advises him not to raise his voice against the upper caste people. It is their lot to tolerate whatever comes their way. He also asks him not to retaliate against high caste men.

....they are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient to overbalance all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us. (Anand, 71)

In the course of events, Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson. He wanted to convert him to Christianity. He is impressed by his talk that Christ accepts all. However, later he could not understand him and he goes away. He goes to listen to the speech of Gandhi at the end of the novel. He is impressed by Gandhi's example of a sweeper boy. Gandhi's philosophy is that all are equal in this free India. The third solution to untouchability comes in the form of a mouthpiece of the author, a poet. He suggests the introduction of the latest latrine system, drainage system to eradicate untouchability. However, none has been much effective even after sixty years of Independence. The characters are also not so aggressive.

*Untouchable* closes with a solution of the flush system to eradicate the untouchability. People like Bakha had hope for future. However, the situation has not changed.

*Saap na Bhaara* is one of the controversial collections of plays written by Uma Shankar Joshi. I do not wish to name it. However, all know it due to the controversial title and theme it has. The dramatist puts before us two aspects of untouchability. First, untouchability is prevailing between the upper caste and the lower caste of the Indian society and second untouchability is prevailing among the untouchables. The dramatist comes with a revolutionary theme. He is right in his observation of this social stigma. The characters he presents are not revolutionary. They are fatalist by nature. Dalits are considered as worse than animals. (Joshi, 148).

The two characters Kachro and Valio go to the village pond to have a pot of water. A high caste old man caught them. The old man thought there would be some animals, but he found the lower caste persons stealing water from the pond and thus defiling it. Kachro appeals to the old man to at least consider them as animals. The old man rejects the appeal and argues that if God wished it, He would have created them as animals and not untouchables. Kachro argues again that God has created them as man, but the society does not consider them so.

The condition of Dalits is miserable. They accept their fate as it is. None of the above characters tries to question the upper caste people or rebel against them

"Bhagat: That Vallabh was telling that if you sacrifice something to the Fire, then your confession will be complete- a sacrifice of our hut."

Hiri: ok, let us sacrifice our hut, by that means we will get fire, The villagers consider untouchable, so do not give us even fire, so we will have fire by that means of sacrifice."  
(Scene-III)

As the drama moves on the better caste among the Dalits dig a small well nearby the village pond. Balo and Meru try to fetch water from this well and thereby defile it. The punishment for this defiling of the small well is to set fire to the hut of Balo. It was a kind of repentance. Hiri, the wife of Balo says that it is better to leave the village than to live there. None allows them to take a piece of fire. If they set their hut to fire, it will be of one use to them, that is they will get fire. See the miserable condition of the Dalits. None dares to raise their voice against this atrocity.

Now if one compares these characters with the characters of the works of Joseph Macwan, one finds that mostly all the characters are



rebellious by nature. They do not tolerate the exploitation silently. I have taken the stories *Ramraj*, *Baap nu Lohi* and *Angane Rudo Avasar*.

*Ramraj* is a story of Karmala who is a tanner. His father advises him to bear all the things silently or be prepared for dire consequences. Karmalo makes shoes for the Village Sarpanch (Head) while preparing it he was absorbed in the thoughts of his would be wife. Something goes wrong and the shoe bites the Village Head. He calls Karmala and punishes in broad day light for making default shoes. Karmala tolerates such an insult. Moreover, the village Head snatches the beautiful chappal that Karmala has prepared for his better half. This was something unbearable for Karmala. He decides not to call his wife until he takes revenge. He does so.

Once it so happens that the wife of the Village Head, while feeding one of the cows, drops a diamond ring in the vessel, the cow devours it. In those days, the ring cost 1000 rupees, and the cow cost 50 or 60 rupees. The village head commits the sin of killing the cow. He calls Karmala and asks him to find out the diamond ring from the dead cow. Karmala does the work and then he beats the Village head heavily. The village head's condition is miserable. He cannot tell nor bear. Not only has Karmala dared the Village Punch too in open when they try to practice in unjust ways.

Karmalo : Chief, beware, if you take any extreme step, we will not move the dead animals from the village!

Karmalo challenges the whole village punch to beware and not to take any extreme step against their caste people. There was an epidemic among the animals and many animals were dying every day. The Village Head and others tried to conspire against the lower caste blaming them for the deaths of animals. Karmalo warns them that if they do so then his caste people will lift none of the dead animals. Karmala's caste people were awestruck by his challenge to the village Head. None had dared to do such thing so far. He was a favourite among them.

Since that day of conflict with the chief of the village, Karmalo has become the favourite among his caste people; a sense of self-esteem has arisen among them. Karmalo has been humiliated so deeply that he has postponed his marriage for some time.

His father has always advised, "We people are destined to tolerate and keep mum. We are not to retaliate but only to maintain silence

against all type of injustice and discrimination by the upper caste. (Macwan Joseph,18)

Karmala's father always advised him to tolerate and be silent. He advised not to raise his voice against the Village head or any upper caste person. But Karmala questions this philosophy of his father and the ancestors. He says he too is a human being. He works hard like an animal and he does not have a peaceful life.

Karmalo : How long should I tolerate such injustice by the upper caste people. I work hard all day, and I don't even get enough food and peace of mind. He too is human like me, but he enjoys, he even does not spare any girl in the village. But his father advised him to control himself as his caste people were not destined to raise any voice against the upper caste people (Macwan Joseph,18)

In *Baap nu Lohi* the owner of the Tobacco mill rapes Kamari, later she commits suicide. The owner's father also raped Kamari's mother. The mother does not commit suicide, but Kamari does. This incident underlines the social hypocrisy of the upper castes, which make much of their high caste, their purity and their separateness from the Dalits in public by practicing covert untouchability and yet in private exploit the same people sexually and otherwise. Joseph Macwan highlights the exploitation of the workers in the Tobacco mills in Charotar.

*Baap nu Lohi* deals with a young Dalit girl, Kamari, who wants to go to school and study. However, the poor economical circumstance forces her to go to the Tobacco Mill and earn something for her old parents. At the end, we find Kamari's dead body hanging and the old poor mother cursing Kahli and the owner. Kamari's mother clutches Kahli and expresses her anguish:

What kind of revenge you have taken , Kahli? You go and tell the owner of the tobacco mill that the girl you have raped is none other than your own sister, you have committed incest, the greatest of the sins! ( Vyas,147).

The anguish of the poor mother moves the readers. It also reveals the exploitations of the Dalit women workers in the tobacco mills.

*Azaadi na Ladva* depicts the practice of untouchability in a small village and the practice is propagated by the Pandit- Mahant of the



village temple. The story deals with the practice in school as well as in the temple. The Dalits of the village could not grasp the meaning of 'Azadi'. The Mahant of the temple has arranged the celebration of Azadi in the village. 'Brahmbhojan was arranged. He has served an instruction for the Dalits not to come in the village. The next day they find a dead cow lying in front of the temple. Everything is polluted. The Laddu-Sweets prepared for Brahmbhojan too are polluted. Now they cannot eat them. So the sweet is sent to the Dalit Maholla. However, the cooks mixed some intoxication into the sweets. As a result, all the Dalits felt unconscious and lied on the ground. The village teacher comes and asks the Mahant if he had mixed anything poisonous into the sweet or not. He declared that he was going to complain to the collector.

Recently Navsarjan Trust carried out a study with the help of three US based organizations-The Kroc Institute for International Peace studies at the University of Notre Dame, Dartmouth College at the University of Michigan and Robert F. Kennedy Center for Social Justice and Human Rights, Washington, DC. During this study, the researchers did not find a single village where no form of untouchability is practiced, giving an unnerving idea about the extent of the problem in a state which is home of Gandhi.

Ahmedabad based social scientist Prof. Ghanshyam Shah, a retired professor from J.N.U. New Delhi also helped in this study. He says, "Dalits face untouchability at religious places the most because the concept of untouchability has been centred around religion and 'purity' It may seem for the Urban middle classes that many things have changed, but the ground reality is harsh till today." (Parmar, Vijaysinh, 4.)

He further says, "Untouchability in government establishments is the first thing the government should address, even if it can't bring change at the social or village level."

Dalit rights activist Martin Macwan of Navsarjan Trust says, "In every step of untouchability, the same concept is being applied- that of purity. Gujarat has only tried to dignify an indignity by calling these separate utensils as "Ram patra". ( Parmar, Vijaysinh, 4). (For detailed study on the prevalence of practices of untouchability in Gujarat see the latest report released by Navsarjan Trust on its website).

Thus, the report of the Navsarjan trust exposes the Gujarat government and its claims of development. The situation of the Dalits is

still as Mulk Raj Anand, Uma Shankar Joshi and Joseph Macwan present it in their literary world.

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## Dalit Literature and Its Impact on Society

B.M. Vaghela

Dalit Literature is primarily a literature of protest against the age old oppression and humiliation that was suffered by the lower caste in India. Literature became a weapon to come out from this agony and sufferings. If we talk of the Dalit writing, Dalit writing started in Marathi but soon it spread to other parts of the country.

The literal meaning of the word Dalit is one who has been trampled under feet or who has been oppressed, exploited, insulted, humiliated and thrown outside the pale of civic society. Dalit literature is not only a literature of protest and rejection, but also a literature of reconstruction of the past. Dalit literature is seen in the main, as protest against the establishment as commitment to inculcating new values aiming at a new order. There are in it a lot of frustration, a lot of anger, and a lot of hope, too. It wants freedom. The protagonist, be it of a poem or a short story, is usually projected as a rebel 'standing up against subjugation, humiliation and atrocities' and is also shown at times, as "Singing intoxicated of the dawn of a new life".

Dalit literature, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It focuses on writing that includes Dalit characters, or descriptions of Dalit life and experiences. Influenced by post-modern literary movements, it questions mainstream literary theories and upper caste ideologies and explores the invisible twilight zones of neglected issues.

The literature is essentially against exploitation, and made use of writing as a method of propaganda for the movement.

Dalit literature has produced so many writers and poets to shape the problems of society, the downtrodden people, the oppressed people and their frustrated deepest feelings towards the upper class. In this literature, the poets through their own feelings give the right voices to the oppressed class people. Regional Dalit writings give the shape of the problem of the downtrodden people associated to that particular area.

Dalit writers say the emergence of low-caste literature has taken place alongside a broader growth of consciousness and activism, particularly in urban India. While in rural India, caste is omnipresent, in cities many of the signs and signals that identify a person's caste have vanished. In cities, too, Dalits are better organized to stand up for their rights.

"There is a growing consciousness that is emerging. People are now better educated and they all get to know about their rights," said Anita Bharti, a long-time writer and activist who heads a Dalit literary forum that meets every month in Delhi.

Literature, said Ms Bharti, has an important role to play in the ongoing struggle by Dalits to end discrimination. While abuse of low-caste people still happens, "they can now write about it. Also, people realize that Dalits have been mistreated in the past and that there is a need to bring Dalit literature to other people."

The basic impulse behind Dalit literature is an awareness of the social injustice and rebellion against it. The Dominant figure in this period was Gopalbaba Walangkar who started a monthly *Vital Vidhwansan* in 1894, Shivram kambale also started a monthly *Somvanshiya Mitra* through which the untouchable sensibilities were expressed. Anna Bhau Sathe gave the first fully uninhabited expression to the movement to the Dalit movement because of the rebellious stance taken by the protagonist of the stories. Narayan Surve, who was influenced by the Marxism, gave a new dimension to the Dalit movement with two collections of poetry: *Aish Ga Mi Brahma* (For I am Brahma), and *Majhe Vidyapeeths* (My University). Baburao Begul's Second volume of Short story *Maran Svasta Hot Aahe* (Death is becoming Cheaper) give

a jolt to mainstream Marathi Literature as it presents the heart rendering experience of the author. In this way, the writers of the regional Dalit writers have given the true picture of the feelings of the hearts of the protagonists.

In addition to the above-mentioned writers, the following writers too contributed significantly to the Dalit literature. They are Keshav Mesharm, Avinash Dolus, Arjun Dangle Bhimro Yogiraj Waghmare and others. The complex obliterated relationship between a Dalit individual and the society constitutes the theme of Dalit short stories.

Dalit Literature has seen women as a dynamic power. It does not depict women as fleshy, sexy object, Realizing that the fall in woman's status has been resulted in the social inequality the Dalits have decided to treat woman as an woman and to take her with them social metamorphosis.

Dalitness in Indian context is not a monotype reality. It is, in fact, a vast plural concept. Dalit unity in India is full of enormous diversity. The relationship between the Dalit literature and the society is more important, because people who suffered hardships and handicaps for centuries in the past are associated with literature to enhance their position in the society. Generally, the writers always keep their eyes on reform or try to change the people through their writings.

Premchand wanted to draw the attention of the upper caste Indians to this insensitive behaviour relating to the Dalits so that the Dalits might be treated at least as human beings. The underlying message conveyed by Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* is that traditional caste structure and values have a stronghold over even those who come out to help the Dalits. Such a hesitation and thinking over the immediate encounter with a Dalit may be explained also by the assumed lack of cleanliness or the unhygienic surroundings assumed to be closely associated with the Dalit colonies.

There are some men and women Dalit writers in Dalit Literature. Narayan Surve, Namdeo Dhasal, Keshav Meshram, Yashwant Manohar, Raja Dhale, Arjun Dangle, J.P. Pawar Waman Nimbalkar, Arun Kamble, Prakash Jadhav among men and Mina Gabhiye, Hira Bhansode, Jyoti Lanjewar, Mallika Amar Sheikh, Anuradha Gurav, etc., among women. All these writers have given the right voices to the downtrodden people in their literary works. Dalit Literary movement is the unique example in India. It has proved an important platform to the

lower classes to express their sense of identity and solidarity.

Thus, the Dalit literature has great impact on the society. The Dalit literature will not open the eyes of the upper castes only but also of those Dalits who have started behaving like "Dalit Brahmins". They can also understand the difficulties, the pains and pangs of their own people. The literature gives the new insight to readers about their identity, their place in the society. There are writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Rohinton Mistry who have presented the picture of the Dalit problems in their literary works but when the Dalit writers draw the picture of their own community it directly presents the Dalit community. Therefore, the literature created by the Dalit literature has great impact on the society.

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## Dalit Literature: Alternative Aesthetic with Social Commitment

*Vipulkumar N. Solanki*

The literature produced by Dalits in a conscious, defined, modern sense with an awareness of what it is to be Dalit is Dalit literature. The role of Dalit writer is to convey Dalit consciousness to the people through literature. Dalit literature is about war of ideas. Sharankumar Limbale opines that the writer's job is to take literature to the masses. Dalit literature seeks to transform savarna society, to bring about change in the heart and mind of the savarna individual. Dalit literature has two dimensions. One is to familiarize Dalits with their past, to explain them that they are enslaved, to show them that they are human beings and it is their duty and their right to fight for the rights of a human being. The other dimension of Dalit literature involves working on the hearts and minds of savarna society in order to persuade them about the rights and entitlements of Dalits, to make them see that Dalits are human beings and have been suppressed, and convince them that they must change. Sharankumar Limbale defines Dalit consciousness thus:

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for Dalit consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness. (Limbale: 32)

Dalit writers write out of social responsibility. Their writing expresses the emotion and commitment of an activist. The ideas propagated in Dalit literature are society-oriented. All the protagonists of Dalit literature are representative characters of Dalit community. Dalit literature is a protest literature against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. Literature of protest is the voice of the new generation. Literature has always been used by writers as weapon to fight against the established social order, norms, traditions, hypocrisy, outmoded customs, as well as the political system.

Dalit is not a new word. The word 'Dalit' comes from the Hindi root dal and means 'held under check', 'suppressed' or 'crushed' — or, in a looser sense, 'oppressed'. The term Dalit is a comprehensive expression which now includes all the communities of the Scheduled Castes. The word Dalit in Marathi language means (1) ground (2) broken reduced to pieces generally. In fact, the term Dalit was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of "depressed classes", a term the British used for what are now called the scheduled castes. In 1930 there was a newspaper published for the depressed classes in Pune called *Dalit Bandu* (friends of Dalits). B.R. Ambedkar also used the word in his Marathi speeches. The so-called Dalit Panthers revived the term in their 1973 manifesto and expanded its reference to include the scheduled tribes, Neo-Buddhists, working people, landless and poor peasant women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Thus the term 'Dalit' is a broad definition, encompassing all those considered to be either similarly placed.

Dalit literature has blossomed in Marathi language more than any other languages in India. It can be attributed to Ambedkar's bid to emancipation and empowerment of Dalits. Ambedkar is the forerunner of Dalit literature in India for his stimulus efforts to unite Dalits and to fight for their rights through his writings. He became the source of creative minds among the oppressed castes with his ideas, outlook towards life and his struggle to achieve what he felt just. Being closely associated with the hopes of freedom of group of people who as untouchable are victims of religious, social, economic and cultural inequality, Dalit literature owes its origins to a revolutionary struggle for a religious, social and economic change.

Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is symbol of change and revolution. Moreover, for Dalit literature, low caste men and their sufferings are of great importance. Many writers have defined Dalit literature. The best

one among them is Arjun Dangle, a well-known Marathi Dalit writer. He defines Dalit literature thus:

Dalit literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people. It is a movement. (Dangle: 266)

Prof. Gangadhar Pantawane, the professor of Marathi at Marathwada University at Aurangabad and founder editor of *Asmitadarsh* defines the term Dalit in the following words:

To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. (Pantwane: 78)

Dalit literature has created its own alternative aesthetic by redrawing the map of literature, by discovering and exploring a completely new continent of experience that has so far been left to darkness and silence, by helping literature overcome stagnation through a cleansing renewal. It has disturbed the sterile complacency of the dominant social groups, by challenging their set customs or conventions, fixed modes of looking at reality and their established literary canons. It thus brings to focus neglected, suppressed or marginalized aspects of experience, vision, language and reality and forces the community to refashion its tools and observe itself critically. Dalit literature rejects the norms set by Brahminic poetics and throws overboard classical values like propriety, balance, restraint and understatement.

Dr. Darshana Trivedi in her article, "Literature of their Own: Dalit Literary Theory in Indian Context" talks about Dalit aesthetics as:

Since Dalit literature rejects canonical literature, it also rejects the established standards of evaluating literature i.e. the aesthetics. The purpose of traditional literature is to provide aesthetics pleasure i.e. "brahamanadsahodarananda". Though traditional aesthetics talk about the basic principles of literature, Sataym (truth), Shivam (goodness) and Sundaram (beauty). It is never realistic. On the contrary, Dalit literature is based on reality and for it man is superior even to God or the nation. Hence when we evaluate Dalit

text we can neither apply Bharata's concept of Nayaka Dhirodad, Dhirlalit, Dhir Prasant or Dhiruddat, nor can we apply Jagannath's definition of poetry "Vakyamrasatamkam Kavyam". Dalit literature rejects Western theories like Freud's Psychoanalysis, Barthe's structuralism or Derrida's deconstruction theory, it also rejects Indian theories of Rasa and Dhawani..... We cannot evaluate the beauty of Dalit woman by keeping Shakuntala's concept in mind (Kimiv himadhuranam hi mandanakrutum). The beauty of Dalit women lies in the web of perspiration on her face while she works in the field. (Trivedi: 6)

Dalit writers have insisted that their writing has a particular purpose and audience, that these have an important bearing on their literary or aesthetic decisions. And that therefore, their work should not be assessed by 'universal' criteria, which, in India, carry the markers of caste and class. While evaluating the Dalit writing the critic will have to become one with the soul of Dalit literature, and take into consideration the stresses and tensions in the inner being of Dalits, as well as the mindset of Dalit writers and the Dalit society. The literature that was written for kings and emperors, and the literature that had kings and emperors as heroes, and its aesthetic value, are simply not relevant for our times. The heroes of yesterday's literature were kings or gods; it was the literature of the privileged. Dalits are absent in it. The literature of those who are untouchable, those who are downtrodden, cannot be measured with the artistic values of Shakespeare, it can only be assessed according to Ambedkarite thought and Dalit thought. Ambedkarite thought is the aesthetics of Dalit literature. Dalit literature cannot be evaluated on the basis of either Sanskrit aesthetics or western aesthetics. The aesthetics of this literature can only be based on the thinking of Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule.

Dalit literature is the literature of social commitment. The Dalit writers' social consciousness and understanding of life are quite meaningful. It is in this respect that there is a difference between Dalit writers and other writers. However, the difference is not only in ideas but also in experience, content, subject matter, style and the use of language. There is a great difference between their own life and characters that about that they are writing about. That is why they have thrown off the values, principles, purpose and aesthetic criteria of middle

class writers and critics. In discussing Dalit writers, the question arises: who is a Dalit. The word 'Dalit' does not refer only to Buddhists and backward class people but to all those who toil and are exploited and oppressed. This definition is in accordance with that given by Baburao Bagul in the Dalit literary conference at Mahad. He said that Dalit literature takes man as its centre. It participates in man's joys and sorrows and leads him to a just revolution. It teaches equality to the mass of humanity, that is, society. It considers man noble. Dalit literature does not spread hatred among men but love. Dalit literature takes human beings as its centre. Moreover, by keeping human beings at centre of literature, the Dalit writers started launching an intellectual attack on the society in which there is no equality, justice or unity.

Having reached various parts of India, the Dalit literature is now growing in almost all Indian languages including some dialects in which Dalit community communicate. It is the reflection of Dalit life. Each writer derives his inspiration from the community to which he belongs. The themes of Dalit writings compared well with the real life experiences. In his writing, the Dalit writer is combating the caste-based divisive forces and tendencies being committed to a cause. Some are committed to particular political ideology. Their writings are not only propaganda but also characterized by a feeling of rebellion against the establishment of negativism. Dalit writers hardly believe in merely sermonizing or raising high-sounding slogans. Most of them are young. They are enthusiastic and of soft motivated young men, and are aware that mere wishes and intentions are incapable of changing the hard reality. Their writings rebelled against the social system and gave it a jolt. Though the Dalit literature is written in different languages, different geographical background, but there is a common denominator; the roots, the sensibility, the common suffering, discrimination, exploitation and injustice. Hence, the solidarity is among all the Dalit writers. They are transcending the narrow barriers of language, of creed, colour and sex.

While concluding it can be said that Dalit literature has much contemporary relevance. Dalit literature is written with the purpose of conveying the anguish and suffering of the Dalits and demands an antidote for it. Its aim is not to teach or preach. Dalit literature is quite relevant in today's society as it derives its strength through the depiction of hard reality and aims at the systemization of human values for national progress. The purpose of Dalit literature is to stem the rot and pave the way for India without barriers of cancerous caste system and

make the country a nation in reality. The Dalit writers have affirmative visions of life. Hence, it can be said the writing that has come forward to forge friendship and harmony between people and literature is Dalit literature. The Dalit writers persuades us to reconsider our ideas, listen to those voices which we often refuse to hear and understand the visions which seek to change the world in which Dalits live. Dalit writers have realized that it is time for the celebration of difference, in its true spirit of pain and agony in being Dalit. Dalit literature can become the great vehicle to inspire generations. Dalit literature deserves to be known to the world, to the children, the elders and the generation next of this country.

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## 9

# Dalit Identity as Presented in B.Kesharshivam's Autobiography *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth*

Kirit Talati

In Gujarat, the Dalit literary activities began in the late 1920s but it gained pace in the 1970s. Ambedkar was and is still an inspiration for all the Dalit writers in Gujarat. The anti- reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985 brought all the Gujarati Dalits together and were united for their rights. During this time, they felt the necessity to express themselves and they started writing.

Rita Kothari has stated in "Short Stories in Gujarati Dalit Literature"

"unlike Marathi Dalit literature, Gujarati Dalit writing did not evolve out of a large political movement against the upper castes...it grew as a response to the upper castes' virulent attacks on the reservation policy in 1981". (Kothari)

In the Dalit movement, the role of Dalit literature is very significant to generate the awareness among the Dalits to unite for their right. The Dalits are in seeking their self- identity and therefore they have started expressing their selves, and literature is one of the important tools for self-expression. With the help of various literary forms they depict the realistic Dalit and non- Dalit life. They have been exposing the social hierarchical system based on ancient principles of 'Varnas', with Brahmins the purest and Untouchables the most polluted. The Dalit

literature is committed to the completely downtrodden society and culture. It makes the Dalits aware of the injustice and their rights that are denied by so-called upper class society for centuries. In this struggle they took inspiration from the African-American writings especially of the 1960s and 1970s and started struggle for self identity and self respect.

Many Dalit writers have tried to define Dalit literature. One of them is Arjun Dangle in whose views, "Dalit literature is not simply literature; it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people". (Dangle 266)

The age-old question of Dalit identity was addressed through many literary genres like the poetry, short stories, fictions, novels and autobiographies. Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar has provided stimulus to the Dalit question. They have not raised questions but also united Dalits to have their freedom. Dalit liberation movement and Dalit literary movement go hand in hand.

Dalit autobiography differs from the mainstream autobiographies, as it is related with the Dalit consciousness, Dalit movement, the style of writing, use of particular language, etc. Dalit autobiography is a type of self- narration in which more significance is given to the collective life than that of the individual life. These autobiographies are not written to describe the achievements and self-glorification. Therefore, the aims and objectives of these autobiographies are different. The Dalit autobiographies are used as a weapon for creating a social awareness among the Dalits.

As mentioned earlier the chief characteristic of the Dalit autobiographies is to spread awareness about social injustice and discrimination among the oppressed and exploited people. According to eminent Kannada Dalit writer Arvind Malagatti, "We are choosing memories that create social change" (*Government Brahmana* 10). Another important characteristic of the Dalit literature is that it vehemently criticizes the 'varna' system that is the root for the pitiable plight of the Dalits.

The other crucial characteristic of the Dalit autobiographical narratives is that they do not segregate the individual from his historical surroundings, family and society. The individual is not isolated subject but he represents whole community. The painful struggles and the quest of identity of the individual seem never detached from the nature that



the organism of social relation and historical surroundings has given him. The subject of the autobiographical narratives generally is a social personage from and among a whole community.

Sarah Beth writes, "Autobiographies of marginalized groups differ in that they are written by...individuals who emphasize the ordinariness of their life rather than their uniqueness in order to establish themselves as representative of their community." (Beth) This painful experience is common to all the Dalit auto-biographers, this firsthand experience outburst when they got opportunities to express themselves. For this kind of expression, this marginalized groups found autobiography the proper medium to express them. For them autobiography is not only a kind of literary form, but is a platform to give voice to their sorrows and sufferings and to their inner yearning to be considered as normal human beings. Guy Poitvin writes, "It serves purposes of social intervention and accordingly carries strong militant connotations". (Poitevin)

Gujarati Dalit literature is healthy in the literary forms like poetry, short story and fiction. However, as far as autobiographical form is concerned; *Purnasatya* is the only full-length autobiography available in Gujarati Dalit literature. It was written by B.Kesharshivam and published in 2002. *Purnasatya* is considered as a 'mile stone' not only by Dalit but also even by mainstream literary critics. It has won 'Dasi Jivan' award of the Government of Gujarat in 2003.

During reading B.Kesharshivam's autobiography *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth* (translated from Gujarati *Purnasatya*) the reader can experience that the genre boundaries are violated by depleting the 'I' – an outcome of the bourgeois individualism – and by replacing it by the collectivity of the Dalit population. The relations between the society and the individual and the private and the public are problematized by conceiving of the self not merely in private or personal terms. It resists the codes that underscore the productions of subjectivities in society and demands new modes of narration and signification. It can be observed that what is represented is not the journey of an individual articulation, sensation and realization but rather a collective and community-based chorus of voices.

*The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth* is a life story about its author's childhood, growing up as an untouchable. It is tale about the struggle that he waged to survive the ordained life of physical and

mental persecution, and his transformation into a speaking subject. It is about the persona that was compelled to internalize patterns of cultural depreciation and social subalternity. In this autobiography, he becomes a chronicler of the oppression he endured not only as an individual, but also as a member of a stigmatized and oppressed community. The first part of the book "Growing Up" deals with the author's childhood memories. The second one "At Work" he has described reminiscences of his service life in government offices, mostly in the state of Gujarat. During his period in service, he realized that there were two ways to show ones performance in job – to work hard and to keep the boss happy. He came to know how people perfected the second method. B.Kesharshivam has written three novels apart from quite a number of collections of short stories and essays. *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth* provides the reader the themes and background of many of the creations of its author.

The first part of the autobiography also highlights the social costumes and the life of the people of the community. Their beliefs, superstitions, and some supernatural elements are also there. Whatever events Shivam has depicted, they are depicted with such vividness that we get a very touching picture of the lives of the Dalits; from births, weddings, religious ceremonies, *bhava*is to *mushayaras*. This shows the collective life of the Dalit community and how they get united in adverse circumstances.

In the first part of his autobiography B.Kesharshivam has described an incident, as a student he went to school picnic after taking food, everyone threw the leaf plates in a pit, the beggars were collecting the leftover from the plates. When a beggar woman saw Bhikha she threw the plate. B.Kesharshivam writes, "She threw my plate as if it were a live wire or filled with poison and cried out 'Hai, hai he's a dhed...'". (B.Kesharshivam 113)

The second part of the autobiography was published later. It deals with B.Kesharshivam's life as a government officer. Even being a government officer, he has to suffer in each and every step of life due to his Dalit identity. In Dholaka, where the author was posted as a 'mamlatdar', he was not able to get house on rent in good locality. In this part, we can see B.Kesharshivam's devotion to Ambedkar and to his community.



B.Kesharshivam continues his efforts to be helpful to his community at any cost. We can see how he suffers while helping to others. As a government officer, he performs his duty bravely. He suffers lot while he allots 'Gochar' to the landless Dalits. B.Kesarshivam writes, "If you were to knock on the words of pain, you would hear the sound of truth; if you were to press the words, you would find drops of perspiration oozing out; and if you were to dig into them, you would find blood streaking out." (B.Kesharshivam,17)

He has spent all years of his career to teach the Dalits, 'the mantra' of Ambedkar: 'get educated, get organized and then revolutionize'. B.Kesharshivam feels, that the governments and social reformers, the untouchability has not been completely removed. It is always there in one or another form. The Dalits share the same country, same religion, and same language but due to their Dalit identity they are forced to live in their own bounding that creates their own subculture. Even after so many years of independence, at some extent the Dalits are treated in the same way.

B.Kesharshivam has pointed out the issue of acceptance of Dalit writers by those who belong to the mainstream. He mentions that there was a discussion for six months whether his first short story *Rati Rayan ni Ratash* (The Anger of a beautiful Woman), which was written mostly in Dalit dialect, should be published at all. "Tremendous courage is needed to create Dalit literature" he declares (xxx). He observes that Dalit literature is a product of various imprisonments – the imprisonment of untouchables, of speech, of knowledge and hence "Dalit literature means prison literature" (4).

One of the first things that strike the readers of *The Whole Truth* is the dehumanizing impact of caste oppression in society. The author documents his struggles against caste-violence, deprivation, discrimination and poverty. This routine violence of everyday existence is described in many Dalit life narratives. These narratives must be treated as *testimonios*, atrocity narrative that document trauma and strategies of survival as Pramod Nayar suggests in his article *Bama's Karukku: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio*. They forge a right to speak for as well as beyond the individual and contest explicitly or implicitly the 'official forgetting' of histories of caste oppression, trauma and struggle. Here the target is not literariness but to convey the pain,

struggle, oppression, and angst of a group or community. The writers experience their ordinary selves not as a unified completely which is in harmony with its surroundings but in a constant state of conflict with the power structure established by the caste hierarchy.

Dalits can claim their selves only as members of their group and only through confrontations with a given system of subjugation, and therefore for Dalits community identity is primary in their perception of the self as it is the community which shares the same pain and stigma as the writer describes in his/her writing.

With the purpose of social intervention Dalit literature too carries strong militant connotations. Arun Prabha Mukherjee thinks Dalit autobiographies are not 'sob stories' but that of anger against injustice (Rege, 10). Guy Poitevin has pointed out the driving motives in Dalit writers behind projection of their past. The first drive, Poitevin notes, is the determination of the oppressed to denounce the culprit and to proclaim faith in the liberation movement launched by Ambedkar. The second one is the will to narrate one's social history, to record the past as a document of the history of their society and humanity in general, to present a precise testimony and show in detail how they have been oppressed. Self-assertion; seeking the status of human being; belief that education is their savior; reassessing and reappropriation of past for an alternative history for further struggle; construction of identity through relentless militancy; projection of social, political and welfare activities; painfully rooting out the memory of trauma of ancestral humiliation etc. are the various motives to write Dalit autobiographical narratives. Recalling the atrocities of the yesteryears is as painful as the real agony. B.Kesharshivam was constantly plagued with the question: "What was the point in remembering the painful past?" (xiv) Readers find pessimism in his attitude when he writes:

What is the point of writing? Who will read it? And what'll happen after it has been read? After death, everything will remain as it is here. (xviii)

He says that "I feel in one life I have lived many lives and that is why I have taken the liberty of writing this autobiography and narrating the stories of my many selves" (xix). He inverted an old saying in the introduction of his book *Shool* (Thorn). "Instead of saying 'though the snakes have disappeared but their traces remain', I have stated 'the traces have been erased but the snakes remain'" (207).

In spite of being, a document of collective trauma and struggle there is no dearth of humour and pathos related to author's personal life in *The Whole Truth*. His parents and other members of family, failure to marry his love because of her higher caste, satisfaction in marital life, and tension in his second marriage - all have place in the book. Her (his first wife) laughter reflected pure happiness that a happy marriage had provided. I too often remember her statement, 'I will never ever leave you'. Yet she left me forever halfway through our journey of life. (71) B.Kesharshivam also reveals before his readers "All my life I have had to walk on the sharp edge of the sword" (xviii). Bitter experiences of trauma, anguish, pain, suffering and atrocities are there in the mind of creators of the corpus called Dalit literature.

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## 10

### Gujarati Dalit Female Protagonist: A Study of Shelbala I.A.S

Atulkumar Parmar

Dalit literature in India represents a powerful, emerging trend in the Indian literary scene and is preoccupied with the location of Dalits in the caste-based Hindu society, and their struggles for dignity, justice and equality. The term 'Dalit' is found in many Indian languages and even in a Dravidian language. The meaning given to "Dalit" in the dictionary is burst, split, scattered, dispersed, broken, torn, destroyed, and crushed. All these English words sum up the exact position of the Indian untouchables and the tribes. Traditionally, Dalits include the members of schedule castes, or ex-untouchables in India. Interestingly there is a continuous attempt to expand Dalit canvass to include other socially and culturally oppressed groups like nomadic, tribes, women, minorities etc in the last three decades. The term Dalit includes individuals, groups, and communities suffering from social and cultural oppression. This oppression can be visible or invisible, open or concealed, manifest or latent.

Gujarati Dalit literature gained it pace as a response to the upper castes' virulent attacks on the reservation policy in 1981. Dalit Panthers Movement and Marathi Dalit literature has also inspired many Gujarati Dalit writers.

In Gujarat, Gujarati Dalit writing gained it pace in the 1970s. It was fully flowered after 1981 and 1985 anti-reservation agitations. The anti-reservation agitation had shaken the Dalits from the roots. At that time, the conscious literary creators of the Dalit society had started to create,

as a part of the Ambedkarite movement the Dalit poems of social sensibility and a torrent of Dalit literature began to flow. That proved very significant event. These poems give the new freshness to the Gujarati literature. Dalit literature began to appear in journals like *Panther*, *Aakrosh*, *Garud*, *Kalo Suraj*, *Dalit Bandhu*, *Ajampo*, *Muktinayak*, *Disha*, *Dalit-mukti*, *Dalit-Mitra*, *Abhyudaya*, *Nayamarga*, *Tamanna*, *Pragati jyoti*, *Taras*, *Avsar*, *Akshay* and *Hayati*. As I mentioned earlier Gujarati dalit writers began to expresse their feelings and emotions through poetry. The credit for editing the first anthology of Gujarati Dalit poetry goes to Prof. Ganpat Parmar and Manishi Jani. That the anthology *Dalit Kavita* was published in 1981. The air war filled with the gushing flow and unique expression of the new current. The wide spread evils in the Hindu social structure were targeted.

Gujarati Dalit literature found numerous poets. Dalpat Chauhan, Pravin Gadhvi, Neerav Patel, Harish Mangalam, B. N. Vankar, Yashvant Waghela, Arvind Vegda, Chandu Maheriya, Raju Solanki, Sahil Parmar, Babaldas Chavda, Shankar Painter were associated with Gujarati Dalit literature from the very beginning.

Gujarati Dalit short stories made their maiden venture into Gujarati literature with the collection *Gujarati Dalit Varta* published in 1987, a unique and valuable effort. Dalit short stories have attempted to establish social values and bring to light certain hidden aspects. The expression of the customs, the way of life as well as the hopes and aspirations of the Dalit community give shape to a different world altogether. Notwithstanding, Dalit short stories are expressive of anger and revolt against injustice in an admirably subtle manner. Thus, Gujarati Dalit short stories reach out in all directions.

Earlier the Dalit stories were published in different magazines but after the publication of *Gujarati Dalit Varta* many collections of short stories of individual writers and anthologies of stories by different writers were published. They are: Joseph Macwan's *Sadhana ni Aradhana* (Worship of the Discipline of Devotion) and *Aagalo* (The Bar), Harish Makwana's *Sapana no Ujagar* (Sleeplessness of a Dream), Shirish Parmar's *Thiji Gayeli Rat* (The Forzen Night), Raghavaji Madhad's *Zalar* (The Gong) and Narsinh Parmar's *Vaitalika* were the earlier published collections. Harish Mangalam has individually edited the collection titled *Pratinidhi Dalit Varta* (The Leading Dalit Short Stories) in 1997.

Mangalam's individual collection, *Talap* (The Desire) was published in 2001. *Vana Boti Varta* is the second celebrated collection of Gujarati Dalit stories. Dalpat Chauhan edited the collection and it was published in 2001. Dalpat Chauhan's individual collection *Munjaro* was published in 2002. Mohan Parmar's *Kolahal* (Clamour), *Nakalank* (The Spotless), *Kumbhi* (The little pot) and *Poth* (The Sack-load) are noteworthy collections. B. Kesharshivam's collections, *Janma Divas* (Birth day), *Rati Rayan Ni Ratash* (The Redness of Red Rayan Fruit) and *Dr. Seema* are noteworthy. B. N. Vankar's collection *Vilopan* (Cessation) was published in 2001. Dharmabhai Shrimali's *Narak* (Hell) and Mavaji Maheshwari's *Adrashya Divalo* (The Invisible walls) are noteworthy collections.

One of the most important achievements of the Gujarati Dalit literature is that it has brought back the freshness of native Gujarat, its dialects and realistic representation of the lives of the Dalits. Gujarati Dalit short stories have depicted the problems of Dalit life, their hopes, and fears. The stories are written in typical Dalit dialects spoken in various parts of Gujarat. These stories have opened a new direction in short story writing in Gujarati. The Dalit writers have remained insulated from so-called foreign influence that harmed Gujarati literature to certain extent in the name of modernism.

Gujarati Dalit short stories, novels, and poetry have their own peculiarities, yet Gujarati Dalit literature has adapted to all new tides in literature that occur with the passage of time. Gujarati Dalit writers of fiction are well acquainted with such changes and make conscious attempts to accommodate them in their works; weaving together the traditional and the modern. Novels by Gujarati Dalit writers are fewer than short stories. All of them weave around socio-cultural, educational, and political issues related to the Dalits striving for the realization of equality with higher-castes. Joseph Macvan, Mohan Parmar, B.Kesharshivam, Dalpat Chauhan, Harish Mangalam, Kantilal Parmar, Daxa Damodra and Vitthalrai Shrimali are well known Gujarati Dalit novelists.

Overall, bulk of the Dalit novels is a mixed basket of matured, artistic novels and raw novels. Until date, around 30 Dalit novels are published. Bharat Mehta, a Gujarati critic has classified Dalit novels into six categories,

First, tragic ending novels with Dalit consciousness which consist of *Malak* (Dalpat Chahuan), *Andhari* (Manilal Patel) and *Kalo Angrez* (Chinu Modi). Second, novels of Dalit consciousness with happy endings that consist of *Angaliyat* (Joseph Macwan), *Ansu Bhino Ujas* (Dilip Ranpura) and *Daya Pashu Ni Vadi* (Mohan Parmar). Third, Dalit novels with feminine consciousness which contain *Tirad* (Harish Mangalam), *Priyatama* (Mohan Parmar), *Mari Parnetar* (Joseph Macwan), etc. Daksha Damodara's novel *Shosh and Savitri* can also be included in this category. Fourth, novels of Dalit consciousness depicted in mythological contexts: Dalit literature has employed the characters Karna, Eklavya, Shambook for presenting Dalit consciousness. Ila Arab Mehta's *Radha*, Darshak's *Kurukshetra* can be cited as notable examples. Fifth, novels presenting Dalit consciousness from critical and realistic point of view: *Suki Dharati*, *Suka Hoth* (Dilip Ranpura) and *Badalati kshitij* (Jayant Gadit) are the examples of utterly realistic pictures of rural Gujarat. These novels present Dalit consciousness in the sense that they depict not merely the life of the untouchables but illiterate rural people who are almost primitive and backward. They represent the society where culture and education have not entered. Dalpat Chauhan's *Gidh* can also be included in this category, and sixth, the novels with glimpses of Dalit reality: This category consists of novels like *Manorath* (Raghuvir Chaudhari), *Varal* (Ramchandra Patel), *Mashari* (Kishorsinh Solanki), *Choki* (Harish Mangalam), *Jatur* (Mafat Oza), etc. (2005, 15-28)

*Shelbala I A S* written by Vitthalbhai Srimali occupies an important place in Gujarati Dalit literature. The novel talks about a sincere, intelligent, brave and resourceful dalit woman. For centuries, the Dalits have suffered, humiliated, and tortured at the hands of upper caste people. Moreover, so far as a woman is concerned her situation is the worst one.

As the girls belonging to upper caste observe fasts and worship Lord Shiva to have the best groom, Shelbala also keeps fast and goes to temple of Lord Shiva for worship but the Pundit denies her to enter the temple. He humiliates her. The girl loses her temper, throws the dish containing pooja material on his face, and walks out of the temple. Later on, she stays at Devshankarbapa's ashram and studies there. She

completes her education and becomes an I A S officer. Though she is honest, devoted and efficient officer, upper caste people do not stop nagging her. They do not miss any opportunity of harassing her.

She forgets the humiliations that she has gone through after getting the post of an I.A.S officer. Devshankarbapa tells the people of the village to organize a programme in honour of Shelbala. The head of the village agrees to the proposal and they organize a programme. The programme begins but after some time one of the villagers throws a stone at Shelbala and she has been injured. Later on realizing his mistake, the person begs pardon for what he has done.

Few of the Rabaries led their cattle to graze in the fields of the Patels. Therefore, the Patels were angry and there was a fight between the people of these two communities. In this feud, two persons were murdered. As the situation went out of control, Shelbala orders the D.S.P to shoot the rioters. As a result, five Patels and eight Rabaries lost their lives. At last the situation comes under control. The Chief Minister instead of praising her tactfulness scolds her and accused of murders.

An editor of newspaper criticizes her saying that she belonged to a lower class and cannot take right decision. How can such a person be given a post of an I.A.S. officer? Therefore, we notice that even today upper caste people are not ready to accept Dalits as I.A.S. or I.P.S. officers and they criticize them. Shelbala is an efficient officer and she never gives in any circumstances, she carries out her duties well and expects her colleagues to carry out their duties in a proper way. She never retreats from her decision. She shows her resourcefulness at different occasions. Once she warns the people of the village and saves them from famine. She takes them to a safe place and helps them to survive. At this time, she is awarded and certificates and mementoes are given to her for her resourcefulness at the hands of Chief Minister. However, after some time she has been transferred as D.D.O. in Dang district. A show-cause notice is given to her for the firing orders at Paldi village. She takes charge of D.D.O. in Dang district. Here she accepts that she does not regret for her condition or care for government notices. She only regrets for she has been born in a lower caste family. Mostly people criticize Dalits and even do not spare sincere officers who carry out their duties well. She thinks that there is no justice at all. This caste system has done a lot of harm to people and has even ruined their lives and careers. She

now makes up her mind to fight against the injustice done to her regarding her promotion. She talks about it to her father. She tells him that she will break but will not give up. The aim of this novel is quite clear. The writer says that so long as the Dalits do not unite and break up their caste barriers they are going to suffer. To fight against injustice unity is required. Ambedkar was an exceptional personality who fought against injustice single handedly and did his best for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Today there are many dalit leaders and officers on the high posts but they do not do anything for their fellow beings. They are so much self-centered that they do not realize the condition of the dalits and do not do anything for the dalit communities.

In the novel, a politically influential person with a little education becomes the mayor of the city. Once he orders Shelbala to transfer a talati of Pipri village just at his will. However, Shelbala bluntly tells him that she is not going to transfer the person without any reason. The mayor threatens her saying that if she does not do what he says he will get her transferred in the future. Shelbala does not lose her temper and asserts that she will work as per the rules and regulations of the government. Her will power shows how strong a dalit woman can be!

A snake bites Shelbala's mother and she expires. She gives fire to her mother's dead body ignoring all the superstitions. She does not believe in superstitions. Later on, she breaks down and burst into tears that show her sensitivity. She is an intelligent officer. Others do not like her courage and tactfulness so she is degraded as a controller of Savings Department. Chandrakant Mauli is appointed as a collector of Dang district who is also a devoted officer. He is influenced and satisfied by Shelbala's work.

The description of the Savings Department grasps the mind of the readers. It is an ordinary office with outdated furniture and the depressed staff. Shelbala curses herself. She thinks is it a crime to be a dalit? Do dalits have always to struggle? When she thinks of her life as a Dalit she has become disheartened. However, the next moment she comes out of the depression, calls the meeting of the whole staff, and motivates them. She thinks about her past life. She thinks about Chandra Mauli and what a life she would have if he becomes her life partner. Then she thinks about herself and her nature. She is an independent woman. She feels that as a friend he is a good person, knowledgeable, practical and

loving person. As a friend, she would love to stay with him. Later on, they stay in the same locality. Once Pashabhai invites both of them to have tea at his house, at that time there takes place a riot, their bungalows are set to fire, and they are burnt to death. When Devshankarbapa comes to know about the fact, he breaks down and pleads the people of the village to write their names on the entrance gate and to put statues of the two persons in the chawk of the village to commemorate them.

Thus, a critical exploration of the *Shelbala I A S* clearly shows the plight and miseries of the Dalits and especially a Dalit woman in a caste centred and male oriented country like India. The Dalits have to bear the brunt of caste domination silently and meekly. If they raise their voice then the whole community has to face violent attacks as the female protagonist faces in the novel. Shelbala wants to fly freely in the sky like a bird but the casteist Indian do not allow her to do so and thus she has been killed mercilessly even though she is an IAS officer.

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# 11

## Depiction of Dalit Life in Shivaram Karanth's *Choma's Drum*

Dr. P. S. Subrahmanya Bhat

### Introduction :

Dalit literature addresses the problems of the untouchables. It usually focuses on the experience of discrimination, suppression and anguish of the Dalit community. The word 'Dalit' literally translated as 'oppressed or 'broken' refers to people who are known as 'untouchables'. It also refers to those people who belong to castes outside the fourfold Hindu Varna system. It has been accepted that the word 'Dalit' came into existence in the 1930s as the translation of the phrase 'depressed class' employed by the British to indicate the scheduled castes. First used by Jyotiba Phule, this term was later popularized by Dr B. R. Ambedkar in order to indicate the situation of the millions of Dalit living in India.

Kota Shivarama Karanth (1902- 1997) was a multi-faceted genius excelling in as many as sixteen different careers. These careers include nationalism, social reform, commerce, journalism, photography, acting, dance, painting, music, cinema, experiments in education, rural uplift, popularization of science (through a multi-volume encyclopaedia designed and written wholly by himself), the writing of novels (as many as forty-five), the writing of plays and environmentalism. He won the Jnanpith Award in 1978. He brought in many innovations in the field of Yakshagana. He was also a painter and an environmentalist, known for his stand against nuclear energy. Dr Karanth has been described as Rabindranath Tagore of Modern India, who has become more than a

legend in his lifetime. Although he hails from upper castes Brahmin family in Udupi District of Karnataka State, Karanth has been contemptuous of the vanity and narrowness of Brahmin upbringing.

Kota Shivarama Karanth's *Choma's Drum* is a novel translated into English from Kannada language in 1978 by U R Kalkur. This early novel has been viewed as having a wider impact on the community. Its central character Choma is an Untouchable whose dream, or rather fantasy is to cultivate his own plot of land. Meanwhile, he worked in the fields of a landlord half his age, his children labouring with him. He drowned his sorrows in drink, and by playing his drum. Stick in hand, he 'coaxed out of the [drum] the monotonous sound, *damadhamma dakadhakka*. There was never a new rhythm, never a new timbre in the sound. Through this novel the novelist attempts to depict the actual life of a Dalit community during the pre-independent India.

It is to be noted that *Choma's Drum* is not the only novel in Kannada literature which attempts to depict the life of Dalit community. Other writers also have made earnest attempt to become the voice of the Dalit suppression. Some of the most prominent novels that deal with the themes of Dalit life are *Kannooru Heggadathi* and *Malegalalli Madumagalu* of Kuvempu ( K V Puttappa), another Jnanapith Awardee), *Hemavathi* of Goruru Ramaswamy Iyengar, *Maadana Magalu* (*Maada's Daughter*) of M V Seetharammayya, *Swargada Baagilu* (*Doors of Heavaen*) of Sooryanarayana Chadaga and others.

*Choma's Drum* has been considered as the first Kannada Dalith novel to provide an account of the life of Dalith community by a non-Dalit writer. It has been compared to Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. While reading *Choma's Drum* one is reminded of Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*, which too was published in 1930s. In Mohanty's novel there is a depiction of a Dalit tribal who has had his land taken away. In Karanth's *Choma's Drum*, there is depiction of a Dalit who can never hope to own land. Both look to the forest for sustenance but are frustrated due to the lack of sympathy. Both are forced to seek consolation in drink, both forced to burden their young with their sorrows. One novel is set in Orissa, the other in coastal Karnataka. Separated by five hundred miles of territory, the novels are united by a mood, a moment, and a movement. Both the writers struggle for social reform.

The novel is set in the early thirties of the earlier century. Published in pre independent India, this novel depicts for the first time the life of a Dalit Community residing in a remote place of South Canara District of Karnataka State. This novel acquaints the reader of the powerful social hold under which Dalit community is forced to live. The life of a Dalit has been depicted as not having a self respect but in the novel an attempt has been made to provide the reader with the kind of life a Dalit individual leads his life in abject poverty coupled with social restriction in the name of preserving Dalit culture. The novel can be considered as an expression of insults experienced by Dalit community in the pre independent India. The social context in which the writer gives expression to the pains and pangs of the Dalit individual makes this novel as an early attempt by the upper caste to acquaint the reader with the life of a dalit individual encircled by caste and creed equations. Karanth has never been an avowed follower of traditional upper caste rituals and conventions. This perhaps has influenced his perspectives on Dalit issues which have been highlighted in the novel.

One of the classics from the Kannada literature, *Chomana Dudi* (or *Choma's Drum* as translated to English) deals with the subject of caste system. The novel depicts the life of people from suppressed class, through Choma and his family. It opens our eyes to the life of suppressed people in the Ghats who were on the downside of advantage. The social inequality and conversion from one religion to another were the things that are haunting from so many years.

Choma is an untouchable bonded-labourer in a village who is working along with his family for a landlord, as he belongs to a backward class. As he is very low in the society, he is not allowed to till his own land. Though he managed to rear a pair of bullocks that he found straying in the forest, he cannot use them to till the land. He comes in contact of Christian missionaries who try to convert him giving him the lure of the land, but Choma does not want to let go of his faith. He releases the fury that fate has beset on him, by beating his drum.

Drum, plays the role of symbolic oracle. For him, the only way to express his inner most feelings, anguish, anger, joy or sadness is through his drum. The drum represents his vocal output, which is curbed by his social stature being an untouchable. The novel starts with the drum beats, listened by those returning back to their homes from the village

festival. One of them remarks, "It's Choma again, and it looks like he had a drink too much today". The echoes of his self expression, is ridiculed as the naughtiness of a drunkard. The drum is omnipresent, as much as the part of his physical extension. It remained so, until the beats stopped, for the drum and Choma.

The protagonist of this novel is Mari Holey. Holeyas are the clans who belong to the last place in the stratified Hindu society. They are known as the panchamas. They are not allowed to use water from the wells used by the upper castes. They always live in the remote corner of the village. It is the popular belief among the upper castes that if the shadow of the holeya falls on the place where the upper casts Brahmins live then, the Brahmins live would meet with great danger. It is this attitude that the novelist is attacking and while attacking he is trying to put the Dalits in the right perspectives. By making a holeya a protagonist, Karanth is foregrounding the relationship between the upper castes Brahmins and the lower caste holeyas in addition to throwing light on the relationship between the Dalit individual and the society in general. The encounter between the traditional view and modern view about the life of the Dalit is brought out when the novelist makes a comment on the traditional expectation of the society that Choma should live and die as an 'untouchable'. This is the disease that the novelist strongly objects but suggests that this social disease is irrevocable. This societal disease haunts Chomas mind which conceives it as a terrible fear which later turns him into a phobia.

The central character Choma is a labourer working in the fields of Shankarappa, the landlord. Choma is tied to the landlord without cherishing any type of hope of liberating himself from the clutches. Neither Choma nor his children can hope to break this bond and lead a respectable life in the society. The system is such that even the landlord, in the ordinary course life, cannot break this bond and he is expected to take care of not only Choma but also his offspring. This is the convention that has been followed since time immemorial and will also continue without break. Another interesting fact is that these people normally do not ask for payment for their work. They take whatever is given and very often they live on the leftover food or dead cow meat discarded by the upper castes. Their life can be compared to that of the bonded labourers who are enslaved traditionally to a landlord.



The practice of untouchability is not new in India. It is much worse than racism. In depicting the life of Dalit community five parameters have been adopted for the purpose of discussion. These are the residence, economic condition, drinking country liquor, practice of borrowing money from the landlords and beliefs in the unseen spirits that is believed to govern the activities of Dalit community in the region specified in the novel.

**Residence:** One of the important factors that contribute to the creation of self-respect of the individual is that of his residence. In the traditionally bound stratified society, everything is pre-decided and prescribed. The village elders decide everything and these elders are usually the members of the upper castes. Dalits have no choice to live in the place of their choice. The novelist throws light on this aspect of the life of Dalit community in the novel. He points out the Choma's residence is a near the edge of the Bhoja village which will never be visited by the members of the upper castes. The house is built not by walls but by the bamboos. It has the leaves of the coconut tree as roof. In the house there is no partition marking the space for kitchen and bedroom. They have to live and sleep in the veranda all together. During the summer season, they sleep on the yard outside the house. However, the rainy season puts them into severe hardship as they find it very difficult to sleep when their thatches lets the rain inside through many holes in it. As there is scarcity of oil in their house, they do not light the lamp. This leads them to finish off all their work before sunset. After hard labor in Shankarappa's field during the daytime, Choma returns home completely tired. Although he is tired to the core, Choma finds happiness in beating the drum until late at night. Thus Choma's drum assumes significance in becoming a powerful and effective instrument for providing happiness and enjoyment to the otherwise dry life. Beating the drum and reliving the accumulated tension seems to be the part of the life of Dalit community.

**Economic Condition:** The novelist has thrown much light on the economic condition of the Dalit community in the novel. *Choma's Drum*. One of the reasons that have been cited in the novel for Choma's abject poverty seems to be many children he has got. He has five children who are named as Cheniya, Gurava, Belli, Neela and Kaala. All these children work hard along with Choma to make livelihood. Yet Choma is not able to make his both ends meet. Although he loves his motherless

children a lot, he is unable to make his children happy. This creates tension in his mind and in order to forget the life's hardship and poverty he drinks a lot at night and returns home late at night with empty stomach. Sleeping with empty stomach is due to the fact that his landlord does not make the suitable payment for his work in the field.

### Drinking Country Liquor:

Another evil that has received the attention of the novelist in depicting the life of Dalit community is the extensive use of country liquor. This evil has crept into the life of Dalit community so much so that it has become part of their life. Many have justified the use of liquor on the ground that Dalits are forced to work hard in the field from dawn to dusk. They do not get enough to eat in the traditional set up. To meet simple things also they have to beg before the landlord who throws some money making him feel insulted. Added to this is the fact that the money given to him is usually much less than he would have wanted. This creates tension and disappointment. If he demands more, very often he will be beaten and hounded out like a dog. In order to escape from the tensions created by these regular insults and abject poverty, and in order to take some pleasure they resort to drinking country liquor.

The novelist does not seem to support this popular view with regard to drinking habits of the Dalits. He points out to the fact that drinking liquor offers only temporary relief clouding the harsh realities of life. Despite this, he makes Choma taking refuge in drinking inexpensive country liquor to overcome the disappointment caused by the feeling of landlessness. Whenever he drinks, Choma takes his drum and starts beating enthusiastically and sometime frantically singing songs at the top of his voice. While Choma beats the drum and sings all the artistic qualities, come to the fore and all the people nearby surround him supporting him in his endeavor. Later when the daybreaks Choma is made to realize that liquor, instead of replacing the pains of poverty, has only perpetuated the condition for ever. Karanth has not glamorized this habit of drinking but made a subtle indication of its evil nature in the depiction of Dalit life in his novel.

### Borrowing Loans:

Another aspect that has received attention in the novel is borrowing money from their own landlords to meet routine and special exigencies.



One of the chief reasons for the permanent bondage of Dalit family to a landlord appears to be this particular practice prevalent among the Dalit community. Karanth has graphically described this practice in the novel. The central character borrows money from his landlord to meet the expenses that arise during festivals and marriage occasions. As he is not able to repay the amount, he becomes a kind of slave to his landlord who never allows him to be away from the bondage. Normally no Dalit is able to repay the amount that is accumulated year by year and when he is not able to pay the debt during his lifetime then that debt is carried forward to his children and grandchildren. The burden of loan and debt remains until his end and an individual Dalit can never hope to free him from the bondage of loan. This unending suffering kills his life and joy that he is entitled to.

The evil circle of borrowing loan and getting involved in the permanent bondage with the landlord constantly haunts the life of the protagonist. The evil is vividly depicted in the novel. Choma had borrowed money from his landlord while his wife lived. This loan grew in leaps and bounds and grew into fourfold and eightfold. With a view to reducing the financial burden, two of Choma's daughters start working at an early age in the landlord's fields. When they work for many years, the amount is declared to be repaid. However, the landlord is not in a mood to declare it as being repaid completely. So his manager in the coffee estate tells Choma's daughter that he will never declare her father's debt being repaid unless she offers herself to him. He forces her to enter into sexual engagements. Once she submits herself the manager is never ready to declare her free as this would amount to losing her permanently. He continues this for many years threatening her that a Dalit will never be declared as having repaid his loan in his lifetime. This shows the manager's attitude towards Dalit's women. This incident shows that the rich always contrive schemes to make the debt remain forever so that the poor Dalit women could be exploited indefinitely.

#### Beliefs:

The depiction of any community will remain incomplete if it does not discuss the belief systems that operate in the society. A keen observer of belief systems of Dalit community in the South Canara district of Karnataka, Shivaram Karanth has lost no opportunity to comment on

the beliefs and to parody the blind beliefs prevalent in the Dalit community.

Dalits in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka worship the spirits of the dead or Bhoota Aradhane. This worship is known as Bhoota Worship. There is a strong belief among the Dalits of this region that the Bhoota is capable of relieving any disease and also capable of solving any familial or community based problems. There are many such bhootas variously known as Panjurli, Pili Bhoota etc. The novelist is graphically describing the sway of the bhootas over the Dalit community. Dalits mentioned in the novel have immense faith in the ability of the bhoota in curing any disease that may afflict any individual. Once Cheniya, Choma's son is affected by high fever. At that time, unable to find any solution to the problem at her hand, Belli, Cheniya's sister prays for bhoota spirit. As part of this prayer she visits a Dalit priest who acts as a mediator between her and bhoota spirit. Although a Dalit, this mediator assumes the status of a Brahmin priest with all vices and rituals. If Brahmin priests are being alleged that they extract money from the innocent Dalits, this Dalit priest also appears to be no different from the Brahmin priest. The Dalit priest awakening from the influence of country liquor advises Belli to make elaborate arrangements for organizing bhoota worship which is quite expensive and not feasible for her to do under such circumstances. This incident shows that even among the Dalits there has come up a brahminical priest to exploit ignorance of the Dalits. Through Dalit priest Chenna, Karanth in this novel has exposed not only the rudeness and rusticity but also ignorance of the Dalit community in a vivid manner. The shallowness of the whole procedure of bhoota worship is brought to light when we come to know that Belli's brother Cheniya dies even before the Dalit priest commences his elaborate prayer.

This shallowness is testified further for the second time. In the novel, there is a reference to a migrant coolie. This migrant coolie was moving in search of job in some unknown coffee estate. On his way to the coffee estate, this migrant's child starts showing the signs of high fever. Instead of giving rest to the child, this migrant makes the child walk. The child unable to walk further succumbs to death due to high fever. When the child dies the migrant believes that, his child has died because of the anger of Panjurli, the bhoota spirit. Therefore, he prays Panjurli not to put any further problems in future.

On close examination of the novel, it appears that Choma is destined to fail from the beginning. The life beats him repeatedly. One after the other his family members are lost. His girl, the one he loved the most and only person he respected or feared is also managed defeat him. There are others like the estate managers who loot them with increasing the debt and interest. To the society he is a low class, his dreams and hopes have no standing in their life. Even the sympathetic land lord had to adhere to the social norms ( his aged mother make sarcastic comments about the low-class), there are promises of freedom from this by accepting the ways of the Christ, but Choma is not ok to leave his God's and the other deities. Choma continue to cherish his dream of owning a piece of land. There are government offer for a piece of land, but he does not know the way of getting it done. He realises that his status being a low class, will come in between him and his dream. He even contemplates joining the Christianity just to fulfill his dream.

Panjurli appears to have strong psychological sway over the activities of Dalit community both in good and bad times. We find that Choma is unable to extricate from the cobweb of social system that never allows him to lead peaceful and dignified life. However much he tries to overcome the conventions of his community, he is brought down by the same ritualistic community of which he is the part. Consecutive tragic events that befall on his family make Choma to take a strong decision to be converted himself to Christianity. This new religion appears to offer him a lease of life with full of respect and dignity. He decides to convert to Christianity in the hope of receiving a better status in the society. He also hopes that all his financial and social problems would be solved once he embraces Christianity. Unfortunately for him this does not take place. When he goes out of his house to join the new religion, he meets the place of bhoota worship, and automatically he bows his head before Panjurli, the bhoota spirit. As he rises, it appears to him that the bhoota is enquiring the purpose of his departure from the village. It questions his wisdom to be converted to the new religion just three days before his death. He could not resist this taunt by the bhoota and finally returns to his dilapidated hut.

#### Conclusion:

An attempt has been made in the present paper to throw light on the various aspects of the life of Dalit community as depicted in Shivaram

Karanth's popular novel, *Chomas Drum*, which has been described by Dr Ananth Murthy, another Jnanpith Awardee, as one of the most authentic expression of Dalit community. Although written by non-Dalit writer in the pre-independent India, this novel provides the reader with a clear picture of Dalit life in the pre independent India. The human world depicted in the novel is described with a biting irony. The entire novel leaves the reader spellbound with full of emotions and tragic sequences. This novel has entirely focused on the theme of untouchability which was rampant in India during that time. It is true that much change has taken place in the lives of Dalit especially after the socio economic programmes initiated by the government of India. Nowadays Dalits have acquired status equivalent to that of the upper castes. With many pieces of legislation aiding the individuals in the Dalit community, many members of the community have become economically and educationally strong occupying high positions in the social set up. In spite of this, Shivaram Karanth's novel *Choma's Drum* occupies high position historically in the arena of Kannada literature as the novel ushered in a fresh wave of thinking about the Dalit community.

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## Caste Radicalism in Kannada Revolt and Dalit Fiction

*S. B. Biradar*

The present paper attempts to study revolt and Dalit literature of Karnataka with reference to Dalit novels. The purpose is to analyze the contribution of major Kannada revolt and Dalit novel writers to literary representation of anti-caste struggles, social differentiation, and complex cultural forms of discrimination and Dalit problems. The paper also tries to focus on the depiction of distress, agony and pain of revolt and Dalit novel writers.

Kannada is a classical language spoken by the people of Karnataka. The credit of raising voice for oppressed classes goes back to 11<sup>th</sup> century. Madar Channaih, Devar Dasimayya, Basavanna and few others have questioned the atrocities of upper caste in their writings. Madar Channaih, a cobbler by profession, Dasimayya a weaver by profession and Basavanna a minister in the kingdom of Bijjal have fought against social evils. They have contributed for the development of an egalitarian society. They have highlighted intensive universality. In the modern period Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar carry out the flame of revolt against such social evils. Both are highly critical about equality. They have created counter-history for the lower caste people. In this context, Anupama Rao rightly observes "Ambedkar provided the set of political idioms that most effectively converted negative identity of the untouchable into the political potentiality and historical agency of the Dalit" (15). Marathi and Hindi translations have been frequently used the term 'Dalit' for oppressed classes during 1930s. For Ambedkar,

Dalit is the experience of 'deprivation', 'marginalization' and 'stigmatization'. The term 'Dalit' came into practice officially in 1958 at the first conference of Dalit literature in Mumbai.

Dalit writings strongly oppose the inhuman oppression practiced by upper caste people over the other. It questions injustice, social inequality and simultaneously tries to bring a meaningful change in society. It exposes cruel social system and hegemonic master-slave culture. It tries to uncover the upper caste conspiracies. It provides the voice to the voiceless people. Dalit writers have a very strong commitment to their opinion. They have their clear-cut vision and objectives in their writings. Fundamentally, their ideas emerge from the broad thoughts from the discourse of humanism. It observes the sensitive complexities involved in social inequalities. It shows its concern towards marginalized voices. It has revolted against all types of exploitation. The term 'exploitation' is not limited to a particular class or caste. The people exploited socially, economically and politically are Dalits. In other words 'untouchables' are Dalits.

Anupama Rao defines "Dalit is a word for a community and an identity that are in the making" (Anupama Rao, 1). However, the term 'Dalit' has three connotations. The first connotation implies 'Dalit' as backward, exploited, economically and socially weaker. Theoretically this view is endorsed by Marxists. The second connotation implies 'Dalit' as caste. Indian caste system includes untouchables as 'Dalits'. He is 'ground down' or 'crushed'. They belong to the lower strata in the hierarchy of Indian caste system. The followers of Ambedkar advocate this view. Lastly, untouchables are equated along with poor caste people. The followers of Lohia advocate this view. In the following exploration, the second view is taken into account to study the short stories of Kannada. From this perspective, Dalit means untouchables. The noted Dalit writer Arvind Malagatti is of the opinion that Dalit is "the one who is exploited economically, socially, politically and educationally since the ages, unable to survive among the people, lives in the outskirts of the society, depends on the inhuman profession, ashamed of his identity, ashamed of his degraded names or discarded by the society" (Ganeshan, 7). Dalits are humiliated by cultural exclusion. They are excluded from the mainstream life and society. The writing of such writers is Dalit literature. Dalits are deprived of education and

knowledge. Historically Dalits are deprived of education, hence the contribution of such writers need to be identified separately. Some of the Dalit writers are of the opinion that it is better to limit the term 'Dalit' to untouchables rather than including all the exploited class of people.

Kannada novel is the most popular form of literature. Dalit novels are equally popular in Kannada literature. Even non-Dalit writers have contributed for the development of Kannada Dalit literature. Non-Dalit writers have shown their social concerns through their revolt fiction. Baragur Ramachandrappa has initiated Kannada revolt literature. His writings are committed to Marxist philosophy. His works explore conflicts existed in semi-feudalism. *Sutra* (1974) is the first novel of Baragur. This novel presents the exploitation of village leader, *Gauda*. It also explores the extra marital affair between Parvati, wife of Gauda and Channa. Baragur shows his revolt against tradition and age old values. Parvati acts as a guardian of democratic values. *Hutta* (1977) is another novel by Baragur. The similar trends of the first novel are also active in this novel. Kengappa is the exploiter and Mara revolts against him. The whole system acts in favour of Kengappa. Many honest people suffer due to exploitation. *Ondu Urin Kathe* (1977) Gauda, priest, and rich Basavayya exploit the village. Gauda represents upper caste, Priest represents religious exploitation, and rich Basavayya represents economic exploitation. Outcaste Hanum and Putti, Ram and Gauri have added the caste dimension. The representatives of rich class from various castes try to catch hold of the power. Baragur shows his concern towards social equality. *Benki* (1982) is another novel by Baragur. Laxmi is the protagonist of the novel. Her husband is impotent. Many rituals are carried out in order to overcome his impotency. This has turned into social problem. Kum Virabhadrappe has depicted conditions of low caste people. *Kappu* (1981), *Beliya Hugalu* (1987) and *Pakchigalu* (1987) are the best examples of such themes. Baragur Ramchandrappa, Kum Virabhadrappe, Benakanhalli G Nayak, Odeyar D Heggade and R. V. Bhandari have contributed for the revolt literature. Their focus is on interrogating inequality and exploitation in their works.

Mullur Nagaraj is one of the Dalit writers of Kannada literature. His work *Maran Mandal Madhyadolage* (1986) gives a new dimension to Dalit literature in particular and Kannada literature in general. The upper caste woman Maligemma falls in love with untouchable

Sangayya. This relationship tries to eradicate in inequality. Nagaraj uses a unique hybrid language of folk tradition and modern Kannada. Apart from this he uses both prose and poetry while narrating the events. It is a revolutionary work in Kannada Dalit literature. Through this venture Nagaraj searches for Dalit identity.

M. N. Javaraih has contributed only one novel. *Magi* (1987) explores agony, pain, exploitation, hunger, and miseries of life. It intensively unravels the subtleties and intricacies of caste system. Magi stands as a tall monolithic character who undergoes inhuman suffering. Magi was exploited by her husband Giriappa. He tortures her frequently. Brothers and sisters of Giriappa have also exploited her. Apart from this her own children betrays her and they try to insult her. Above all the novel idealizes human values.

Aravind Malagatti's *Karya* (1988) is his masterpiece. It is a critique on traditional practices and revolts against such practices. Bangaravva dies in the course of the novel. However, her death is not important here. Instead of this Akkavva becomes prominent. It adopts Dalit language of North Karnataka that intensifies the theme and action of the novel.

Devnur Mahadev's *Kusumbale* (1988) is known for its unique language. It explores the relationship between upper caste and lower caste people. The male and female of different castes unite sexually. Kusumbale has attraction towards low caste Channa. Kempu, daughter of Turamma has sexual relation with others. There are innumerable sexual relationships in the novel. Grandfather of Kusum also has such affair. Kusum's mother Mallajamma has also shown tendencies of extramarital relationship. Adultery is central theme of the novel. It projects caste conflict and caste struggle much effectively. It hopes for the eradication of such caste complexities in the new economic powers. Devanur's documentation of Dalit identity through such description is in a way revolt against mainstream society and their culture. *Kusumbale* is milestone in Kannada Dalit fiction. His novels depict amazing worldview on Dalit conditions.

Women writers have also contributed equally in asserting their identity. Geeta Nagbhushan, Rekharani, B. T. Lalitanayak and Veena Shanteshwar write their fiction on burning issues related to contemporary social conditions. The best work among these writers is

Gandasaru (1978) by Veena Shanteshwar. It depicts female perspective on prevalent social conditions. She is critical about male hegemony. The novel depicts a woman who is exploited by male hegemony. Selfish nature and sexual interests of men effectively depicted. Geeta Nagbhushan's *Mapur Tayi Makkalu* (1985) and *Hasimans and Haddugalu* (1985) depicts contemporary scenario of exploitation. Rekharani's *Arthavagadavaru* (1986) and *Manolisidavaru* (1986) exhibit their sensitive artistic expressions. B. T. Lalitanayak's *Gati* is also very popular which reflects social conditions. The women writers have attempted Dalit issues seriously but unfortunately, they have failed in establishing their authenticity in their works. Male Dalit writers have surpassed in all the ways as far as depiction of Dalit issues are concerned.

Muslim writers such as Boluvaru Mohammad Kunyi, Sara Abubakkar and Fakir Mohammad Kattadi have shown their outlook related to oppression and exploitation in their works. All these writers have shown their social concerns. Boluvaru Mohammad Kunyi's *Zehad* (1987) is a novella. He depicts agonies in the light of humour. It reflects exploitation of Raheem on the one hand and Kareem Khan's humanity on the other. Salma exhibits her courageous nature throughout the novel. This novel is known for Saleena teachers love and affection, revolt of Rasheed, and courage of Salma. All the evils and positive aspects are realistically presented here.

Sara Abubakkar's debut novel, *Chandragiriya Tiradalli* explores social and religious evils practiced in Muslim community. Ignorance and innocence of poor people, mean mindedness, sacrifice and humanity are expressed in the most mature manner. The novel presents the practice of 'Talaq' (divorce) critically. Male exploitation in the name of 'Talaq' is presented in a vivid manner. Men divorce women conveniently according to their whims and fancies. Sometimes they divorce their wives without reasons and go for second and third marriages. They are not even ready to provide compensation to divorced women. The novel depicts subtle complexities involved in such cases. The protagonist Nadira is victim of such atrocities. At the end of the novel, she is carried away in the flood of river water. The writer symbolically presents this. Abubakkar criticizes the wrong interpretation of the Kuran. Her second novel *Sahana* explores the life of Naseema who becomes mother at the very early age of fourteen. She has lost her baby

due to ignorance of her mother-in-law. She works in *bidi* (cigarette) manufacturing unit. Due to excessive work she reaches premature old age. She gradually comes out of these problems and asserts her identity. She revolts against the inhuman acts of her husband and social evils of her community. She becomes a symbol of emancipation. Miseries of life teach her many lessons. Her next novel *Vajragalu (Diamonds)* is a sequel to earlier two novels. This novel explores life of an exploited Muslim woman Nafeesa who is divorced by her husband. Her second marriage is also unsuccessful and losing her baby is depicted emotionally. Abubakkar depicts cruelties practiced in her community in most vivid manner. The writer notices deep-rooted social evils in Muslim community. They are like the diamonds very hard and tough. The title of the novel is very apt in this sense. Protagonists of all the novels such as Nadira, Naseem, and Nafeesa undergo similar experiences of life. They are truly victims of contemporary Muslim society. All the three novels of Abubakkar reflect genuine concerns of the writer towards inhumanity prevalent in Muslim community.

Fakir Mohammad Kattadi's *Sarakugalu* depicts the economic conditions of Muslim community. He is committed writer of Marxism. He explores the disparities between rich and poor. Apart from caste, how class works in Indian subcontinent is reflected in this novel. He is sympathetic towards his characters in this novel. He shows his concerns to Hazima, Hafya, Juleja, and Nafeesa.

Contribution of Muslim writers to Kannada revolt literature is meaningful. They are highly influential writers in this movement of revolt. Their views are complimentary to Dalit literature. The scenario and deprivation of Dalit and Muslim community appears to be different yet they resemble similar in interrogating social evils practiced in respective communities.

Apart from Muslim writers, many upper class writers have equally contributed to Kannada revolt and Dalit literature. Purnchandra Tejasvi's *Karvalo* (1980), *Chidambar Rahasya* (1985), Chadurang's *Vaishakh* (1981) Vyasaray Ballal's *Bandaya* (1985) Prasan's *Nautanki* (1981), Chandrashekhhar Kambar's *Singarevva and Aramane* (1982), Maanu's *Lingan Gudi* (1984), Kundarnad Patil's *Hant* (1983), Nirarnjan's *Mrutyunjay* (1976), M. K. Indira's *Faniyamma* are noted works emerged from revolt and Dalit movement in Karnataka.

Revolt and Dalit Literature of Kannada has evolved its own identity through its caste radicalism. It justifies social equality and liberty in all communities and castes. All the writers respect and honour social values and humanity in their writings. They expose inhuman society and its evil practices critically. These are the fierce critics of society. Overwhelming atrocities enable these writers to interrogate such practices. These writers historicize their community and their problems. They focus on Dalit struggles and try to provide a respectable position to their community. It is possible to find an anti-caste discourse in these writings. They can be rightly called as caste radicals who have established their own tradition and canon of literature.

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## 13

### Narratives of Dalit Suffering and Resistance in Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan*

Dr. Charu C. Mishra

Mani Ram Banjare

Urmila Pawar was born in the Konkan region of Maharashtra where weaving 'aaydan' – bamboo baskets, storage bins and other household items – was the main caste based occupation of the mahar community. Looking back on her childhood, Urmila sees a close connection – one of unspoken pain – between the weave of the aaydan that her mother made and her writing. It was because of this that she called her autobiography *Aaydan*. It was first published in Marathi by Granthali, Mumbai in 2003. Five years down the line to make it familiar with non-Marathi readers it was translated as 'The Weaves of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs' by Maya Pandit.

According to her, there is a widespread misconception about caste having disappeared from society. She clarifies that it exists in several hidden forms, and that it may remain 'invisible' to the people traveling in fast vehicles but is always visible to the people who have their feet on the ground. Women are in a similar position. Women seem to be everywhere and yet the question that troubles her is 'where is the dalit woman?' While the voices of some educated, employed dalit women are just beginning to be heard in the public sphere, the spectre of globalization has put a question mark on their direction and lines of progress.

'*Aayadan*' or '*The Weave of My Life*' portrays the conditions of a subhuman existence of an entire community, shamelessly exploited by the upper castes, extremely marginalized and reduced to the status of beasts of burden. In Konkan, the mahars lived in the centre of the village, unlike outside the boundaries as was customary in other parts of Maharashtra because it was convenient for the upper castes. The mahars could be called any time for work or be attacked from all sides if anything went wrong. Urmila's memories of humiliation since her childhood, helps her delineate the reproduction of caste as a form of modern inequality both in the villages and the cities. When she was a child her mother would send her to deliver the baskets that she had woven to the homes of their upper caste customers. She hated this task since people would first 'purify' the aaydan, (the bamboo basket woven by dalits) by sprinkling water on it when they took it from her. If the home happened to belong to one of her classmates she felt even more embarrassed by the entire procedures. She often ignored her mother's requests to deliver the aaydan but then did it because her mother tempted her with money for groundnuts and jaggery. Once she did the job, her mother never gave her this promised money and just to spite her Urmila would miss school and sit outside the temple. She recalls the fair complexioned priest at the temple who gave them offerings made to the God as well as a disturbing incident she had witnessed when the priest locked himself inside the temple with a young girl from a komti (mason) family. The girl left the temple in tears and Urmila recalls how she was afraid of the priest after this incident.

As Nidhi Sadana in her Report on "Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India" writes, "One of the most pernicious forms of violence suffered by Dalit women in caste society is sexual violence; in their case this is not something they face in certain dangerous situations, but an ever-present threat. This is because the hierarchical order of caste is defended by patriarchal control by the men of each caste over 'their' women. But a sexual liaison between a man of an upper caste and a woman of a lower caste is not seen as a transgression of the social order; the man is exercising a right, and through this reminding the woman's father/husband/brother/ caste fellows of their inferiority. Thus sexual violence against Dalit women is a naked expression of caste power." (Nidhi Sadana,72)

At school too her teacher Herkeker Guruji, often picked on her to clean the dung in the school grounds when it was the turn of her class to do so. Once he ordered her to clean the dung, saying it was their cow that had dirtied the school compound and she felt very insulted. She refused because it was not the turn of her class. For this curt reply Guruji slapped her hard and sent her back home with her cheek swollen. Her mother intercepted this teacher on his way back and threatened him with dire consequences if he beat her daughter again. She told him that he could not ill-treat her children because she was a widow and that she worked hard so that her children would be educated and do well some day. Urmila recalls the tremendous sense of support that she experienced for the first time from her mother.

Though she is describing a situation that existed thirty years after independence, Nidhi's commentary is quite apt: "our society is still too ready to tolerate poverty around us, to compromise the future of children by marring the innocence of their present. Our sense of hygiene is confined to our person and the inside of our homes; even those homes are cleaned by servants. Dirt and deprivation are 'out there', attached to 'others' who themselves become dirty in the process of cleaning our surroundings. This too is a form of superstition that prevents Indians from moving to more effective and humane civic solutions for cleaner streets in our villages, towns and cities." (Nidhi,69) Urmila Pawar's unpolemical style of writing in fact invites the non-Dalit reader to empathize with the Dalit. In this way we can perhaps understand our own sense of dignity and modernity, however fragile it is in the current sense of 'Clean India' campaign.

Once the girls in her class had decided to cook a meal for themselves, they had intended to give her the slip. But when she joined in, she was asked to contribute money instead of food and was not allowed to touch the food that was being cooked. Nevertheless, she enjoyed the meal and ate well and the girls discussed this at school, ending up by calling her names. Urmila Pawar tells of a 'friend' who would not eat at her house, but borrowed Urmila's silk sari for a wedding, and returned it in a soiled condition. Similarly, she recalls how two of her close friends who were Muslims, who stayed in the rooms rented out by her mother, suddenly stopped interacting and eating with her after a relative of theirs advised them to observe the customary distance from the Mahars.



The day the Muslim family left their home for a better locality, she remembers feeling suffocated, the Hindi rhymes that they had sung together now sounding empty and hollow.

On the day of Holi, the Kulwadis, Marathas and Brahmins would make sweet chapattis called puran poli. The Mahar women would be excited and eager to go to the houses of these upper caste people to beg for the festive food. Urmila recalls, "Our sisters-in-law Vitha and Parvathi, would also go begging, along with other women in our community. — But if Baba came to know of this he would get mad and shout, 'These stupid women! When will they cease to behave like beggars? Go tell them, don't go begging! At least don't bring any such food to my house. And don't ever show your faces to me again!'" (p.51)

As Sonalkar comments, "Urmila Pawar has a whole chapter on food and eating habits in her autobiography, through which she achieves a number of distinct objectives. Firstly, 'the experience of extreme poverty, of living with a persistent lack of adequate nourishment, is most effectively conveyed through the child's viewpoint. The mother is described as stingy, fending off her children's demands, while we also see her efforts to make ends meet and to give them what taste and variety she can. Then there is the contrast with young Urmila's upper-caste schoolmates. The children's negotiations with each other and the pain the girl feels tells us a great deal about one of the central aspects of caste hierarchy. And, finally, throughout the hierarchy, it is the women who nurture the culture of their caste, and there is an enjoyment and a pride in talking about the food characteristic to one's caste and the food prepared at festivals, however meager it may be.'" ("The Weave of My Life" p. xxiv, Introduction to the Columbia University Press edition by W. Sonalkar)

While collecting firewood or carrying water from a distance, the young Dalit girls often have to venture into the jungle, or up rocky and thorny mountain paths. Bama in 'Karuku' tells us of how her hair would get tangled in the thorny bushes, of how the bare feet would be pricked by thorns and stones. Similarly Urmila describes the women's journeys over long distances along mountainous trails carrying baskets of firewood on their heads to sell in a bigger village market. The *aaydaan* is a cane basket; her mother wove these baskets to sell them for a few paise. The nature of exploitation of the girls' and women's labour comes

through in the ratio between the time and labour spent and the price received for this merchandise. Their extreme poverty implies that they have to take up any work, even the most laborious and ill-paid, that will supplement their cash income.

During the *holi* festival, it was the Mahar boys who collected logs of woods to light the ceremonial fire, but they were not allowed to participate in the ritual of actually lighting the fire. In fact, "the Marathas, Bhandaris and Kulwadis who were in the forefront of the ritual sought the blessing of the goddess and then set the woods on the fire. This done, they would start praying loudly. This ceremony was called Garhane. It featured lots of prayers for the village's well being and averting calamities. But funnily enough they also prayed for diverting the calamities to the Mahars. Then the ritual of howling and cursing began. Again terrible curse would target the Mahars. But the Mahars dared not lodge a protest against this." (p. 47). And again, "The upper castes men who had the prestige would dance around the Holi and would carry the palanquin of the god. None of the Mahars would be allowed to touch it. With dust flying from the dancing feet, gulal thrown around, it would be difficult to recognize people. Taking advantage of this, some Mahar boys would run to take the palanquin on their shoulders, and some even succeeded. Then somebody would notice the deception. All this would invariably end in quarrels and fights. Our young men would have carried sticks with them in anticipation." (p.48) Often the festivity would end with the mothers of the drunken and bruised Mahar youths, wailing and nursing their son's wounds.

Sharmila Rege in her 'Afterwards' to Urmila's self narrative writes, "Such a stark picture of the direst poverty is rare, even in Dalit women's (or men's) writing. (Her) purpose is didactic; she wants to keep alive the memory of deprivation and the forced association with all that is discarded by *savarna* society and is repulsive to it. Her purpose is to arouse disgust as well as compassion in the contemporary Dalit reader who has not experienced such extreme deprivation. But the power and richness of her descriptions can help us understand the nature of the humiliation that is inflicted on the Dalits, something that goes beyond exploiting their labour and excluding them from the basic amenities of life. It is as if the deepest identity of the non-Dalit man, when he is feeling himself to be purest and nearest to god, is predicated on the impurity of another person, the Dalit."



Urmila's brother Sahu used to perform priestly services as well as exorcism for the community after their father's death. But when the spirits to be exorcised were said to be particularly powerful ones, special exorcist called *burwas* were needed. Govind dada, who wanted her mother to sell the house that her father had built, often listed all deaths in the family and argued that there was a dangerous spirit residing in their house. He would bring a *burwa* along and have him sacrifice a cock from their pen and perform the feat of digging out red-blooded limes from their back yard. These feats went into the background after *Dharmantar* (religious conversion). Urmila records:

"All such things – ghosts and supernatural experiences – stopped abruptly after the conversion ceremony took place. — Govind dada and the villagers collected the idols and various pictures of the gods and goddesses adorning our walls, which Aaye used to worship every day, and threw them into a basket. I was expecting Aaye to remonstrate with him, but was amazed to see her dump some of the idols as well. — After conversion, Govind dada hung a portrait of Dr. Ambedkar on the wall in the god's room and kept a Buddha idol in the place vacated by the gods. His daily prayers had stopped. Activists from our wadi went from door-to-door to teach people the Buddha Vandana. — Now activists began to travel across several villages to spread the word of Dr. Ambedkar among our people. Ambedkar Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti, Nirvan Din – Dr. Ambedkar's death anniversary – would be observed on the designated days. One important fall-out of this was that boys who usually played truant gradually began to return to school. Also, the older rituals performed to mark birth, marriage and death were given up and new ones gradually came to be finalized, according to the Buddhist religion. (p.109 - 111)

Urmila Pawar, like other Dalit women writing in Marathi has her own style in dealing with the subject of superstition and degrading beliefs associated with religion. Giving these up was an important part of Ambedkar's mobilization of the Dalit community in Maharashtra. His conversion to Buddhism in 1956, a few months before his death, was emulated by thousands and this marked a giving up of all these practices. There are many accounts of how the household gods were physically thrown out in an act of emancipation. However, Urmila Pawar notes towards the end of her autobiography that, when she visits her

village years after she has left, she finds new roads, buildings and signs of prosperity; but inside the houses of neo-Buddhists she is dismayed to see that old icons and talismans have reappeared.

Harishchandra Thorat, her prospective husband had quit his job at the Mamlatdar office because of being at the receiving end of a caste prejudice. Once, on an official visit, a village officer insisted on inviting him home for a meal but when he discovered his caste, he served him in the cattle shed. Humiliated, Harishchandra vowed never to go to a village but to move to the city. Urmila writes, "I do not know whether he was aware of what Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had said: 'Leave the village. The village will never help you progress. Go to the city!' But his childhood memories of his father quitting caste based labor after listening to Babasaheb's speeches were definitely the basis of his self-respect." (p.159).

In the summer at her in-law's village Bhirwande, the wells often ran dry. Women in the community then went to the Maratha wells to fill water but her mother-in-law forbade her from doing so. She went nevertheless and realized the reason for her mother-in-law's insistence as the Mahar women were made to line up near the well, and had to more or less beg for water. At this she quietly came home back. The insults did not stop there. When her son was born Urmila remembers that Sawant an upper caste man passing by their home asked if the child was a boy or a girl and, on hearing the answer, remarked, 'The bastards! They always get sons!' (p.211). Her mother in law shouted back, 'Why, does that give you a stomach ache?' Actually, Sawant knew that Urmila's mother-in-law had six or seven sons and they were all educated and employed hurt him like a thorn in the flesh.

This leads us to the question of education, which is an important theme in many of the life narratives of Dalits, whether men or women. Especially in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the movements led by Periyar and Ambedkar have left a lasting impact in the form of a belief in education as a means of emancipation from caste oppression. While autobiographies written by male authors emphasize how education enabled an emancipatory trajectory of the self, even these often mention mothers and grandmothers who made sacrifices for the education of children in their families. But works by Dalit women writers add something more to the stories of emancipation through education. The

women are much more down-to-earth in their descriptions of the process of struggle whereby a person born in poverty in a community which tradition deems unfit for education faces deprivation, humiliation and all kinds of economic hardships to go through school and college. It can be noted that they do not so much tell stories of personal struggle and individual success in the face of huge obstacles like the men writing autobiographies; some of these narratives lose their revolutionary focus and sharpness after the (male) author has attained a certain amount of social prestige.

A Dalit woman writer's life trajectory is much less direct; it meanders and turns back on itself, there are steep hills and troughs even after the early obstacles have been overcome. So these women's narratives are much more complex, revealing many facets of social oppression and asking us to question the idea of ambition itself. Urmila Pawar in her self-narrative recounts how her schoolmaster father used to thrash her and her cousins to make them go to school. As a child she thought this was mere cruelty, but later she realizes that he was correct to value education so highly. In her childhood the family is very poor, but later she gets a job that enables her to go to college. She falls in love with Harishchandra and marries him before she completes her degree, but her husband is supportive and she even does her M.A. after they move to Mumbai.

When they shifted to Mumbai, and found a place of their own in Bandra, Urmilatai's colleague got hold of the keys on the pretext of getting the electric wiring done, and cheated them by subletting the house. Her sister's husband, a lawyer who had encouraged them to settle in Mumbai, helped them get the house vacated, but even as the illegal occupants were leaving they abused them saying, 'These are low caste people! So what else can you expect from them? Look at their things! A tin cot and cheap pots and pans! The moment we saw their things, we knew what they were! Dirty, mean, uncivilized —!' (p.224). And they had to listen to all these insults, though it was not their fault, while the people in the building enjoyed watching the whole scene.

In addition to such caste based humiliation Urmila Pawar also describes the ill-treatment meted out to women in dalit households. A new daughter-in-law is mercilessly forced to work at the behest of her elders, scolded and punished if she does not obey. Baby Kamble tells us

how suspicion about the wife's fidelity was often the pretext for beatings or more violent treatment like cutting of the nose. Urmila mentions how her husband Harishchandra was resentful when she goes on to become a writer and wins fame and popularity. We may thus surmise that the Dalit women's writing about oppression by Dalit men is tempered by their knowledge of the injustice, humiliation and exploitation that these men have to suffer, even though they do not say so explicitly.

Baby Kamble says that she wrote her memoirs mainly for a readership from her own caste. 'I have tried to sketch a portrait of the actual life of the Mahars and the indignities they were subjected to. I am writing this history for my sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and my grandchildren to show them how the community suffered because of the chains of slavery and so that they realize the ordeals of fire that the Mahars have passed through. I also want to show them what the great soul Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar singlehandedly achieved'. ('The Prisons We Broke', p. xiv)

Like her Urmila Pawar too depicts conversations among her mother's friends as they work and journey with baskets of firewood on their heads, explicitly using the swear-words that colour their self-expression. All this cannot always be conveyed in translation, but there is no doubt that these women writers are conscious and creative in their use of language; if we are more sensitive to this, we will be less likely to dismiss their writings as mere chronicles of victimhood. They are far, far more and have a lot to teach us about our society and ourselves.

This is a kind of feminism that we see in many of Dalit women writers, which need not suppress consciousness of their caste and identification with their community in order to be feminist. What we see here like in many other dalit autobiographies, is certainly not a portrait of 'victimhood' of women. Dalit women are seen as active protagonists, remarkably strong and resilient even when they are living in the most deprived and harrowing circumstances. They are down-to-earth, not given to euphemism. They take joy in their sexuality— this is most clearly seen in Urmila Pawar's 'The Weave of My Life' and in the conversations with Viramma. They negotiate for their dignity in situations where others would feel humiliated and crushed. As such, they can be seen as role models for Indian feminists who are, in the last resort, oppressed by the same patriarchal caste order that is so brutal

towards the Dalit woman. So we see that these women, who by the very fact of being able to write such narratives demonstrate how education has empowered them, have very different approaches to the issue of education. Yet none of them forget that behind them stand generations of illiterate Dalit women who intelligently and courageously dedicated themselves to the cause of education of their sons *and* their daughters.

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# 14

## Protest of Social Group and Class in Annabhau Sathe’s *Fakira* and Baburao Bagul’s *Jeehva Mi Jaat* *Chorli Hoti*

Dr. Dipti H. Mehta

Dalit literature, a socio literary phenomenon has been far diverse from that of the mainstream literature in Maharashtra. It is the literature of the oppressed by caste system for centuries together.

Annabhau Sathe is a dominant literary figure in Dalit literature in Maharashtra. A self-educated man without any formal education in school swam deep into the ocean of literature to bring out many unique literary diamonds. Being unlettered, panned down many novels and play in Marathi, which is probably the rarest of the erratic in the universe. Unfortunately, unexploited by the mainstream literary readers and critics considered him as the founder figure of Dalit literature.

Sathe belongs to realist culture in fiction. He is a keen observer of human society and that’s why he portrays both the positive and the negative side of life by drawing simple and social, noble human beings. His early works were male dominated, but today’s education has been instrumental in bringing prominent changes in the normal life style which leads to be conserved light bit in his latter works. His former works exemplify the traditional image of women who suffers and sacrifices their lives for their families. Her strength lies in facing the poverty of calamity with a cheerful face. Annabhau Sathe has depicted

women issues in the form of women protagonist as Chitraa, Vajanta, Chandan, Phulaphakharu, Ratna, Aavadi Chikhalati Kamal and many more.

According to Sathé his protagonists are the reflection of the real people with whom he has come in contact during his life span. As a writer, his primary job is to interpret the truth by characters that represent "the realism of life". He draws his character from the lower community of society of Maharashtrian culture. As a prominent Dalit writer, he was the first to pick up the incidents and experiences and make such issues as the substance of his novels. For him, to look at them is too look at life and to know more about them in detail is to know about them.

Sathé was the first feminist writer of Marathi literature, who protracted Dalit community and their issues by depicting in works. He has created both the kinds of women i.e. feminine and feminist. When we go through his works, we find the life like picture of contemporary Maharashtrian women. They have stubborn essence, which boost them against their old convention, rituals, beliefs, civilizations and even injustice done by the British Government and social community. Such women's are dually maltreated, disassemble the patriarchy supremacy. They are bottled-up being a woman and even being a Dalit woman.

His novels are categorized into four groups dealing with the problems of women problem based on love melodies, related to rural communal life and even ensuring revolutionary substance. He was born in the village Vategaon near Sangli that belongs to the Dalit community. Poverty being the main reason has obstructed him from getting education and good livelihood. He wrote 35 Marathi novels and 15 short stories, novels, a play, travelogue on Russia, 12 screenplays, 10 Ballads. He depicts his life memories and experiences of his childhood. His characters were strong to faces all the odds of life.

Annabhau contributed tremendously towards social awakening during Pre-Independence Movement, The United Maharashtra Movement and The Goa liberation Movement. His short stories have been translated into many Indian and non-Indian languages. They have been categorized into four groups. They are class conflict, autobiographical element, exploring criminal lives and stories based on love themes.

His novel *Fakira* explores about the downtrodden community who plays active role in freedom fighting movement. Before independence, this oppressed, downtrodden, poor class community lived inhuman condition and faced the world with humiliation, sometimes by reason and sometimes without any cause. Sathé in his *Fakira* has beautifully portrayed his protagonist who belongs from the downtrodden community facing suppression and humiliation from both the sides – one because they were socially discriminated and another from injustices of the British Government.

*Fakira* in his nineteenth edition received a State Government Award in 1961. His *Vajanta* is also a remarkable one. His prize winning novel of Annabhau successfully depicts the social reality of how historically Dalit occupied the social periphery and have been excluded from the core of politics and economy. It is the most encouraging, moving, realistic, and delineation of Dalit life, troubles, tortures their exploitations by the upper caste. Sathé's characters love their country, though the upper caste has piled up inflictions, exploitations and tortures. Thus, the story *Fakira* happens in Vategaon and has a rural setting. The people of Vategaon strongly believe and practice the tradition.

*Jeehva Mi Jat Chorli Hoti* is the collection of short story published in 1963 which earned Baburao Bagul great name and fame and established him as a renowned literary Dalit writer. His story is an outstanding autobiography that painfully depicts the Dalit story. The author gets a job at Udhana railway station as an officer. He was very happy as he thought that now his financial crunches will be solved out. When he joined for his duty, the first question asked to him was, "What is your caste?" By showing the fury and frustration on such question, he decided to avoid it. Likewise, his sophistication conduct and arrogance mislead the villagers by assuming him the man of the superior class. Even Shri Ranchod Tiwari had given his room on rent with all the amenities in it. But one day, when Tiwari discovered the reality of the author that he belongs to the Dalit class, he gathered the mob and went to the railway station to beat him. The mob started beating the author cruelly as they felt that they have been deceived.

Suddenly Kashinath a Dalit appeared and intervened in the matter ferociously and attacked the mob with bright knife and protected the author. As the Kashinath's brother is a Forman and an officer in railway, the villagers afraid that he will complain his brother and they might have been removed from the service. So the mob has been dispersed. But

this instance has changed the conviction of an author and its impact remained forever in his mind. Baburao cannot forget the fact that though he was a deserving person but suppressed only because he belongs to the Dalit community. People do not like to give him their house on rent, neither like to give respect. He thought that all the facilities in the room he got because he had hidden his caste that makes him self-guilty.

At the end when Kashinath challenges the mob by showing the knife, all run away. But mentally the author was injured and badly affected when he found that all the things in the room along with his certificates were torn out. When questioned him, "Jeeva Mi Jat Chorli Hoti, why and how did he tolerate the attack and got beaten up?"

Baburao Bagul replies, "I was not beaten up by them but by Manu." The story ends with such words. The story is theoretically a portrayal of a poisoned mindset with the thoughts of untouchability – a social evil poisoning social psyche.

Close study of the works of Bagul and Sathe reflects that Ambedkarism and Marxism both the ideologies reflect social inequalities going in the society and insists on emancipation and freedom. Both of them make the exploited man as the center of their art. They even brooded over the Dalit woman of Indian society. They are both highly conscious in fostering their characters and do not attempt to run away from the grim reality of being Dalit and keep that Dalithood and consciousness. However, both make hard undertakings to emancipate the Dalits from the shackles of the caste, culture, religion and the Hindu dominant biases.

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## 15

### Re-Visiting the Issues of Gender and Caste Discrimination in Indian Dalit Autobiographies

Dr. Chandrakant A. Langare

Dalit autobiographies are often been considered to be an emergent mode of Dalit discourse. The present proposal seeks to comprehend, evaluate and interrogate the issues of caste, gender and identity and offer a rich perspective and discourse on the body of Dalit personal narratives. The analysis will certainly give an insight and enrich our understanding of the sufferings and anguish of the Dalits over the past decades.

The origin of Dalit writing can be traced to a deep rooted and age long longing for equality and fuelled by anguish and anger at the denial of personal and socio-political dignity of Dalits. Particularly, because mainstream Indian literature has omitted the word-view and aspirations of Dalits, this body of writing carry the force of a people long denied freedom of speech and movement.

'Dalit' is a word for a community and an identity that are in the making. To call oneself Dalit, meaning "Ground down", "broken to pieces", "crushed", is to convert a negative description into a confrontational identity and to become particular sort political subject. Dalit literature reacts against the 'Varna system', the Hindu caste hierarchy that paves way to many forms of discrimination. In India the Dalit literary movement is inspired by the thoughts and ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Dalit leader, politician and activist. Dalit literature

appeared in the syllabi of many literature classes in the USA before it was included in the Indian syllabi, and with translations into French, German, Japanese and others. It has acquired global acclaim.

The present proposal seeks to comprehend, evaluate and interrogate the issues of caste, gender and identity and offer a rich perspective and discourse on the Dalit personal narrative. It also seeks to study the rhetoric of marginal identities and subaltern concerns in a few representative Dalit autobiographies in India. Dalit autobiographies create rich mosaic of national consciousness and ethos. They continually explore the dialectical binaries of privileged-unprivileged, rich-poor, upper-caste-lower-caste and male-female to unravel the multilayered complexities of exploitations and discriminations.

It is very well measured fact that Dalits in India are voiceless and marginalized. Dalit literature represents the collective consciousness of social political economic and racial discrimination suffered by the Dalits for hundreds of years. This suffering is due to the age-old 'Varna' system envisaged by Manu that created the caste-based hierarchy in Hindu society forcing the low caste people to undergo pangs of humiliation and exploitation at the upper-caste hands. Therefore, fundamentally Dalit literature contains the seeds of protest and rebel against these age-old practices. It must be noted that much has been said and written about the social improvement and reformation movements devised to uplift the Dalits, but the situation of the unprivileged Dalits has not improved considerably.

The phenomenon of caste as a status badge has been the most significant dimension of Indian society. Ganesh Devy observes, "The origin of the notion of the caste is so obscure and its manifestation in social life is so complicated that it is almost impossible to think of it as a 'system' with 'rules' that can be articulated and reasoned out". (Introduction, *The Outcaste*, Ganesh Devy,; xiv) It is painful that one's caste continues to adhere to one's identity throughout one's life. It is a lived social experience in India than a well thought over mode of social classification and Indian society has put caste convention intact and alive. Therefore, what Sharankumar Limbale says is very much true, "A feeling of rebellion is invariably accompanied by an extreme psychological commitment. As Dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary". (Limbale, 1992: 267)

Dalit literary movement explicitly shows the deeper concern with social justice and humanity. It radically analyzes the legacy of scriptural sanctions (*Varna* system) that unfortunately and deliberately imposed on them by the upper-caste hands. It was Ambedkar who, in the twentieth century, took up the most pragmatic and sensible battle against the injustice and impoverishment emanating from caste discrimination. His approach to the question of caste and religion was that of a democratic humanist, and at the close of his life, he embraced Buddhism in order to save millions of his followers from the clutches of tyranny of caste discrimination. He considers caste as the monster that crosses human path. He believed that one cannot have political reform or economic reform unless one kills this monster. (Referred to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste in Writing and Speeches* Vol -I 49) In order to fabricate a truly democratic society in which the Dalits enjoy freedom and equality, Ambedkar advised them, 'to educate, organize and agitate'. Hence, Ambedkar's life and work have continued to ameliorate many Dalit activists and writers all over India. His influence has kept inspiring many Dalit writers over the last five decades and has led to an eon of epochal change in the literary idiom. With this, a blend of pathos and protest has transferred Dalit literature into the defining feature of the Dalit discourse.

Dalit autobiographies are considered an emergent mode of Dalit discourses. Both men's and women's autobiographies seem to have succeeded in raising a big protest against the ubiquitous form of caste discrimination. With the arrival of many Dalit writers on the literary scene of the elites and upper-castes, the edifice of the so-called literary establishment and circle is already cracked and its mentors are left brow-beaten. It should be noted that Dalit life narratives have played important role in redefining the holistic body of Dalit consciousness and identity. As stated earlier the narratives have arisen from the wide spread caste, gender and identity conflict. They challenged the hegemony of the established tradition of canonical or "Hindu literature" constituting a vital segment as Dalit literature. Most of these narratives are the tales of intense personal suffering. Raj Kumar succinctly says "on the face of several oppressive forces, these writers with their growing perceptions and mature imagination, capture the tensions which grow out of a continuous battle between 'loss of identity' and 'asserting of self' (Raj Kumar, 2010: 150). It should be noted that the experiences

recorded in their works paved way to achieve a sense of identity and mobilize it against the oppression. Dalit autobiographies are microcosm of the world of subjugated and exploited people. The works have been reviewed as path-breaking social experiments meant for the eye opening of the oppressors.

Ironically, Dalit self-narratives focus on every day caste and class based discrimination and exploitation that often demand some serious moral and social scrutiny. The writers anticipate restoration and social revamp of the status of the oppressed community. The works expose many accounts of 'unspeakable' horrors and horrendous degree of exploitation of their community. Moreover, there is a site of inevitable discourse of the troubled and rebellious minds that face the condition of an abject poverty, sexual exploitation, lack of education and chaotic socio-economic circumstances. Most of these narratives are written because of an age-old slight that of being 'turned away' from the doorsteps of the privileged people. Therefore, the Indian Dalit autobiography can be considered as a new and a significant identity of modern Indian literature. It is because of its tonality and bold nature of epistemologies that they become symbol of distinctive protest and rebel. They invariably interrogate the issues of caste gender and identity and the above all the whole intriguing world that made the Dalits meek, passive, pliant and malleable over the thousands of years. "Dalit literature is one of the major sites of their resistance and creativity". (Mukherjee, 2010: xxiv) Therefore, Dalit personal narratives have added new dimensions significantly to the growing corpus of discourse on caste gender and identity in India. The narratives create rich mosaic of national consciousness and ethos by exploring the dialectic binaries of privileged-unprivileged, rich-poor, upper-caste- low caste and male-female. They unravel the complexities about the atrocities and discrimination that they underwent.

The autobiographies contain a volatile depiction of the life of those who are forced to live by concealing their identities. The politics of caste and exclusion described so far explains the invisibility of the Dalits in early Indian literature despite its beatific literary tradition. Ironically Dalits have had their own oral traditions with immense historiographical benchmarks. Probably, this is because the Dalits are considered as the 'Aborigines' of India. In fact, Dalit writers' engagement with personal narratives can be seen at another level in their wrestling

with everyday struggle for survival much similar to the struggle depicted in the Indian Dalit History.

Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi (The Outcaste)* has been considered as a contemporary classic soon after its publication in 1984. Ganesh Devy in his 'Introduction' refers it as "a disturbing life narrative" (2011: xxv). The narrative confirms Limbale's views expressed in his book *Towards Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*, for he believes that the non-Dalit literature emerges from imagination, where as the Dalit literature emerges from experience. It is an "unflinching portrayal of 'seamier' side of Dalit life", that of a troubled protagonist who is haunted by his fractured identity. He lives outside the boundaries of the village where, "There is ignorance, sexism, violence, internal rivalry, conflicts, drunkenness and death" (2004: 13). Here Sharan, the first person narrator has carved a distorted self-image due to the humiliation imposed upon him by the privileged upper-caste people. The whole narration is acutely informed by what may be called the politics of evil existed in the upper-caste people. The narrative designates his fractured identity as he is born out of an illegitimate sexual relationship between an upper-caste 'Lingayat' father and a Dalit woman. Limbale writes in an article entitled "Chronicle of a Fatherless Being", "I have sown the events, incidents and experience from my life of twenty seven years... this is the story of my life, an expression of my mother's agony and an autobiography of a community. Being fatherless is as much as my fate, as it is to be in a general ward (of hospital) of suffering. (A, Ba, Ka, Da, I. Diwali Special Issue, 1986: 152).

In *The Outcaste* the narrator condemns the sexual exploitation of his mother, the low born woman and the sexism that prevailed unfortunately in the Dalit settlements. He depicts realistically the sexual exploitation of Dalit women by the high caste men and the way the women are left to die vulnerably when they grow old. The narrator is haunted by the reflective question, "Who am I? Am I an upper-caste or an untouchable?" (12). The most significant aspect of Limbale's life story is his sincere depiction of the stark realities of the Dalit world, the instances of touching humanness, quest for individualistic identity and his compassionate outlook on women. He depicts the intense suffering of his mother and his grandmother who have been betrayed, exploited most evilly and suffered most blatantly by the pangs of unbearable life in their settlements. They are labeled as 'illegitimate' children against



the backdrop of their forced upbringing. It is rather an affront to human dignity as the victim has to bear the brunt of illegitimacy from childhood. The narrator raises pertinent questions like "Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world?" (37), "What else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion nor a caste, or his father. I had neither a father's name nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all." (59). He feels alien because his father is not a low-caste and in his settlement he feels alienated as he was considered a 'bastard'. His father lives in a mansion and mother in hut and ironically, he lives on the street. He raises some pertinent questions, "Why didn't my mother abort me when I was a foetus? Why did she not strangle me as soon as I was born? We may be children born out of caste but does that mean we must be humiliated? What exactly is our fault? Why should a child suffer from the sin of its parents?" (64) After a great struggle the boy gets education and schooling. During the formative years he becomes conscious about the idea of untouchability. He says, "With our education, there grew in us a sense of pride, casteism made us bitter." (76) The narrator is afraid of his caste and religion. He yells, "In a sense I was not a Mahar (Dalit) because high caste blood ran in my body. Could I drain this blood out of my body? My body nauseated me." (82) Here Limbale depicts the helplessness of the Dalits and their animal-like existence and perennial struggle against poverty and hunger. The narrative raises many questions regarding the suffering of the Dalits as well as the imposed slavery, poverty and filthy conditions of their tragic lives. There is a nerve-striking depiction of how Dalits were forced to do certain humiliating and menial jobs like skinning dead animals and removal of decomposed carcasses, sweeping the village streets and so on. Even they were not allowed to fetch the water from upstream of the river, the narrator yells, "the water at the lowest end was meant for us." (7) He quiet often haunts and grapples with the question of satisfying hunger. He used to collect cattle dung because they passed undigested grains in their dung. The narrator reveals the fact about how his grandmother used to pick up the lumps of dung and wash them in the river to collect the clean grains. She shows no sign of nausea from the food prepared from the grain collected from cattle dung.

The narrative explores the diabolic bestiality and evils of the upper-caste people showing how they behave inhumanly with the helpless

Dalit women and children. The narrative raises a silent rebel, as there is no point in cursing or blaming the high-caste people. The narrator accepts the plight of his community very calmly and with great perseverance. And it is for the evocative appeal of the narrator that the book is widely appreciated in global literary and social circle. It should be noted that by critiquing the caste system with all its ramifications of evil, Limbale initiates a serious discourse on the age-old hierarchy of caste system. It seems that it is difficult to provide an answer to the pertinent question that he raises at the end of the narrative, "Who has created such values of right and wrong and what for? If they consider my birth illegitimate what values am I to follow?" (113). Throughout the flow of narrative Sharan never hesitates to disclose the inhumanity of the upper-caste and the burdensome childhood in most realistic manner and sense. Given above is the grim picture of a family that struggled hard in order to survive and make ends meet for a better future. Thus, throughout his life Sharan displays a behavior rarely found among the Dalits. He constructed his self according to his circumstantial needs; otherwise he would have found it difficult to survive.

Om Prakash Valmiki is a prominent Hindi writer whose life-narrative, *Joothan: a Dalit's life* (1997) reveals the painful life of the *Chuhras*, the downtrodden community from north India. The word 'Joothan' refers to food scraps left on the plates that are given to Dalits to eat. At the outset, the writer talks about the low status of his community, for, he states bleakly, "Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in social order that is extremely cruel, inhuman, and compassionless towards Dalits. (2010: vii) The narrative is all about the history of the atrocities done to the entire 'Chuhra' or 'Chamar' (Cobbler) community who have been dragged to the brink of caste-based tyranny for ages. They have been cruelly discriminated by the upper-caste Hindu society often worse than lesser animals. Om Prakash reveals how his community depends on the scrap food of the high caste in lieu of their laborious and humiliating work. The word 'joothan' carries the connotations of ritual of purity and pollution as 'jootha' means polluted. The title of the work symbolizes the legacy of the agony, humiliation and poverty of the entire Valmiki community. The narrator offers a detailed account of begging for and preservation of the 'slops' of food. The narrative bears the bleak memory of preserving



the food and of relishing the reprocessed scraps that trouble the narrator with great pain and anguish. Throughout the narrative, Valmiki expresses his mental anguish and emotional terror on quiet a number of occasions. He boldly speaks about the atrocities done to his community by the police. There are many occasions his entire community was assaulted by the police, the law and its enforcers with the upper-caste support. Valmiki describes the manner and the ways of the police atrocities and its effects on Dalits. "Those people return home after a severe beating, bereft of all hope. Silence was glued to their faces. There was deep anguish in their eyes. Their bodies were wounded." (392) As a conscious writer Valmiki states that, Dalit writing is born out brutal experiences. Many downtrodden people share such experiences across India, who are very much concerned about the issues he is writing about and the people he is addressing to. He is convinced that the raising of the caste related issues may trigger a fruitful discussion on the plight of Dalits at a national level. Valmiki announces that the paramount issue of his narrative is about 'identity' concerning caste. Pramod Nayyar writes, "Dalit trauma has always been represented by others, while the victims have themselves always been silent. *Joothan* is a stage in the representation of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma becomes visible when the persons compose these oppressed put forward characterizations and representations of ongoing social events. *Joothan* brings to visibility the life of a Dalit lived in rural and semi-urban India, where caste is the single dominant factor." (Nayyar, 51-65) He further maintains, "*Joothan* and other Dalit texts must be read not only as trauma narratives and testimonies but as archives of feelings, especially of loss, pain, anguish and often, shame." (2008)

The narrative constitutes ironically a clear diagnosis of a particular social reality and a buoyant hope for its possible transformation, the Dalit sensibility shows a deep concern for the Dalit 'point of view' that needs a deeper insight into the animal like and stark Dalit lives. The book records how the narrator violates the community's convention by going to school. Dalits were forbidden to get educated. Even though he faced the abuses and insults from high caste students during his school and college life, he pursued his studies with indomitable desire for learning. He finally completes his education and was honored by his own people to be the first ever graduate from his community. Later on, he secures a government job. It is a fulfillment of a long cherished dream

of his father to educate him. To put into his father's words, "you have to improve the caste by studying." (29) This prompts him further towards futuristic aims and achievements. Otherwise, he would have been pushed to the peripheries as per his belief that, "There is no accounting of how many talents have been wiped by deception and treachery." (39)

It would not be over emphasizing to state that, throughout the work, the narrator raises many reflective questions about caste and identity. The nature of such questions consists of a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by the chuhras. The questions like, "Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits?" (41) He further broods, "The cuts I have received in the name of caste even aeons won't suffice to heal them." (52) During his troublesome school days he was constantly reminded of his father's advice to improve the caste through learning. However, he was quite aware of the impossibility of such a difficult task. He is quiet aware of the ordeal of achieving such a grand status for; he ironically puts, "He [father] constantly said that I should improve my 'caste' by getting an education. He did not know that 'caste' cannot be improved by education. It can only be improved by taking birth in the right caste." (58) Finally, he abandons education and joins a factory as an apprentice. Though he was not aware of the job, he knew one thing that he does not want to follow that line of menial work that his ancestors had been doing for thousands of years. Valmiki asserts the significance of education learning and reading books that widen the scope of one's intellect and social consciousness.

During his days spent in Chandrapur, where he served for long, he came in contact with the Dalit Panther movement which made him conscious about Dalit literature and Ambedkarite thought. He gets attracted towards the Dalit theatre and poetry and emerged as a prominent Hindi poet and fictional writer. But, soon he realized that being educated does not provide any help to improve the caste nor redefine one's self-esteem, he aptly says, "the Dalits who have become educated face a terrible crisis-the crisis of identity- and they are trying to find an easy and instantaneous way to get out of this crisis." (126)

As a conscious writer, Valmiki is very much aware about the plight of the Dalits at the national level. He tries to depict the pangs of delusion and horror suffered by him from the very beginning of his life. He says, "Right from my childhood to this day, countless stings have stung not

just my body but also my heart. What historical reasons lie behind this hatred and malice?" (133) The work significantly revolves round the issues of 'caste' and 'fractured identity'. Valmiki at the end comprehends the fact that, "caste is a very important element of Indian society. As soon as a person is born, caste determines his or her destiny." (133)

It should be noted that, the broad spectrum of perspectives about the plight of Dalits and caste issues and the ambivalent relationship with the upper-castes justifies the very emergence of Dalit discourse. Here, Valmiki is not only critical of the hegemonies of upper-caste people, he is also highly critical of their hateful and humiliating behavior towards the Dalit. The narrative reveals some alarming facts about how the caste system operates secretly within Indian bureaucracy. The surname 'Valmiki' that designates his caste put him into trouble blemishing his prestige, Valmiki writes, "At my office, many of my fellow officers and subordinates undervalue my worth because of this surname." (132) He ironically says, "When the caste is the basis of respect and merit, important for social superiority this battle can't be won in a day." (132) Focusing on multiple marginalities pertaining to caste, nation and identity, Valmiki condemns the complex nature of social stratification and evil emanating from the rigid concept of caste. The narrative is a candid account of a quest to understand the meaning of life in a meaningless world. He learns to accept the plight of his life and the entire community against the backdrop of the surrounding socio-political conditions. He is obsessed with the notion of eradicating the casteism throughout his life. Though learning is inevitable to improve caste, it is an impediment too. The book reveals the fact of how the educated Dalits had to face the "blatant inhumanity of casteism." (127) The last question, "Why is my caste my only identity?" (134) compels the readers to contemplate over the issue of the ubiquitous nature of discrimination based on caste and identity.

As stated earlier, *Joothan* has arisen from social conflict. It has foregrounded many issues and discourses pertaining to the sufferings of oppressive and subjugated community at the hands of a society evolved with caste biases and unequal opportunities. In this regard, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, the translator of *Joothan* comments: "Valmiki does not, cannot, claim the authority to address a national collectivity. On the contrary, he aims to point out the exclusion of people like him from the imagined community of the nation." (Mukherjee, xxvii) In short,

*Joothan* demands a radical shift from the 'tainted' society into an 'egalitarian' society based on the values of social harmony, human rights and justice. The work relentlessly explores the jeopardy of the upper-caste people and society. "*Joothan's* dual address problematizes the reader's caste and class." (xxvii) *Joothan*, then, is a polemical text, that paves way to document Valmiki's story of terrible anguish and oppression that demands substantial social scrutiny and transformation.

Unlike Dalit men, a few Dalit women have also written autobiographies in regional Indian languages. The narrative also explores all the facets of their victimization under both caste-hierarchy and patriarchal subjugation. Collectively then all these narratives speak of how poverty compels them to abandon education and succumb to the demands of hard labor for survival. There are innumerable issues related to the existential conditions and harassment of Dalit women. In the past, Ambedkar encouraged a large number of Dalit women to join his reformative movements to improve their status; as a result, Dalit women were benefitted immensely from his reformative initiatives. There was an emergence of women's discourse through personal narratives in the literary scene in the nineteen seventies. It should be noted that the Dalit women were the worst sufferers of caste based discriminations, abject poverty and male sexuality. Some of them were embraced to writing in order to unravel the stigma of their painful experiences. Moreover, the life narratives became chief source of asserting and addressing their sense of identity, gender position and self-respect. The works document the perils of atrocities done to the Dalit women. Therefore, some Dalit women that were either molested or raped by the upper-caste men fought back like a crusader to guard their dignity and self-respect. These women writers succeeded in raising rebellion against such ubiquitous forms of oppressions and subjugation. They depict the grim situation of their lives and of social despair, gender and caste based hierarchies. They explore the pernicious forms of evil and vicious circles of the upper-caste people and their machinations and intrigues devised for their social and sexual exploitation of the outcastes.

It should also be noted that the genesis of Dalit women's self-narrative was formulated with the objective of radically transforming the marginal Dalit women into socially conscious human beings. It aims to make them self-assertive, self-reliant and indiscernible against

the backdrop of their continuous exploitation and multiple deprivations. The autobiography as a genre seems to have helped them to fortify their existential awareness and confidence against the backdrop of oppression with its wide ramification on the social system. The work focuses attention on a number of conflicting issues that we found in men's autobiographies viz caste, gender bias, poverty, slavery, and identity. Moreover, they demand serious moral and social scrutiny in order to strengthen the values like humanity, solidarity, gender-equality and women's empowerment. These narratives tend to carve a new image of Dalit woman far different from the upper-caste-class Indian women. Above all, they unravel the politics of evil and the dual face of patriarchy functioning in their world. Janardhan Waghmare, a critic of Dalit studies aptly says, "Theirs is a double jeopardy. They face degradation and even de humanization. Gender is at the base of their marginality. Husbands and wives are unequal partners in family life... they move under dark phallic shadows of man's lust." (Dangle, 23)

In their sustained interrogation of existential quest, the Dalit women writers have endeavored radical, an uninhibited search of their identities drawing the grim picture of poverty, illiteracy, caste based, and gender based exploitation as the major themes in their works. In this regard, Baby Kamble, a Marathi Dalit writer, raises a huge protest against the rigid and hierarchal social order. Through her path breaking life narrative, *The Prisons We Broke (Jina Amuche)* she demonstrates how caste and patriarchy unite to perforate exploitative practices against Dalit women. It is an account of the way she relentlessly tried to find out meaning and identity in meaningless existence of her life. Being a victim of double subjugation, she moved about on the helm of her struggled existence and life enduring the most of class, caste and gender discrimination. It depicts all forms of female exploitation focusing on the painful and agonizing phase of her formative years and old age. Her work echoes the burden of social, political, economic and religious bondage imposed on almost every Dalit women both by privileged and unprivileged class. It is a powerful narrative on caste and gender-based exploitation. It illustrates the point of an intense female subjugation. It can be considered as a sensible and sweeping account of the plight of the rural Dalit women, who succumb to the hegemonic tradition imposed on them by both the upper-caste people and the Dalits. It is an eye

opening and audacious judgment of the Ambedkarite discourse and the perspective of anti-caste protest emanated from it. Maya Pandit, the translator and feminist critic, succinctly argues, "Baby Kamble's narration reflects her love for her people without seeming to glorify their terrible condition. Outrage against the inhuman condition of existence and love for her suffering people are organically fused to evolve a self-critical and humane and mature tone." (xiv) The work gives an account of the deep-rooted superstitions, strange and queer faith as well as beliefs among the Dalits. Kamble is chiefly concerned with the hierarchy and legacy of exploitation done to the Dalits by the upper-caste hands, "Baby Kamble demonstrates how caste and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women... She shows the remarkable dignity and resilience of Mahar women in their struggle through which they have emerged as the agents of transformation in their community." (xiv)

By describing caste privilege and prejudice, Baby Kamble makes the authorial statement that the aim of her work is to awaken the future generations of Dalits about the evil and inhuman forms of exploitations imposed by the upper-caste hands. Above all, to make them see the bleak past and grim realities about their animal-like existence this is an affront to the dignity and self-respect of the Dalits. The suffering of her people becomes the part of the deep agonies of her own. She seems to be very much aware of the fact that gender is an exclusive base of her own subversion and state of marginality. She is entirely convincing in this poignant tale of life outside mainstream Indian thought and ideology. Revolving around the process of women empowerment and caste operation within the Indian caste hierarchy, it portrays the self-reflection and recovery from the point of view of all pervasive social and institutional evil. It records a number of awesome experiences and instances of domestic violence, as she firmly believes that a Dalit woman is the sole and easily available creature for all types of subjugation because she is often regarded and assumed as a passive, powerless and meek creature. The narrative is an unflinching depiction of the seamier side of Dalit women who are forced and dragged towards the peripheries of social and human progress. In his 'Afterword' to the book, Gopal Guru, the veteran social scientist and critic says, "Dalit women's testimonies could be seen as the political imitative to engage with the Dalit patriarchy and social patriarchy. Dalit women's personal

narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitation by the state on the one hand and marker on the other. Dalit women's autobiographies are also the statement of protest against their exclusion from Dalit public sphere, literary gatherings, academic gatherings, publishing sphere and other spheres of recognition like political parties." (160)

The legacy of anti-caste critique goes through the writings of many regional Dalit women writers disseminating the instances of horrendous atrocities and brutal violence. Bama, the Tamil born Dalit Christian writer in her poignant work *Karukku* (1992) expresses various forms of violent oppressions unleashed on Dalit Christian from her region. She narrates the evils of caste discrimination and the inhuman practices of bonded labor- an arena defined by economic and social exploitation. Through Bama's web world, we gain insights into the complex social relationship between the Dalits and the upper-caste people mainly the 'Pallars' and 'Parriyars'. She identifies herself with the movement of Dalit feminism in Tamilnadu. And firmly believes, "Casteism must be annihilated basically." (2009: 268) The title of narrative substantiates the validity of the world she lives in. The word 'Karukku' means the saw-like double-edged stem of the 'palmyra' leaves with their serrated edges on both sides are like double edged swords.

Bama belongs to the Tamil Dalit community called 'parayas' who are estimated as the lowest of the low in caste order. *Karukku* depicts how the abject poverty and social status compels her family to embrace Christianity. On the contrary, instead of any social enhancement, her religious conversion puts her into problematic situations. Even after their conversion the Dalit Christians are still looked down upon by the privileged class. Bama's *Karukku* explores and comments on many forms of caste and gender based discrimination. Significantly it exposes the evil of caste operation existing within Catholic Church in her region. She writes, "It is only upper-caste Christians who enjoy the benefits and comforts of the Church." (*Karukku*, 80) She realistically portrays how people of the low social status lead a hard life fighting with hundreds of battle daily, she clearly states her motif, "*Karukku*, written by a wounded self has not been dissolved in the stream of time... it has been a means of relieving the pains of others who were wounded." (2012: X) Bama radically speaks in *Karukku* retracting courageously against the conventions of mainstream discourse. She speaks directly and openly, with unprecedented confidence about her culture, the

problems of her community and of her individual struggle to find out her identity. *Karukku* ardently comments on the rapacious aspects of caste-hierarchy and oppression. She depicts how her own people live in utter poverty and their hard work gains no dignity of labor, "...our society is divided into those who toil and those who sit down and feast." (79) She expresses her deep sympathies for the people, "Who toil far more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, yet live out their lives in their huts with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labor are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But those who reap the rewards are the wealthy, the upper-castes." (79) The work records the instances of the way her family quelled the bouts of hunger, "Sometimes we boiled and ate drumstick leaves." (72) The work tells the story of her struggle to search her identity during her formative years. During her school days she would find some menial and farm work like gleaning groundnuts, collecting firewood and picking up cow dung. Even after the attainment of higher education she endures the hardships of being alone in the corrupt world of jobs. For she believes, "The task of finding a job seems monstrously difficult." (118) Apart from the pangs of poverty, Bama suffered from various forms of caste, class and gender oppression both within her village and outside. *Karukku* records how the upper-caste people took an undue advantage of their poor economic conditions and the hassle of their life. It shows how they were immediately thrown out of their jobs on account of their reaction and protest. Bama takes serious cognizance of such brutal and inhuman acts in her writing. She strongly raises the question, "For how long can you live in disguise?" (116)

Unlike Valmiki's *Joothan*, Bama's *Karukku* triggers a number of reflective questions about her 'quest for identity' and the plight of her community. It should be noted that, confronting with all the hardships of a low social status, Bama has always ushered a hard life. Through hard work and perseverance, she accomplishes her academic career and finally becomes a teacher in a convent school. She goes to an extent of becoming a Catholic nun to serve the poor and the destitute. But when she gets into a religious order she notices that even this domain is not free from the evil and the dichotomies of upper-caste and lower caste. Finally, she arrives at a conclusion that the work culture of the Church helps the high caste to intentionally discriminate the unprivileged people. For she writes, "They never asked, why do people suffer, what is the state of this country, what Lord Jesus actually did for

people, why did we become nuns, how can we undo these injustices. Such questions never came out of their mouths." (111-112) The work records her helplessness and the facts about how she becomes extremely alienated as she could not share her life with the poor and the destitute. Ironically, there was a "well-endowed" one, the god they worshipped there was "A wealthy Jesus." (106) Bama concludes her grim experience about the church in a bold and radical statement, "There seemed to be one god within the Church and another outside." (107) Thus, *Karukku* concludes on a tragic note, revealing the facts about her grim future. She finally resigns from her teaching post in the convent realizing the futile nature of her teaching profession, for she says, "What use would I be then, to society?" (131) further, she returns to her village to mingle with her own people and to do something to enhance their social status. Bama is conscious of what is really meant to be a destitute and poor. She writes, "Today, I do know what it is to be hungry, to suffer illness in solitude, to stand and stare without a paisa (money) in one's hand to walk along streets without protection, to be embarrassed by a lack of appropriate clothes, to be orphaned and entirely alone, to swim against the tide in this life without position or status or money or authority." (120)

In *Karukku*, we find that Bama's quest for identity gains much prominence and recognition that can never be ignored. In this regard, Lakshmi Holmstrom, the translator aptly says, "Bama captures a moment that contains a paradox: she seeks an identity, but also seeks a change which means an end to that identity." (xix) Further, she praises the work, "Yet it has universality at its core which questions all oppressions, disturbs all complacencies, and, reaching out, empowers all those who have suffered different oppressions." (xiv)

A careful reading of *Karukku* implicates new sites of the social, cultural and institutional betrayal against the backdrop of caste-based violence and oppressions. It also recounts an individuated structure of ordeals and trails. Because, after all what Anupama Rao says is very much true, "Violence has played a central role in the semiotic density and public salience that the term "Dalit" have acquired across the last century." (Rao, 264)

In conclusion, it may be stated that both Dalit men's and women's autobiographies have emerged as an epitome of protest and rebel and

gathered wider and global critical acclaim for their proactive writing. They can be referred to as epitomes of protest and rebel and gathered a wider critical acclaim for their proactive writing. They can be referred to as an emergent mode of Dalit discourses. Moreover, they have been fore-grounded with the issues of epistemological, social and existential predicament. The discourses of caste, gender and identity have further sensitized many Dalit men and women writers to raise voice against the politics of evil, social oppressions and caste-based discriminations. These narratives have made conscious endeavor to interrogate the fundamental issues emanating from the ubiquitous sites of oppression and resistance. Therefore, the Indian Dalit autobiographies are considered as unique literary productions because of this unique consciousness. And it is for the same reason that these socially potent and powerful narratives make the readers meditate deeply, see clearly and think radically, which is what is expected from any serious literary work.

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સમતાના સેનાની

# ડૉ. આંબેડકર

સંપાદક  
ચંદુ મહેરિયા





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[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

સંયમિત હતા. હાલમાં તેઓ આ પ્રશ્નને જોર દઈને આગળ વધારવા માગતા હોય તેમ લાગતું નથી. તેઓ સનાતનીઓની લાગણીઓને દુભાવવા પણ ન માગતા હોય એમ લાગ્યું.” ગાંધીજીની પદ્ધતિથી પરિણામો તત્કાલ મળે તેમ નહોતાં. ફેરફાર ધીમો અને ન દેખાય (gradual and imperceptible) તેવો હતો. પરંતુ ડૉ. આંબેડકર તો ‘તત્કાલ અને વર્ત્ય’ તેવા બદલાવના પક્ષે હતા. તેઓ માનતા કે જો ‘હરિજન સેવક સંઘ’ નાગરિક અધિકારો માટે નહીં લડે તો સમય અને નાણાં બંનેનો વ્યય છે. ‘હરિજન સેવક સંઘ’ના તેના કેટલાક કાર્યકર્તાઓએ વ્યક્તિગત ધોરણે કેટલીક જગ્યાએ સંઘર્ષની ભૂમિકાએ જરૂર કામ કર્યું, તેનાં સારાં પરિણામો પણ હાથ લાગ્યાં. મદ્રાસ પ્રદેશ (તામિલનાડુ)માં સંઘના આગેવાન એ. વૈદનાથ પોતાના દલિત સાથીઓ સાથે મદુરાઈના પ્રસિદ્ધ મીનાક્ષી મંદિરમાં પ્રવેશ્યા હતા અને ઉચ્ચ વર્ણના હિંદુઓ સામે સંઘર્ષ કર્યો હતો. સી. રાજગોપાલાચારીએ પાછળથી આ પગલાને ટેકો પણ આપ્યો, પરંતુ આ પ્રકારના કાર્યક્રમો ‘હરિજન સેવક સંઘ’ના કામનો વિધિસરનો હિસ્સો ના બની શક્યા.

કરાચી ખાતેના એક સંબોધનમાં ગાંધીજી ડૉ. આંબેડકરની સમાજ પ્રત્યેની નિસબતની પ્રશંસા કરતા કહે છે કે ‘જે પ્રમાણમાં તેઓએ ભોગ આપ્યો છે તે બાબત મહાન છે, તેઓ પોતાના કામમાં ગળાડૂબ છે. તે સાદગીભર્યું જીવન જીવે છે. જો તેમણે ઇચ્છ્યું હોત તો મહિને એક-બે હજાર આસાનીથી કમાઈ શક્યા હોત. યુરોપમાં સ્થાયી થઈ શક્યા હોત. પરંતુ તેમની એકમાત્ર નિસબત હરિજનોનું ઉત્થાન છે.” બની શકે કે ડૉ. આંબેડકરનું ‘એકમાત્ર’ લક્ષ્ય તરછોડાયેલા લોકોના વિકાસ અને હકની લડાઈનું હોય. તેમનો જંગ પણ એક પ્રકારની આઝાદીની લડાઈ હતી. જો ગાંધીજી અંગ્રેજોના આધિપત્યમાંથી મુક્તિ ઇચ્છતા હતા તો ડૉ. આંબેડકર ઉચ્ચ વર્ણના હિંદુઓની જોડુકમીમાંથી મુક્તિ ઝંખતા હતા.

૧૯૩૫ના સમયગાળામાં ડૉ. આંબેડકરની ગાંધીજી અને તેમના ‘હરિજન સેવક સંઘ’ પરથી શ્રદ્ધા ઊઠી જાય છે. આંબેડકર હવે ‘જાતિ સુધાર’ નહીં પરંતુ ‘જાતિ નિર્મૂલન’ પર ભાર મૂકતા હતા. “Annihilation of Caste” વાળું પ્રવચન જે એમણે લાહોર મૂકામે જાત-પાત તોડક મંડળની સભામાં આપવાનું હતું તે વિવાદને કારણે રદ થયું, પરંતુ તે પ્રવચનની છપાયેલી પ્રતી ખૂબ જ વંચાઈ અને ચર્ચાઈ. આ જ પ્રવચનમાં હિંદુ ધર્મથી છોડો ફાડવાનો ઇશારો કર્યો અને યેવલા કોન્ફરન્સમાં તો સ્પષ્ટ જણાવ્યું કે “હું ગંભીરતાપૂર્વક ખાતરી આપું છું કે હું હિંદુ તરીકે મરીશ નહીં.” આઝાદી પછી બંધારણ સભાના વડા તરીકે

રહી સમાજના તરછોડાયેલા વર્ગને નાગરિક અધિકાર મળી રહે તેવી અનેક જોગવાઈઓ કરી. અસ્પૃશ્યતાને બંધારણીય કલમોથી સજાપાત્ર ગુનો ગણવામાં આવ્યો. પરંતુ બંધારણ સમક્ષની સમાનતા સામાજિક સમાનતામાં બદલાઈ ન શકી. ૧૯૩૫માં જે વાતનો ઇશારો કર્યો તેનો અમલ વીસ વર્ષ પછી ૧૯૫૬માં હિંદુ ધર્મને તિલાંજલિ આપી બૌદ્ધ ધર્મ અંગીકાર કરી કર્યો. દલિત ઉત્થાનની બાબતમાં ‘બાપુ’ અને ‘બાપા’ની ધરી પર ‘બાબાસાહેબ’ રાજી ન થઈ શક્યા.

માત્ર રોટીબંધી કે સ્પર્શબંધી તોડવાથી અસ્પૃશ્યતા નષ્ટ થશે એવું માની લેવાની મૂર્ખામી કરવા જેવી નથી અસ્પૃશ્યતાનાં મૂળ તો ઊંડાં છે. બેટીબંધી તૂટે તો બંધનો ઢીલાં પડે. સમાનતા સ્થાપવાનું એ પ્રથમ કદમ છે. મારા મત મુજબ તો જાતિ નિર્મૂલનનો રામબાણ ઇલાજ આંતરજાતિય લગ્નો છે. જ્યાં સુધી રક્તસંબંધ બંધાય નહીં, આત્મીયતા ઉત્પન્ન થાય નહીં, પારિવારિક સંબંધો સ્થપાય નહીં, ત્યાં સુધી અલગપણનો ભાવ સમાપ્ત થશે નહીં

ડૉ આંબેડકર



ઉત્તર ગુજરાત યુનિ.નાં નવા અભ્યાસક્રમ મુજબ

રેગ્યુલર અને એક્સટર્નલ વિદ્યાર્થીઓ માટે

એમ. કોમ. • સિમેસ્ટર - IV ૨૫૦૨

# ઉચ્ચતર નાણાકીય હિસાબો

Advanced Financial Accounting



કુમાર પ્રકાશન



ઉત્તર ગુજરાત (હેમચંદ્રાચાર્ય) યુનિ.ના નવા અભ્યાસક્રમ મુજબ  
રેગ્યુલર અને એક્સટર્નલ વિદ્યાર્થીઓ માટે

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# ઉચ્ચતર નાણાકીય હિસાબ

## [Advanced Financial Accounting]



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