

ARISE OF GUJARAT DALIT LITERARY MOVEMENT: A STUDY

U. S. Saranya*

Abstract

Gujarati Dalit literature started with the Dalit movement initiated in the state. Gujarat Dalit movement received no attention from the main stream writers. Though there were lot of classical battle between purists and utilitarian then the fury downed and Gujarat Dalit literature set itself the task of a new form content dialectic. When the Gujarat Dalit Panther movement was launched by Rameshchandra Parmar in 1975 marked the advent of the Gujarat Dalit writing. After that many publications started coming into the light such as *Akrosh*, *Kalo Sooraj*, *Garud*, *Dalit Bandhu*, *Nayamarg* and *Disa*. The proposition of the paper will deal with the rise of the Gujarat Dalit literary movement in terms of different genre and the notable works and contribution of the eminent authors who have undergone various transformations through caste in life.

Keywords: Literary, Caste, movement, genre.

* **PhD Scholar (English studies), School of Social Sciences and languages, V I T University, Vellore**

Introduction

The Dalits of Gujarat in 1988 established the *Gujarat Dalit Sahitya Academi* that academi published the quarterly magazines like *Hayati*, *Samaj Mitra* and *Dalit Chetana*. To encourage the Gujarat Dalit writers the government of Gujarat gives two awards in an annual they are Kabir Award for the literary work and Dasi Jeevan award. Dr. Pathik Parmar is a dedicated scholar he has contributed gazals and lyrics and he was awarded Kabir award for his contributions. *Bahiskrit* in 2003 is the collection of the Gujarat Gazals. Ganpat Parmar and Manishi Jain published the first collection of Gujarat Dalit poetry *Dalit Kavita* in 1981. Series of poetry collection followed to be published *Visphot* by Balkrishna Anand and Chandu Maheria in 1983, *Asmita* by Gujarat Khet Vikas Parishad published issues from 1981-1983. Yoseph macwan and Mangal Rathod are essentially modernist in their writing and wrote new themes in their poetry. Dalit poetry has drawn its extensively from the Dalit folk literature. It gives difficulty in translation of the rustic rhythms and tunes of folk songs. In Indian literature Dalit writing is considered to be the manifestation of the postmodernism.

Gujarat Dalit literature was spoken only in the 90's until then there was a stony silence about the Dalit writings. The graduates had more discussion on the difference between the 'lalit' which mean aesthetics and Dalit writing. Gujarati literature kept Dalit literature aside when there was no space to build the unbridgeable gap between the aesthetics and ideology, previlage of the literature over politics, focusing subterranean life and so. Joseph Macwans *Stepchild* marked the turning point and demanded special attention among the Gujarat main stream writers. *Angaliyat (Stepchild)* was the first Dalit novel written about the Dalit weavers. Gujarat literary history has a long phase of Gandian writing. Main stream writers like Sundaram, Umashankar Joshi, Ishwar Petlikar and R.V.Desai focused on Gandhian idealism and however Gandhi's failure to delink the moral from the social and political spheres blunts the edge of the protest literature. Marxist writing also didn't touch Gujarat literature as the progressive writing left Gujarat untouched.

Gujarati Dalit literature had a delayed beginning when compared to Marati and other states. While in other states the movement of protest towards the upper caste lead to the evolution of the Dalit literature in the states but in Gujarat it didn't evolve out of the larger political movement as it grew as a response to the virulent attack on the reservation policy in 1981 against the upper

caste. In 1981 the anti-caste agitation created rift between the Gujaratis and Dalits. It was in this period that Gujarat Dalit literature evolved at this point of time Joseph Macwans first Dalit Angaliyat was published. This phase was a critical phase for the Gujarati people as two anti-caste reservation agitations was on one in the year 1981 and the second in 1985. The division between the savarna (caste-Hindus) and the avarna (Dalits and tribals) was complete during the agitation of the reservation movement.

“Since Dalit were the main targets during both the agitations, they felt deeply humiliated and victimized. The educated Dalits felt isolated and alienated. The more articulate among them became more inward looking and their search for self identity led them to deeper explorations of their own collective past. In this intense identity crises, a new Dalit discourse was articulated. It incorporated Dalit history, Dalit Sociology, and above all, Dalit Prose and Dalit Writers.” (xv Angaliyat)

First time two doctoral theses on Dalit community of Gujarat was written by Dalit professors of sociology and history and two medieval works of the Dalit saint poets was also published by Dalit Scholars in the year 1985 to 1987. First Dalit Anthology of Short stories was published in the year 1987.

Realism appears to be the predominant role in the fiction which is natural and universally accepted as an effective mode of depicting lives. Joseph Macwan is the first Gujarati writer to win the Kendra Sahitya Akademy award for the first novel very early in his career for its excellence in depicting the lives vividly. The real life and fiction overlap in his work and many of his works are like the life sketches. His style is sensitive and evocative and the treatment is simple. Other prominent Dalit writers like Harish Mangalam, Pathik Parmar, Dalpat Chauhan , Naikal Gangera and Raghavji Madhad depicted the life so raw and adopted the realistic and natural method to portray the life of Gujarat Dalits which often verges on naturalism. Mohan Parmar is the most accomplished practioner of the short fiction in Gujarat. He was the pioneer to figure out the search of new pastures, use of the regional or caste dialect, stream of consciousness technique, a predilection for fable and allegory. These were the hallmarks of the Gujarat Dalit fiction. Writers like Madhukant Kalpit and Dasarath Parmar are also known for

their notable works. The rich folk traditions of Gujarati literature are the inspiration than the western models. The Gujarat Dalit novel writers show the comprehensive picture of the Dalit life, portrayal of social life, vivid characterization, and even can be compared to the French realist and naturalist of the nineteenth century. *Gujarat Dalit Varta* is a collection of short stories by Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam in 1987 represents the range and depth of Dalit fiction in Gujarat.

Gujarat Dalit youths got inspired by the Dalit Panther movement in Mumbai before the reservation agitation. Ambedkarite youth followers of Gujarat established an organization under the influence of the Maharashtra Panthers with a similar name and launched a monthly magazine called *Panther* in 1975 and a poetry magazine named *Akrosh* (Rage) in 1978. Many literary magazine like *kalo Suraj* (Black Sun) and *Tod Fod* (Destruction) came forward to publish the Dalit poems. The first anthology of Dalit poetry named *Dalit Kavita* published by Lokayan. It included sixty poets which portrayed the voices of the backward, Adhivasi community. During the anti-reservation agitation many Dalit activists, Dalit Panthers and Dalit poets were arrested by the Gujarat government and they banned the Dalit poetry magazine *Akrosh*. The 80's saw the major development in Dalit literature as well as the Dalit empowerment in Gujarat.

During the first phase of the evolution of the Dalit poetry from 1975-1980 the Dalits became inclusive and not exclusive. Many poets contributed poems the poets were not only from untouchable sector but were even from other community. During the second Phase Dalit prose emerged into the stream only writers from Dalit community were recognized. "In the absence of a larger social movement in Gujarat covering all exploited and marginalized communities, the term 'Dalit' lost its inclusiveness and openness". (xvi Angaliyat) The first ten years after the anti-reservation movement in Gujarat marked the development of the poetry the search of self-identity, self-articulation, the pain and anger of deprivation, oppression, exploitation, marginalization and humiliation were expressed in their anthology of poems called *Asmita* (Identity). Joseph Macwan opines that "The history of Dalit literature of the last ten years is essentially the history of the expression of the agony experienced by the exploited".(xvi-Angaliyat) To underline Joseph Macwans point of view he did not like to define Dalit literature

into the ideology of any frame work or evaluated it into traditional aesthetics. Dalit poet Neerav Patel expresses his anger against caste Hindus

“When you call me Dhed
I am hurt
And wish to slap on your face

When you call me harijan
I am humiliated
And wish to spit on your face

When you call me a member of Scheduled caste
I am insulted
And wish to monkey at you

When you call me
Neerav patel
I suspect you call me covert
and wish to turn my face away

when you don't call me anything
I am annoyed that you
Neglected me altogether
and wish to call you
back to call me

Yes, its all the mess since the beginning
Like the tale of a seven-tailed mouse. (xvii-Angaliyat)

Dalit writers mediate with three strands of the Gujarati language representing the three cultures like the literary-classical, the folk-colloquial and the dialectal. As many writers hail from the

urban and semi-urban background they are exposed to the native village accent as well as the urban-ghettos. Early poets like Nirav Patel and Dalpat Chauhan weaved the literary and folk elements together, Pravin Gadhvi fused the classical language and the civilization metaphors, Sahil Parmar spoke the idiom of the urban-ghettos. The arrival of the short stories and novels the writers like Joseph Macwan, Dalpat Chauhan and Mohan Parmar put forth the rural culture through the local dialects. Such expressions lead to the authenticity of the work and “it enriched the Gujarati language by re-establishing the folk against the classical idiom, the ‘Parkrit’ against the ‘Sanskrit’”. (xviii-Angaliyat).

The Vankar and Charmar caste along with the Garo (Priests), Tidgar (bow and arrow makers), Turi (musicians), and Senwa (basket makers) were called as ‘Dhed’ by upper caste. The old Gujarati proverb puts that ‘the bhangis are the dhed of the dhed’ In the nineteenth century the Sanskrit term ‘Antyaj’ or the ‘last-born’ was introduced in Gujarat. During the time of independence the young educated Dalits faced two choices one the Gandhian choice it is to integrate with the larger Hindu Society and the other was the path of Dr.Ambedkar the path of struggle, agitation, self identity and self assertion. Many Dalit followed both the paths and a majority joined the congress led caste based electoral politics and few remained to struggle for self-assertion and self-identity. The formation of the GHSS (Gujarat Harijan Sevak Sangh) in 1932 by the Gandhian followers aimed to abolish untouchability, social and religious equalities and non-violence in all forms they even called the savarna Hindus for social change. The GHSS didn’t not achieve much as the followers wrote letter to Gandhi about the non-cooperation of the Hindus and so far no well or temples were opened for the Dalits for which Gandhi replied back in Harijan Bandu to Dalit activist Parikshitlal Majmudar that he would stay in Bangi colonies during his travels. This shows that the Gandhian method of integration was difficult for the Dalits. Change of heart and soul force has no space in political discourse in Post-independence India.

Gujarat Dalit literature contributed to drama also the one play which was destined to survive the Dalit movement was Raju Solanki’s *Bahmanvadi Barakhadi* which was performed in the anti caste reservation agitation in 1981. One prize winning entry into the National drama competition

is Dalpat Chauhan's *Patan-ne Gondrethi*. Critical essays written by notable writers like Harish Mangalam's Vidit, Mohan Parmar's Ansaar and Samvitti are also famous.

Dalit literature in Gujarat is the invocation of the subaltern mythology as a foil to classical Hindu mythology which worked as an ideology in disfiguring, assimilating, marginalizing subcultures from the mainstream by concealing the division in the society. The non-Dalit writers also contributed much to the literature Indukumar Jani editor of Nayamarg fostered the talents of the Dalits. Parvin Gadhvi a poet and short story writer depicted the Dalit lives and attitudes from Dalit point of view by a non-Dalit writer. Tame Pabane joyo a controversial story by Dhiraj Brahmabhatt is a satire to the upper caste attitude with the back ground to anti-reservation agitation. K.M.Sherrif states that the Dalit writers of Gujarat can take some consolation of the fact that the works are eminently competent to speak for themselves.

The writers who contributed to various genre in Gujarat Dalit writing are Dalpat Chauhan a Gujarat Government employee he published poems and novels, Pravin Gadhvi published two volumes of poems and collections of short stories, Naikal Gangera his stories are published in several magazines and he is a journalist by profession, Bipin Gohil he is an expatriate Gujarai living in Bombay and he is known for his notable poems, Madhukant Kalpit, Joseph Macwan is known for his novel Angaliyat which won the Sahitya Academy award and has written shoet stories and life sketches, Yoseph Macwan is a short story writer for children, Raghavji Madhad published eight collections of short stories, Harish Manglam is a deputy collector and has published many co-authored works,Shanker painter is a Dalit activist, Dasarath Parmar, Jayant Parmar, Mohan Parmar, Pathik Parmar, Sahil Parmar, Neerav Patel, Mangal Rathod, Mohammed Ishaq Sheik, Raju Solanki, Kisan Sosa, Narsingh ujamba and Yashwant Vaghela are the notable Gujarat Dalit writers.

Dalit literary and spiritual folk tradition began in the medieval time and it lasted till the end of the twentieth century. They are expressed in bhajans, padas, folk-tales and folk songs. Nakar. Badamal, Savo, Moti, Alaraj, Mana Bhatt are the leading persons who contributed their works to folk- literary tradition. The bhajans in Gujarat are lucid and are excellent in the form and content. Dasi Jeevan is the only Dalit poet who composed more number of bhajans with spiritual, social

and philosophical aspects. There are many other writers like Swami Tejanandha, Trikam Saheb, Bhim Saheb, Nathu Ram, Lakshami Saheb, Das Vagho and so on who contributed to their works to the Dalit saint poetry. Only after the Gujarat government declared the right to get education in 1880 the Dalits started to go to school and acquire the language. In 1857 when the British ruled the country they established universities in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta and only after that the Indian renaissance flourished through art, literature, philosophy, science and culture. The poetry *The Pond Damodar at the foot of Giranar* is the first Gujarat bhajan to show the plight of the unnotuchables.

The two towering figures in Gujarat literature in the nineteenth century are Dalapatram and Narmadashankar. While Dalapatram is known for his humor and satire he would recite the poem of the social evil with humor but Narmadashankar is contrast to him and he expresses the deep pain when he sees the Dalits suffering in the society. In an *Untouchable women* poem the poet expresses the way Chundadi is used by the upper caste and lower caste people on different occasion

“ The wife of a Seth is covered with colorful Chundadi after she dies,

The Untouchable woman puts on the same shroud when her son marries.” (70 Gaijan)

R.V.Desai was one of the influential writers in the pre-Independence period *Wealth-Goddess of Village* is written under the influence of Gandhi. There are many one act plays with short and simple length and even extend to full five act play. Only where there is a demand for appreciation the work will flow but despite of it the Dalit writers excelled in various genres. K.M Munshi’s work named *Lopamudra* is neither novel or drama form and it is a confusing form of art. Umashankar Joshi’s *Valmiki, the Untouchable of the Untouchables* deals with the caste based pollution in the Hindu religion.

Dalapat Chauhan was honored with Kabir award his stories are close to reality and are aesthetically delightful. *Munjaro* is known for his artistic skills and it was considered as the best Gujarat story in 1996. Novel form gained much attention in Gujarat literature first novel which hailed in Gujarat is Joseph Macwan’s *Stepchild* in 1986. In that genuine love and caste rivalry is

seen between the Patels and Vankarvas, Dalapat Chauhan's first novel *Malak* was published in 1991, Harish Mangalam's *Tirad* in 1992, Mohan Parmar's *Neliyu* in 1992, Priyatama in 1995, Daya Pasha no Vadi in 2003, B.Kesharshivam's school, and Moo lane Dhool, Gunavant Acharya's *Astitva* and Pragaji Bhambhi's *Diwali Na Divaso* are the notable novel writers and their works in Gujarat.

Gujarat Dalit writers write plays on the historical heroes who sacrifice their life for the well being of the people their heroes are Megh Mayo, Ekalavya, Saint Rohidas and Swami Tejananda. Dalapat Chauhan's play *Patan na Gondarethi* is more interesting play in Gujarat than his other works such as *Bhedbhava No Bhusanaro*, *Galafanso*. Mohan Parmar is another notable Dalit playwright his play collections are entitled as *Bahishkar* in 2002.

Conclusion

The dawn of twenty-first century new challenges are faced by the Dalit writers the globalization is engulfing the local community with their traditional culture and dialect only if the Dalit writers are rooted in their community they will be able to voice out their expression through the Literary Genres. The Gujarat Dalit struggled for identity and social reformation from within and outside they strived hard to make space for them in the international and national arena through the voice of the universal human rights. Though Gujarat being a Gandhi born state Gandhi did not find space in the hearts of the Dalits and it was only through Ambedkar's influence the Dalits found their strength and voiced out through literature.

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