

## **Chapter IV**

### **The 1981 Anti-Reservation Agitation of Gujarat and Its Impact on Dalit Writing**

During the night of 25 December 1980, Patel youths beat mercilessly and burnt alive Shakrabhai, a tanner, a guard in a farm and a local Panther activist at Jetalpur village some 15 kilometers south of Ahmedabad. A week after of the killing of Shakrabhai the 1981 anti-reservation agitation started. The anti-reservation agitation not only shook Dalits in Gujarat but also raised serious questions on their existence as a human being and their rights as citizens.

India-wide, Dalits had started to demand their rights before and after independence under the leadership of Ambedkar. A key moment in this history was the founding of the Dalit Panthers in 1972. Through such organisations, the Dalits tried to establish their identity and demanded their rights. When Dalits in Gujarat started questioning upper caste authority and social status on the guiding principles of “Equality, Fraternity and Liberty” of the constitution of India, upper caste people particularly the Patels found it hard to accept. This was perhaps the major cause for upper caste resentment which then culminated into the 1981 anti-reservation agitation.

In order to understand the reservation agitation and the response given by the Dalits, one has to understand the social history of Gujarat from 19th century to the present day. The Patels, who, until the nineteenth century, were known as Kanbis and were also considered a low caste, gradually strengthened their social and economic position and attained higher caste status. In the strengthening process of the Patels, the Swaminarayan movement started by Swami Sahajanand early in the 19th century played a crucial role as did the land reforms.

#### 4.1: Caste Question in Gujarat up to 1980

As I have discussed in the Introduction, as per 1931 census of the British Gujarat, Brahmins, Banias and Rajputs – together 12 per cent of the total population – belonged to the upper castes. Kolis constituted around 24 per cent of the population. Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Dalits constituted 7 per cent of the population and Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituted 14 per cent of the population of the state (according to the 1981 Census. The dominant caste, the Patels, were earlier known as Kanbis (agricultural cultivators). The Patels constitute around 12 per cent of the population. The main divisions among them are the Leuva, Kadva, Anjana and Matiya. All Patels do not enjoy the same status: the Leuva Patels of the Charotar area – Anand, Borsad, Nadiad and Petlad talukas of Kheda district – enjoy the highest status among the Patels. Until 19th Century, the social and economic condition of the Patels was not sound as it is today. Their Sanskritization through the Swaminarayan movement led by of Swami Sahajanand early in the 19th century led them to progress economically and socially.

With the economic progress, they started to maintain good relationship with the Mughals and the Marathas. Their linkages with the aristocracy played a crucial role in their change of status from agricultural cultivator to land owner and a revenue collector as pointed out by B.V. Lal. He says:

Sometime during the Mughal period, the Kanbi of the Charotar tract organized themselves into a community of village rulers and named them Patidar. The name is derived from pati (strips of land) and dar (holder). Holders of strips of land, the Patidar assumed the responsibility for collecting revenue for the Mughal rulers. They cultivated the best land while leasing out the less desirable areas to other groups on whom they frequently levied extra taxes, grew the most lucrative cash crops, dominated the trading networks, and controlled local politics through force or patronage.

(19)

David Hardiman also notes the Patels' role as a revenue collector.

The Patidar controlled the economy of the village. In normal times, they could ensure that they were always richer than those were lower in the village hierarchy. On paper, the Patidars were liable to pay far higher sums of revenue than the subordinate peasantry, for they farmed the richest lands. In practice, they invented a whole range of extra taxes which they imposed on the lower castes. As a result, the lower castes were normally impoverished while the Patidars were comfortably off. (38)

The Patidars or the Patels maintained their privileged position during the British rule of India and the British gave them lands in what were then backward areas. They pushed the local inhabitants—mainly Kolis and tribes—into the jungle or the hills, or converted them into agricultural labourers. Many Patels bought more lands from Kolis at throwaway prices under distress sales during the 1899 famine. The Kanbis of Kheda extended their landholdings in the Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts. The Kanbis of Surat acquired land in the tribal area of Bharuch district. Thus, their estates expanded and their prosperity increased. Ghanshyam Shah discusses the parallel rise in the literacy rate of the Patels during this period:

The Patels not only made a dent in trade and industry; their rise in the field of education was striking. Thirty-five per cent of the Brahmins and 44 per cent of the Baniyas as against only one per cent each of the Kolis and Kanbis were literate in 1901. Two Kolis and thirty Kanbis, against 3306 Baniyas out of one lakh sample were literate in English. By contrast, only thirty years later in 1931, 31 percent of Kanbis were literate. (1987, 156)

As their economic and political power increased, the Patels tried to raise their social position and tried to be a part of the middle class. Before their entry into the middle class the Brahmins and Baniyas were the major components. Both of these castes ridiculed and looked down upon the Patels. Sometimes they openly expressed their contempt for the Patels as Ghanshyam Shah points out were “polluting their culture” (1987, 163). However, the resistance was not very strong partly because the Patels were well off and partly because the Patels became

a political force by the beginning of the twentieth century. The gap between the life styles and social values of the rising Patels of mainland Gujarat and the Banias and the Brahmins was marginal. Moreover, at that time the competition for government jobs was not severe. Thus, the Patels entered the middle class after facing a very mild resistance from the Banias and the Brahmins.

The Patels benefited a great deal from cash-crop cultivation. Many of Patels migrated abroad and reinvested their surplus money in commerce and agriculture in the state and they occupied a dominant position in the industries of central Gujarat. They were active in the Congress party from the days of Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928 and consolidated their political power in the pre and post-independence period under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel. Because of the economic, social, and political rise of the Patels, the *Ahmedabad District Gazetteer* described them as an enterprising community, which “earned their status, wealth, and power by ability and tactful behaviour” (196).

The way Patels worked hard to gain their status, the Dalits also did the same hard work in the same period but they could not gain the higher status as did the Patels. The labour and the enterprise of the Patels in the 19th century and early 20th centuries were matched by that of the Dalit communities. But caste structures operated in such a way that they could make little progress on the economic or social front. As elsewhere in India social status of Dalits in Gujarat is quite low. Their status is governed by their work culture and economy. The Vankars (weavers) work traditionally as a weaver, the Chamars (tanners) as leather workers, Bhangis (scavengers) as a sweeper, and Garodas as the priests of the Dalits. Industrialization worked as both a boon as well as a curse for the Dalits. It was a boon because it brought the Dalits to the cities where industries opened; they were able to get rid of the feudal structure of the village. It was a curse

because their traditional weaving business was totally ruined and they had to work as labourers in the textile mills under capitalist exploitation.

In 1861, the first textile mill opened in Ahmedabad. In 1864, the opening of the railway line between Ahmedabad and Bombay played a crucial role in rapid expansion of the textile mills in Ahmedabad. The developing textile industry generated waves of migration into Ahmedabad city and extensive growth of its population and territory. The geographical and the demographic growth of the city affected the dynamics of interrelations between caste and class and resulted in growing tensions among Hindus. The Vankars came to the city at the turn of the twentieth century in search of jobs and established themselves before other Dalits within the textile mills and the textile labour union. The textile industry was at its height during the years 1931-60. This was the period when more groups of Dalits migrated to Ahmedabad in quest of work. By 1939, there were seventy-seven mills in the city and eighty-three by 1941 (*Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation Revised Development Plan 1975–1985*. Vol. I, 45).

The caste structure affected the division of labour in the textile mill industry too. Dalits worked in the spinning shops, which was the most laborious, and one of the lowest paid positions. It was in a way caste-based. Howard Spodek also stated this fact, “Muslims dominated the weaving departments where Kadva Patels also worked. New recruits for a particular department in the mill were frequently members of the same caste” (779).

The Dalits who migrated to Ahmedabad became the victim of the capitalist approach of the mill owners. The mill owners exploited the workers not only economically but also physically. However, in 1895 for the first time in history the mill workers united, majority of whom were the Dalits and raised their voice against the new rules framed by the mill owners. Makrand Mehta and Shirin Mehta covered the account of the mill strike of 1895:

In 1895, male workers had to work for 14 hours while the female workers had to work for 11 hours. Twelve-year-old children had also to work for eight hours. There was no compensation policy in place for any kind of mishap in the mill for the workers. The workers were paid weekly wages. The mill owners took two decisions. They announced that they would pay fortnightly wages and second they would reduce the number of female workers. The workers decided to oppose this decision and on 28 June 1895, they declared strike in the fifteen mills of Ahmedabad. On 3 July 1895, 10000 mill workers including women joined a rally after attending a public meeting on a ground opposite to the Kankaria Lake. Raibahadur Ranchhodas Sheth intervened and worked out a compromise with the workers. Both demands of the workers, that is, the weekly payment of wages and retaining the women workers were complied with. After 18 days, the mills started to work on 16 July 1895. (1997, 16-20)

Through this strike, Dalits learnt to oppose and protest. They understood that if they were united, they could win. Their protest and rebellion against caste-based exploitation was sharpened after Ambedkar's visit to Ahmedabad in 1931, which sowed seeds of protest through education in the psyche of the Dalits. Dalit started to unite against their exploitation and demanded their civil rights. The Dalits started to take education as per the British government policy. But they were denied admissions and were also opposed.<sup>1</sup> However, the Dalits continued to struggle and slowly and steadily moved on the path of education. Through education, they could sharpen their protest. The 1938 'Enter Hotels' agitation in Ahmedabad, the 'Enter Bus' agitation at Sardhav in 1947 and the Temple Entry agitation of 1948 in Ahmedabad which I have discussed in the first chapter of the thesis are examples of Ambedkarian way of protest.

After independence, the implementation of the two Government Acts "Land to the Tiller" and "Land Ceilings" played important role in the socio-political history of Gujarat. In 1947, Saurashtra was a separate state while the present Gujarat state was a part of Bombay state up to

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<sup>1</sup> For details How the Dalits were denied to enter the school and other public spaces refer Jyotikar, P.G. 1991. *Gujarat Ni Ambedkari Chalval No Itihas: 1920-1970*. Gandhinagar: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Janma Shatabdi Uajavani Samiti. 20-23.

1960. In Saurashtra, the land owning classes were feudal Kshatriyas and the Patels were tillers while in the British Gujarat, the Patels were the landowners and the Kshatriyas were the tillers and the Dalits were the landless labourers and artisans in both cases.

In the *Report on Implementation of Land Reforms in Gujarat* Ameer Raza also highlighted that, “On the recommendation of the Agrarian Reforms Commission appointed by the Government of India, the government of Saurashtra enacted the Saurashtra Land Reforms Act, 1951, the Saurashtra Barkhali Abolition Act, 1951, and the Saurashtra Estate Acquisition Act, 1952” (61-62). The Acts aimed at abolishing all intermediary tenures and giving occupancy rights to the tillers; they made all landholders equally liable to pay land revenue in cash. The Saurashtra government rigorously implemented the land reforms in Saurashtra in order to transfer the rights over the land from the former princely states. Consequently, land reforms in this area yielded a change in the local power structure. The Rajput landowners lost lands to the generally poorer Patels. In Saurashtra and Kutch region more than 1.2 million hectares of land was transferred to the tillers. The majority of the beneficiaries were the Patels. They suddenly attained ownership over land and gradually became economically and politically influential.

Simultaneously, the government enacted comprehensive land legislation called the “Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act.” Unlike the Saurashtra Land Reforms Act, 1951, the Saurashtra Barkhali Abolition Act, 1951, and the Saurashtra Estate Acquisition Act, 1952 of Saurashtra state, the ‘Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act’ was not rigorously implemented in the British Gujarat by the Bombay government.

M. B. Desai’s doctorate study *Tenancy Abolition and the Emerging Pattern in Gujarat* revealed the fact about the implementation of the tenancy abolition law in the former Bombay area of Gujarat that,

Out of the 10,45,305 tenancy cases that existed on April 1, 1957 only 8,90,758 cases had been disposed of by April 1, 1964. In 3,14,838 cases, the existence of tenancy was denied. Tenants declined to purchase ownership rights in 56,503 cases, and in 41,183 cases tenants dropped out of the proceedings after having applied for ownership rights. By April 1, 1964, tenants had been permitted to purchase ownership rights in 3,95,111 cases. Out of these, in 45,900 cases the purchase was eventually declared ineffective as the tenants failed to pay the purchase price. (64-66)

After considering all the aspects of the matter, Desai came to the following conclusion:

The results of tenancy abolition, however, were not as expected. About half the area previously under tenancy passed into the ownership of their respective erstwhile tenants. About 12 per cent of the land held by 9 per cent of the tenants continued under recognized tenancy. A little over 2 per cent of the lands of tenants slipped from them in default of payment of compensation amounts. The rest were the cases in which the tenants denied tenancy surrendered their lands to the landowners or kept away from the hearings of the tribunals and, therefore, missed of their own volition to be owners of the land they cultivated on lease. Thus, a sizeable tenantry escaped ownership under tenancy abolition. (123)

*The Gujarat Agitation and Reservations A C.P.D.R. Fact Finding Report* highlighted the data given by Jiwanalal Jairamdas on the land reforms in Gujarat, “From 1-9-1961 to 15-6-1976, 1,234 SCs had been allotted 5,361 acres of land from the land declared as surplus under the land ceilings act, and 398025 acres of land had been allotted to 66,276 SCs from the government waste lands” (5).

This was partly because Patel, Bania, and Brahmin landholders, who might have adversely affected by the Act, dominated the ruling Congress party and administration. A large number of tenants belonging to the upper and intermediate castes were able to acquire land from absentee caste-fellow landowners who had moved to urban areas. Lower-caste tenants rarely gained land based on high-caste absentees from their lands. Since they were poor and less exposed to the outside world, they found it difficult to understand the intricacies of law, and to

protest against the landowners of the dominant castes.

Thus, the implementation of these acts was different in both the areas and the major beneficiaries were the Patels. One can easily see that the beneficiaries of the Saurashtra region got 1.2 million hectares of land and majority of them were the Patels. While in central and north Gujarat only 5361 acres of land was transferred to the tillers and 398025 acres of land was the wasteland where major beneficiaries were the Dalits. Moreover, the upper castes farmers started the utilization of this government land. The Patels who had gained their self-respect and social status through land were not willing to give away their land so they had used money and muscle power to stop the Dalits from becoming the owner of the land. Thus, wherever the land was given to Dalits no physical rights of tilling were given to them.

Economy is the main key through which one can easily climb the ladder of social mobility. Patels achieved this through land. However, land rights were denied to the Dalits. In this scenario, the Dalits were left only with the reservation benefits. There are two indicators i.e. literacy and urbanization through which social mobility of the Dalits was visualized by the upper caste people. Ambedkar explained the value of education to the Dalits and thus Dalits started taking education seriously. He also appealed the Dalits to leave the village and thus to break away the Varna occupational circle. He also provided constitutional benefits to the Dalits through reservations.

There are two popular views on reservation as far as India's secular status is concerned. I. P. Desai has given one view in his article "Should "Caste" Be the Basis for Recognising the Backwardness?" He says, "One strata of the society believes that if we really want to promote the secularization of the society and the state, therefore, class should determine backwardness

and the eligibility for reservations” (1106-16). Defenders of reservation have given the counterargument and Ghanshyam Shah has counter argued in his article,

If we really want to have secularism we need to have interaction between the upper castes and the lower castes and reservation on the basis of caste would create the involvement of people from different social groups working together. In this view, the beneficiaries of reservations would become part of the middle class, and this was a secularizing process. (1985, 38-9).

Subrata Mitra also highlighted in his essay, “Reservations based on caste would weaken caste consciousness since they would sever the link between caste and occupation” (292-312). Caste barriers could be defeated only by constructed social interaction between castes through caste reservations. In both views, caste lay at the heart of Hinduism and the guiding task in the shaping of reservation policies was the eradication of caste and the promotion of secularism. The implementation of the reservation policies benefited the Dalits up to certain extent but it also led to have some caste-based conflicts also. Sunita Parikh made this point when she says, “The expansion of reservations for the backward castes in educational institutions and government jobs, as well as preferential policies for the SCs and STs, became the main reason for intensifying conflicts between forward- and backward-caste Hindus from the mid-1970s” (297-333).

The Central government did issue orders for the implementation of reservation policy in education and employment sectors, but the data from the Central and the State governments both showed that reserved vacancies were not filled cent percent on one or the other excuse. As per the *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1966-67*<sup>2</sup> “The

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<sup>2</sup> In 1966, out of an all-India total of 9,605 reserved vacancies for the SCs, less than half (4,179) were filled. In Gujarat, only 53 of the 134 reserved vacancies for the SCs were filled. In the same year, only 1,299 of an all-India total of 4,688 reserved vacancies for the STs were filled, while in Gujarat, members of STs filled 41 of their 164 reserved vacancies. (103-106)

appointment of SCs and STs for posts and services under the central government fell far below the statutory provisions” (15).

The 1968–9 *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* concluded that, “despite the working of the reservation orders for the last seventeen years, both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are inadequately represented in Class I, II, and III. The position of SCs and STs in Class IV also is far from satisfactory” (36). The *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1978-79* also talked about the change in the situation of SCs and STs, “By 1971, there was only a marginal improvement in the number of filled reserved places, even though the quotas did not reach the rates granted in the constitution” (13).

The chief reason for the consistent inadequate representation of SCs and STs in the government sectors could be attributed to the state policy, which is governed by the Brahminical ideology. As Ghanshyam Shah mentioned,

The bureaucracy, an over-whelming majority of whose members belonged to the upper castes on the eve of independence was also not committed for the policy of reservations. The policy did not adversely affect the interests of the upper castes occupying position in bureaucracy at that moment. Moreover, ideologically the bureaucracy who inherited the British legacy did not want to give up the notion of being the ‘most obedient servant’ of the state. They therefore preferred to pose themselves as ‘neutrals’. However, the neutrality was and is so feeble and fragile that more often than not most of the bureaucrats easily succumbed to class and caste pressures. By now, it has become quite clear that bureaucracy and the rank-and-file of the political parties sabotaged the extension of the policy whenever possible and/or displayed no enthusiasm in implementing it. (1987, 158)

The reports of the Commissioner of Scheduled Tribes provide sufficient evidence year after year exposing the prejudices of the recruiting authorities against SC and ST candidates.

Every year the numbers of reserved posts were not filled under the excuse that qualified SC/ST candidates were not available, despite the facts to the contrary. In course of time, such unfilled posts were de-reserved. The bias of the departmental heads often blocked the chances of promotion of SC/ST candidates. The Ministry of Home Affairs issued an office memorandum in 1968 asking department to grant certain concessions to the SC/ST candidates in the matter of promotion. However, many departments did not comply with the memo.

In Gujarat, the reservation policy for SCs and STs for Class I and II were ignored until the mid-sixties and there was no reservation in the promotion to Class I and Class II respectively, and a mere 7 percent and 14 percent in Class III and IV. It may be noted that even in 1969 the reservation of Class I and Class II posts did not correspond to their proportion in the population. Thus, the constitutional guarantees were not satisfactorily observed even in issuing executive orders until the very end of 1960s. However, the Gujarat government introduced the reservations for SC and ST in proportion to their population in the state, that is, 7 and 14 percent respectively at all levels from Class I to Class IV posts in December 1971. Moreover, complying with the repeated recommendations of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the Gujarat government introduced a roster system in all classes in proportion to their population. The introduction of the Roster system was to prevent ambiguity. Ghanshyam Shah says:

“to avoid uncertainty about when, on which post, at which stage, reserved seat should be filled.

All the departments were asked to maintain register containing the roster. However, a number of

departments did not maintain the register and roster was not followed in promotion. SC/ST

political leaders and employees pressurized the government for clarifying the 1971 GR regarding

promotion. Consequently, the government issued a number of GRs in 1976 specifying a number of

posts and procedures to be followed for promotion. (1987, 158)

In the first twenty years after 1947, the upper castes took better advantage of the opportunities that opened up with independence because of their already privileged position in society. It is only after these 20 years Dalits who were living in the slums in the city began to access constitutional rights of reservations. Reservations provided growing opportunities for the SCs and STs in the representative bodies, professional courses, and government jobs. With the spread of education, the upward mobility among the weaker sections and particularly among the SCs was startling and conspicuous. Ghanshyam Shah stated “Up to 1980, the SCs in Gujarat had reached the national average level of literacy, and reservations had increased the numbers of professionally trained graduates among them. In primary and secondary education, the SC children competed with Patels” (1998, 33). At least one person from each 7 per cent of households from these castes had received college education. The reservation policy played an important role in the rise of education as well as employment of SCs and STs.<sup>3</sup>

The rise in the employment of SCs and STs in government sectors obviously meant a curtailment in ‘white collar’ jobs available to the upper and middle castes that had previously monopolized government services. Their condition deteriorated further because of increasing unemployment (Shah 1987, 163). The middle class of the upper and middle castes were adversely affected by the increase in educated unemployment. Ghanshyam Shah discusses the upper caste predicament as one of “relative deprivation”. Middle class upper castes people felt that they could not do manual work nor could they secure themselves financially like the elite. “We cannot do manual work like backward caste persons. We are therefore sandwiched between the affluent and the poor. Thus the sense of ‘relative deprivation’ as well as a set of norms

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<sup>3</sup> Ghanshyam Shah has highlighted the impact of orders issued by the Gujarat government in 1971 to implement the reservation for SC and ST thus, “The proportion of SC and ST in Class III positions increased from 4.8 and 4.4 per cent in 1971 to 10.7 and 8.9 per cent respectively in the state government administration in 1978. However, the reservation quotas had not been achieved, but the growing number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe government employees, especially in the lower-ranked positions of the civil service – classes III and IV – made their presence more visible” (1987, 163).

dictated by his caste status generate a feeling of resentment among the members of the upper and rising status of backward castes” (Shah 1987,163). The presence of persons from Dalit communities as colleagues, as well as their relatively quick promotion under the roster system, upset upper and middle caste employees who harboured deep-seated prejudices against the SCs and STs.

Because of reservations, the Dalits are able to achieve government jobs and thus they had started earning a steady income through government jobs. Because of this income, they had started enrolling their children into good schools and colleges. They did not have to visit the upper caste peoples’ house for work or plead with them for economic assistance. There was a visible change in the physical and mental outlook of this government employed Dalit. S/he tried to live a life of dignity. His/Her lunch and dinner menu changed.

Some workers among the Dalits did particularly well during the growth of the textile industry. “The Scheduled Castes were able to provide their children with opportunities for better education, and the level of literacy among them increased” as mentioned in the *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1978–79* (7-8). Ghanshyam Shah also observes that by the last decade of the 20th century, “Among the SC workers below the age of 25 there were no illiterates. Young SC workers, as well as the children of SC workers, performed better in education than workers belonging to backward castes and Muslims, and were on par with the upper castes” (1998, 32). Because of education and urbanization, the economic and social mobility among lower and backward castes had been developed in Gujarat since the 1960s. In Ahmedabad, some groups among the Dalits had been able to improve their economic situation. Some had been able to improve the quality of their housing conditions and to provide their

children with better schooling. As a consequence, says Achyut Yagnik “Based on their economic conditions some groups among the Dalits had become part of the urban middle class” (2002, 23).

The Dalits who were working in the textile mills in Ahmedabad, were forced to live in proximity to the Patels. The Patels could not bear it as in villages Dalits had to live at the outskirts of the village Untouchability was practiced and it was intact that was proved in the study of I. P. Desai “Untouchability in 69 villages in Gujarat has shown that in 90 per cent of the villages, Dalits’ entry into temples, houses, and shops of high castes is not permitted. In 64 per cent of the villages, there are separate sources of water supply and in 17 per cent of the villages untouchability prevails even in Panchayat meeting” (1984, 1106-16).

While the impact of land reforms and reservations on the society of Gujarat and its relationship with caste is very significant, it is equally important to have an idea of political scenario at a glance where also caste played its crucial role.

Caste is a vital feature of the Indian society and politics and it has played an important role in post-independence Indian politics as well. After 1947 when the Congress became the ruling party in Gujarat that was a part of Bombay State, the Patels occupied positions of power in the Congress because of their long association with the party. However, when Gujarat came into being as a separate state in 1960, initially small elite drawn from among the Brahmins and Baniyas ruled it. The Patels deeply resented this. Driven by their opposition to the land reforms, rich Patel farmers from the Central Gujarat and Saurashtrian Rajputs among the Kshatriyas formed the Swatantra Party in 1959. In the 1962 and 1967 Gujarat assembly elections, the party gained support from the Kshatriya Sabha. In 1962 elections the Swatantra Party evolved an alliance called *PA KSHA*, an alliance of Patels and Kshatriyas. This grouping narrowly missed the majority at the hustings.

In 1969, there was a split in the Congress party into Congress (O) and Congress (I). Morarji Desai was a highly respected leader in Gujarat led the Congress (O). At the time of the split a majority of Congress Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) stood by Morarji Desai and Congress (I) had only 7 MLAs. The Patels supported Congress (O) to gain political advantage for which they were waiting quite long. However, in the 1972 State elections Congress (I) won 139 seats out of 168 seats and Congress (O) could win only 16 seats, which made Indira Gandhi more politically strong in Gujarat. In 1972 Ghanshyam Oza, a Brahmin, was chosen as the Chief Minister and once again the Patels were sidelined. The Oza government took many pro-poor steps like a ceiling on agricultural landholding, minimum wages for agricultural labourer, abolition of land revenue for marginal farmers, more effective tenancy act, urban land ceiling and workers participation in management of industries. Such pro-poor steps profoundly disturbed the rural and the urban elite and made the Congress (I) immensely unpopular with the rich and the vocal sections of the society.

The Oza government faced several crises due to its pro-poor face. Chimanbhai Patel led the opposition to the Oza government and successfully became Chief Minister on 18 July 1973. Chimanbhai Patel's government was the first government headed by a Patel. But the road to governance was not easy. Because of famine, there was a scarcity of food grains in 1973. Gujarat received from centre only 15,000 tons of food grains in place of 1,00,000 tons requirement. This led Chimanbhai Patel to implement Levy Act strictly and thus he became unpopular among the farmers (of which the Patels were majority) who could make a profit by selling their grains in black market. This led to the rise in the price of the essential grains and edible oil.

The rise in price of the essential grains and edible oil raised the food bill of the college hostel students and they opposed it publicly under the leadership of Achyut Yagnik and Manishi

Jani. As I have discussed earlier, they formed a Navnirman Samiti and gave a call for statewide bandh on 10 January 1974 to protest against the price rise and corruption. Eventually this led to the resignation of the Chief Minister.<sup>4</sup> This impacted the Assembly elections of June 1975 where Congress (I) won only 75 seats in comparison with the Congress (O) which improved its tally from 16 to 56 and Jan Sangh from 3 to 18 seats.

As a consequence of its electoral reverses, the Congress (I) party decided in 1975 to focus on the oppressed and exploited sections of the society that is Kshatriya (K), Harijan (H), Adivasi (A) and Muslim (M) popularly known as KHAM and distributed party tickets and positions in the party among the members of these castes in the 1980 elections. It won 140 seats out of 182 seats. The Chief Minister between 1980-5 was Madhavsingh Solanki, a “low-caste” Kshatriya from Kheda district. In addition, for the first time, as many as five Kshatriyas as against three Patels held a cabinet rank position. Thus, in the field of polity the Patels faced severe loss which was deepened by the declaration of implementations of reservation policy for Socially and Educationally Backward Castes (SEBC) in 1980 as per the Baxi Commission guidelines.

The increasing importance of Dalits to the polity was not matched by a secure social position. The Gujarat government shamefully admitted the increasing atrocities. Between 1967 and 1970, the Gujarat Vidhan Sabha was told that, “35 Dalits were murdered due to money lending, land, property, or sexual relations” (74). These were mere official figures recorded in the police stations. Many more went either unrecorded or subtly camouflaged by the oppressors. The mainstream writers and historians were silent on the caste violence<sup>5</sup>. It was the task of the Dalits to resist as well as depict the violence to raise the Dalit consciousness. With the establishment of Dalit Panthers in Gujarat, Dalits started to depict the caste violence in

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<sup>4</sup> See Introduction, Footnote 5 [5].

<sup>5</sup> For details of caste violence on Dalits see Appendix II.

pamphlets and *Panther*, a monthly magazine and mouthpiece organ of the Dalit Panthers organisation in Gujarat. The *Panther* not only covered the world of Dalits' in Gujarat but also the events that had affected the life of Dalits in any part of India. Thus it was an effort to present a pan-Indian Dalit point of view to unite Dalits across India and to fight for equality and liberty. *Panther* whose motto was to raise Dalit consciousness started to cover all the atrocities through its representatives across Gujarat. Their coverage of violence against Dalits in Gujarat led to the documentation and visibility of atrocities and the rise of Dalit consciousness. The Ranmalpura violence of 1974 where the Dalit was attacked and 2 Dalits killed, the Mandala violence of 1979 in which Chhitabhai Vankar and his son were killed and the Jetalpur violence of 1980 which led to the murder of Shakrabhai are just 3 examples of the fact finding coverage put together by the *Panther*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Three major events of caste violence, two in Ahmedabad district and one in Vadodara district, took place. These three incidents describe the situation of the Dalits in Gujarat. The first event of caste violence took place at Ranmalpura village. A violent attack on the Dalits at Ranmalpura village of Dhragandhra taluka of Ahmedabad district took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1974. Patels mainly inhabited Ranmalpura. Only 17 houses of the Dalits were there. The Dalits were facing severe water crisis from April 1974. The Dalits gave applications to all the authorities i.e. Gram Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat, Mamlatdar and Collector also. Their miseries were not solved after two months. The taluka and district officials advised them to use the public well. When the Dalits talked about the decision of the officials to the Sarpanch and other leading villagers, they were furious and banned the Dalits to fill the water from the public well. Therefore, the Dalits went to the taluka headquarters and the taluka officials gave them a police protection of three policemen and told them to fill water from the public well. Therefore, the Dalits started to fill water from the public well in the presence of the policemen from 19 June 1974. Therefore, the whole village boycotted the Dalits and stopped giving the daily needed grocery items. Patels also stopped filling water from the well as the water was considered polluted. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1974 when the Dalit women went to fill water, a mob of 500-armed villagers attacked the Dalit locale. Stones were thrown on the Dalit was. Each house of the Dalit was attacked. Two Dalits (i) Bijalbhai Govindbhai and (ii) Devjibhai Dahyabhai were killed. Bijalbhai was killed in temple while Devjibhai was killed in his house. The attackers did not leave old men, women and children also. They looted property of rupees 73,383 also from the houses of the Dalits. All the Dalits ran away to other nearby villages. The policemen were also injured in the attack. They informed the taluka headquarters about the attack and State Reserved Police was provided to the village. Afterwards the legal actions were taken. The magistrate court sentenced three men and two women to life sentence and four others to four years rigorous imprisonment (all non-Dalits). [See Manubhai Parmar. Ed. *Ranmalpura Hatyakand*. Dhragandhra: Harijan Sewa Samiti, 1975 for further details]

The second event of caste violence took place at Mandala village of Dabhoi taluka in Vadodara district. On November 27, 1979, the Dalit leader of Mandala, Taluka Dabhoi, Vadodara district, Chhitabhai Hirabhai Vankar and his son Ranchod were murdered. They were assaulted by the Simrakhas (security guards guarding crops against theft and damage by cattle) of Patels. The harassment of Chhitabhai started with fine for his cattle, which trespassed into the crops of Patels. Chhitabhai was targeted because he was well off and as well as leader of the Dalits. A Dalit with wealth and power cannot be seen as a positive aspect of Indian society but marked as an attack

I here discuss the Jetalpur violence in detail. This coverage led to greater Dalit consolidation and a conscious self-characterization of SCs as Dalits. For example, Narsinh Parmar has written a poem on Chhitabhai Vankar where he describes the way how Dalits are treated as dogs,

Like a leg of a dog  
 “Chhito Vankar’ of Mandala !  
 If cut down with a knife, then what?  
 If burnt in a fire, then what?  
 What to us?what to you ?  
 What to Mandala?  
 We came to know when published in newspaper  
 .... (6-7)

Here the poet has visualized Chhitabhai Vankar as a barking dog who was a member of the Panchayat and who participated in the meetings of Panchayat. The poet presents his participation as interference in the hegemonic power of upper caste and is presented as a leg of a dog and he was killed like a stray dog who barked. Thus, through the image of dog, the poet has bluntly presented the upper caste psyche of the Indian society.

#### **4.2: The 1981 Anti-Reservation Agitation<sup>7</sup>**

The 1981 anti-reservation agitation began with the strike of the students of B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad on 29 December 1980.

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on upper caste hegemony. Chhitabhai had to pay fine for four to five times for impounding of his cattle during the watchmanship of Ibrahim Vasant, the headmen of Simrakha gang. When Chhitabhai’s son retaliated and injured one of the Simarkhas it was also perceived as an attack on caste superiority. In order to show the power of caste superiority ultimately Chhitabhai and his son Ranchhodbhai were killed on 27 November 1979. The State also behaved as a protector of the Brahminism as it favoured the oppressors by appointing one-man commission that also followed the pretext of Brahminism, the upper caste perpetrators of violence were declared innocent, and the Simarkhas – agency for the violence – were punished. The Mandala event thus exposed Brahminism, State as a protector of Brahminism and questioned the neutrality of judiciary. [See A. R. Desai, and Wilfred D’Costa. *State and Repressive Culture*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994 for further details]. I discuss the Jetalpur violence in detail in the next section.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed account of the course of violence perpetrated on Dalits, see Appendix III.

Around the same time as the Jetalpur incident, the medical students of the B. J. Medical College launched their agitation against reserved seats for SC candidates in the pathology department. Their claim, however, that the agitation was a spontaneous one, was not quite true. Dr. Prakash Amin and 73 other B. J. Medical College students had filed a case in the Gujarat High Court in November 1979 against the carry forward system, the roster system, and interchangeability of reserved seats. The verdict of the court came in February 1980 in which the students lost the case. The judicial defeat led the students to resort to direct action in the form of an agitation.

The agitation in Gujarat started as an agitation against reservation of seats at the post-graduate level in the medical faculty for the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Socially and Educationally Backward Castes or Classes (SEBC). The last category covered 82 communities, including some Muslim communities. This category had become eligible for educational and job reservations similar to the SC and ST in July-August 1980. They were therefore not sufficiently conscious of their rights. The total percentage of reservations for all these categories, which amounted to not less than 60 per cent of the State's population, came to 26 per cent; for the remaining 40 per cent or less, 75 per cent of the seats were unreserved or open. In fact, it can be argued that these seats were anyway conventionally 'reserved' for the upper castes, some castes below them and other religious communities. The SC, ST, and SEBC were not permitted to compete for the 75 per cent seats filled by open competition based on the prevailing criteria of merit. On December 31, 1980, a memorandum was sent by the representative body of some students of B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad to the Minister of Health, Gujarat Government. The students made four demands in the memorandum. First, abolish the interchangeability system of seats between SC and ST immediately. Second, abolish

the carry forward system. Third, reduce the number of reserved seats at the post-graduate level, and fourth increase the number of unreserved seats at the postgraduate level.

The principal argument of the agitators against reservations was the question of merit and efficiency. In their view, because of reservations standard of merit is lowered which has increased the inefficiency as well as lowered standard of teaching in the field of medicine.<sup>8</sup>

When one looks into the facts, one finds that in practice the specified percentage and number of SC/ST student has not been reached.<sup>9</sup>

Based on data provided by I. P. Desai a question certainly arises, “How can one SC Professor and one SC Associate Professor and 5 Assistant Professors, out of a total of 500 teachers bring down the standard of teaching” (1981, 821)? If indeed the standards have fallen, it must be due to the high caste/class teachers. The figures given by I. P. Desai show that there was no issue; yet, government tried to meet the demands of the upper caste medicos even these were against the interests of SC/ST students. The non-SC/ST students had everything to gain and nothing to lose. By 9 January 1981, the Gujarat government conceded 3 out of 4 demands. The government immediately abolished the carry forward system, declared that the system of interchangeability system of seats between SC and ST would be abolished soon and agreed to add one seat to the open seats for each SC seat filled in the specialized department.

Encouraged by this easy success, the upper castes students immediately demanded that post-graduate reservations for SC and ST students should be scrapped. Medical College students

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<sup>8</sup> Girish Patel, a Human Rights Activist had written a letter to the editor of the *Times of India* on 23 January 1981 debunked the upper caste arguments of merit and efficiency. For details of the letter, see Appendix IV.

<sup>9</sup> To counter argue I have referred article of I. P. Desai. He has given the recruitment data of SC/ST candidates in his article, “Anti-Reservation Agitation and Structure of Gujarat Society” that “In the academic year 1980-81, there were only 7 SC/ST applicants for the 17 seats in the postgraduate courses. In 1979-80, the SC and ST students in medical courses filled 507 out of 4,500 seats. According to their 21 percent population the number should have been 945. Out of the total 106 Professors in the medical colleges in Gujarat, only 1 belonged to the SC. Out of the total 101 Associate Professors in the medical colleges in Gujarat, only 1 belonged to the SC. Among 293 Assistant Professors, there are only 5 SC, and out of the total 237 tutors 15 are from SC and 2 are from ST. Thus, out of total 737 teaching positions only 22 are held by SC and 2 by ST” (1981, 821)

in Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Jamnagar went on a day's token strike on 12 January 1981 in support of this new demand. Junior doctors of these colleges declared their support for the students. About 1,000 students took out a procession in Ahmedabad and burnt an effigy of the "reservation policy." They garlanded the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Income-Tax Crossing, Ahmedabad and took an oath to continue their agitation until the acceptance of their demand. The Surat Medical College observed a strike on 13 January 1981.

On 14 January 1981, the students put fresh demand of abolition of all reservations at all stages from education as well as employment sectors. As the medical students put forth the demand for the abolition of all reservations, all those who believed that they had been affected adversely by reservations supported them. Those in the professions like lawyers, university teachers and others also extended support. The general intelligentsia was also for the abolition of reservations on the ground that reservations go against the interests of individuals who rise by their merits. Business and industrial organizations, while not directly and openly supporting the demand, urged that the agitation should be peaceful.

On 14 January 1981 student representatives of medical colleges in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Jamnagar, and Surat met the Education Minister and the Minister for Health and demanded the scrapping of the reservation system for the posts of housemen and registrars. They demanded removal of the reservation system as it encouraged mediocrity and hence was dangerous for the future of their profession.

The agitation travelled from college campus to street after 23 January 1981. On the 23 January, a minor clash between the pro-reservationist SC medical students and anti-reservationist students within the college campus spread into the surrounding Asarwa and Girdharnagar areas, as well as the industrial areas of Saraspur, Rajpur, Gomtipur, Pritampur, Ranip where Patels and

Dalits lived in close proximity to each other. Stabbing of individuals, stoning and attacking of bastis—especially Dalit bastis—local police collusions with the higher castes or at best indifference to attacks on Dalits, spread to various areas in the last few days of January and first week of February. The Patels, seething with anger against the Dalits following the Jetalpur and other incidents, got their chance to attack. As I. P. Desai rightly pointed out, “The most important allies of the anti-reservationists were however the land-owning agricultural classes and castes who took the lead in perpetrating atrocities and creating terror among the SC not only in rural areas but also in urban areas” (1981, 821).

During the second week of February 1981, the attacks eased, but started with renewed vigor around the 20 February 1981. A few more stabbings were reported. From the first week of March 1981, the agitation spread into high caste localities of Ahmedabad, Khadia, Paldi, Naranpura, where there were no Dalit bastis and also to other towns of Gujarat. Government property, especially post offices, banks; lampposts, etc. became the targets of attack. The police force brought in from neighboring states being less partisan, was ruthless even against higher castes. The police became a target of attack; a few policemen were killed and some got injured.

The then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, intervened in the situation. She sent her emissary, Jaisukhlal Hathi in the last week of March for talks with the students. She invited the students as well as the chief minister to Delhi for negotiations. After several rounds of talks in Delhi and then in Ahmedabad, both the parties signed a 12 point accord on 13 April 1981. Besides abolition of ‘interchangeability’ and ‘carry forward’ which the government had accepted in early January, the government agreed to increase additional non-reserved seats against the number of reserved seats claimed by SC, ST and other backward caste students. The medical colleges were

reopened and notices against junior doctors were withdrawn. Thus, after more than 103 days the anti-reservation agitation came to a halt.

During agitation and arson in Ahmedabad city and rural areas, more than forty Dalits lost their lives. Many were seriously injured due to police atrocities and stabbing by caste Hindus. Throwing stones and burning flames by the Caste-Hindus injured many. Some instances of burning houses of the Dalits were also recorded and brought to notice to the state as well as the central government.

All the national parties supported reservations, in fact, members of some parties were active in the agitation against reservations. Some BJP members were arrested under National Security Act (NSA). Two of the leading junior doctors, Dr. Ramesh Gandhi and Dr. Bharat Amin were known active RSS members. It was also worth noting that during the anti-reservation movement, not one out of the 13 SC MLAs belonging to the ruling party had raised his voice in protest against the atrocities on Dalits. In view of the silence maintained by them, the Dalit Panthers, Gujarat pointed out the futility of political reservations and asked for their abolition.

The agitation first began in Ahmedabad in late January and within days took a violent turn. In Vadodara, it began within a week of Ahmedabad agitation, and in Mehsana and Kheda it started during second and third week of February. The geographical spread of agitation was wide, but it was most intense in the three districts of Kheda, Ahmedabad, and Mehsana in North Gujarat. In Vadodara district, it was confined to Vadodara city and to the nearby town of Dabhoi and was largely against the government. In South Gujarat, it became less intense against the Dalits as we move from Vadodara to Bharuch, Surat and Valsad districts. In the last two districts the agitation was against the government only and not against the Dalits. In Saurashtra, it was mostly confined to cities like Jamnagar, Junagadh, and Bhavnagar. The rural areas in Saurashtra

and Kutch were relatively unaffected; whatever agitation there it was against government and not against Dalits in Saurashtra and Kutch.

Out of three categories that were getting the benefits of reservations, only SCs had been made the target. They suffered heavily in terms of life, personal injuries and destruction of houses and household possessions, both in urban and rural areas, at the hands of both the high caste Hindus and the police. The most aggressive and cruel in their attacks on the Dalits were Patel landholders in Kheda, Ahmedabad, and Mehsana. These were also the districts of concentration of an awakened SC population. The disturbances and violence in these districts were related to two factors as observed by Pradip Kumar Bose. These factors were,

(1) Mobility i.e. the extent of literacy of and urbanization among SCs, (2) the concentration of SC in these districts. In Ahmedabad where SC had a very high urbanization (66.57 per cent), high literacy (37.77 per cent) and high concentration (17.42 per cent), the conflict took the most violent turn and continued for the longest period. Finally, it is these four districts which had shown greater degree of economic development and hence provide greater competition for scarce jobs. (713-16)

However, in all the four districts there was some resistance from SC that again was because of mobility, urbanness and consciousness. The Dalit workers in the textile mills decided to go on strike and were completely successful in closing down the textile mills for two consecutive days in the last week of February. Dalits who separately ran the spinning and carding departments struck work on 24 and 25 February 1981.

I. P. Desai has rightly pointed out the failure of Gandhian ideology in his article, "Equally significant is the ineffectiveness, of the Gandhian leaders some of whom have remained silent on the atrocities perpetuated on Gandhi's Harijans" which has forced the Dalits to move away from it (1981, 821). The atrocities increased beyond imagination and the cold and very mild response

given by the Gandhians and Sarvodaya workers inspired Jayanti Parmar to write a satirical poem *Punarjanma* [Rebirth] on Gandhi who wanted to be reborn as a Dalit.

....

Whose land is seized, are you that?

A person who is attacked, are you that?

From a well who came back without water

Who is boycotted, are you that,

Say Bapu where are you?

Zanzmer, Meethaghoda, Ranmalpura,

....

In which Dalit house have you born? (Vol. 11,12-13)

One of the staunch pro-poor and pro-backward caste leaders, Jinabhai Darji, a former GPCC (I) president said that, “while the Congress (I) could not compromise on the total abolition of the reservation issue, the government should take steps to reserve at least 10 percent of seats for the economically backward irrespective of castes” (“No Compromise,” 1).

On the other hand, the SC and ST were not united and OBCs were largely indifferent to the agitation. As the ST middle class was still very small, and the number of ST students in medical colleges was insignificant, they were inactive in the course of agitation as if it had no effect on them. Moreover, STs were concentrated in certain districts, and caste Hindus were in a minority in these areas, while the SC population was scattered and invariably in a minority in the villages. Hence, they were more vulnerable. The SC leaders could not mobilize the ST and OBC. In fact, they did not have any following among the all castes of SC. Their influence was limited to their own caste and area. A majority of the SCs who were very poor and whose children had hardly taken high school education could not relate themselves to the problems of the educated Dalit students who had become part of the middle class in their life style. The sweepers,

scavengers, cobblers, etc. of the urban and rural area did not find much in common with the middle class Dalits. They, therefore, refrained from participating in the agitation except when they were attacked by the caste Hindus. Thus, in terms of numbers, Dalits who were actively involved in the counter agitation were very small in number and mostly confined to large cities.

The most important change was in the attitude and outlook of the Dalits. Their mute trust in the caste Hindus and a belief that they would be left alone in their habitual misery was replaced with a pervasive sense of mistrust, insecurity, hatred and, among the more conscious, even contempt. I. P. Desai has also discussed the change in the attitude as he has mentioned, “The failure of Gandhian ideology has been conspicuous. It was not effective in Gujarat in 1969 and 1974 and has not been effective in 1981. The SC and ST can now write off that ideology as a force in their favour” (1981, 822). Thus, Ambedkar and Ambedkarism was established among the Dalits.

The role of the police, in particular the local State police, in the agitation was also linked with the reservation policy. In November 1980, 50 Police-Sub-Inspectors (PSIs) were promoted to Police Inspector (PI) by the Government and not even one of them belonged to the SC. Out of 517 PIs in the State only four were SC and two ST. Thus, it was evident that there was an overwhelming bias within the force towards the caste Hindus. After the promotion of the 50 PSIs, the SC PSIs who were eligible for promotion got a stay order from the Court for further promotions, in their demand that the ‘roster’ system be followed. PSI Rathod, who was one of the SC officers who called for the stay order, his house was burnt in February by unknown elements. Thus, the role of the police, in particular the local State police was extremely questionable in the agitation.

Soon after the strike of the medical students was declared, a number of PIs, all of whom happened to belong to Patel community personally supervised the attacks and looting of Dalits in areas such as Khanpur, Bharadiavas and Girdharnagar. These atrocities were mentioned in the report published by Bhartiya Depressed Class League titled as *Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*. In the report it is mentioned that,

The police inspector J. C. Patel beat Lakhiben Manilal on 18 February 1981 at her residence in Meda-wali chawl. At Fulchand-ni-Chawl, in Saraspur area of Ahmedabad 17 Dalits were seriously injured in an attack of a violent mob. When this attack took place police inspector Mr. Barot and police sub-inspectors, Mr. Sharma and Mr. Mehta were present. (27-32)

In early February, the unions of the Police Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, and Constables passed a resolution that reservation as a policy should be scrapped so that the carry forward system and the roster system both will be scrapped. This resolution made it clear the open support that the force had extended largely to the anti-reservationists. The only official forces that were impartial to the Patel-Dalit clashes were the CRPF and BSF personnel. Thus, the Gujarat police had played a deliberate inflammatory role in the tension-ridden areas, and their behaviour was in almost all cases, directly partisan.

The vernacular as well as the English press were also sympathetic to the demands of the students from the beginning of the agitation in January 1981. The former was more open and strongly biased than the English press. The regional language press of any State usually wields a great deal of influence, because it is read by a wide cross-section of people, including the middle classes. The regional press in Gujarat, in particular the wide-selling dailies *Gujarat Samachar*, *Sandesh* and *Jansatta* played a critical role in igniting prejudices of the upper castes against the

Dalits, by distorting news, and in some cases, by inventing incidents that never took place at all to add to the tensions.

When the medical students' agitation spilled out into the streets and the riots began, the Gujarati press indulged in considerable rumor mongering and thus created tensions and spread fear among members of different communities. The two examples of rumor mongering will make my argument more explicit. First, the *Gujarat Samachar* published news that "the Dalits had attacked the Ved Mandir in Ahmedabad" ("Dalitono Amdavadna Ved Mandir," 1). In fact, there was no attack on the temple, and the temple Mahant (priest) issued a denial of the press item the same day, which was not printed.

The *Gujarat Samachar* published another news item about "an attack on the Jain temple in Rajpur area by a Dalit mob" ("Dalitona Hinsak Tolano Rajpurma Jain Mandir," 1). In reality, there were no signs of attack on the temple and in fact, there was no attack anywhere near the temple. The temple priest too issued a denial which was again not printed.

The *Jansatta* published "an attack by a Dalit mob on Rabaries by throwing stones and burning flames" ("Dalitona Hinsak Tolano Rabario Par Pattharo," 1) causing burning of grass and burns to their cattle in Jogeshwarinagar, Meghaninagar area to excite Rabari community.

The *Gujarat Samachar* published, "attack on a Caste Hindu Mr. Ramesh Chhotalal Sanghvi by a furious mob" ("Savarna Ramesh Chhotalal Sanghvi Par Hinsak," 1). The news was published with a photograph to create an impression of molestation. Actually, the furious mob was not of Dalits. On the same day high caste hooligans stabbed and killed Narsinhbhai Purushottambhai – a Dalit – on the same spot, this news was not published in any of the dailies. The report published by Bhartiya Depressed Class League titled as *Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat* (1981) covered this news (95).

A report in the *Statesman* 23 March 1981 mentioned, “During the entire course of the agitation not a single case of rape or molestation or of missing women was registered by the police. And yet there were hints in the Press that Dalit mobs had molested women from the high caste” (“Dalit mobs had molested,” 10).

*The Statesman* report further observed that

Some journalists also complained that on many occasions the police, whose credentials have become suspect because of their seeking sympathy for anti-reservationists misled the press by giving reports based on telephone calls. With such strong pressures and ineffective government action to publicize the truth, many middle-class families still believe the reports the papers had circulated. (“Dalit mobs had molested,” 10)

The press also made no effort to investigate the facts about the reservation policy and its implementation to avoid the people forming their opinions based on populist speeches. The fact-finding committee of PUCL observed in its report *The Gujarat Agitation and Reservations*:

The attitude of the press is simply a reflection of the fact that the ownership of the newspapers is largely with the higher castes. Formerly certain standards of professionalism used to check blatant partisanship, but it is now increasingly the trend to not only take sides, but to distort facts that support the side the paper has taken. (26)

In the *Times of India* report, a doctor is quoted as addressing students:

In the civil hospital, Ahmedabad, 65 posts for fresh housemen have been advertised. Out of which 27 are reserved for SC/ST candidates, which comes to approximately 41 per cent of the total posts... Is this fair when other students having good number of marks and competency in the subject are denied opportunity because we do not belong to SC/ST? The government may reserve jobs but not in higher studies. This is to discount for highly professional knowledge.

(“Government may reserve jobs”, 3)

The information given regarding the reserved posts for SC/ST by the upper caste doctors was contradictory, as they have mentioned the cumulative number of 27 reserved seats. However,

they haven't clarified how do the reserved seats number increase so much. It was not disclosed that the seats have increased because they have not been filled for the last three years and every year the vacant seats were carried forward as per the carry forward system. That is why the doctors had demanded abolishment of the carry forward system. The increased cumulative number has proved that every year the representation of SC/ST is inadequate.

Some other doctors asserted that SC/ST students were misusing the facilities given to them. They said while talking to the reporter of the *Times of India*,

These students were not interested in studies. They lived in sophistication and snobbery, the high caste doctors argued. They moved about in cheap attires with a cigarette between their lips. It is they who find enough time and money to gamble in their hostel rooms. It is they who can afford to send some money home after utilizing a part of their scholarships for a standard of living, which is higher than some of the poor medicos who by misfortune could not be born in SC or ST family.  
 ("SC/ST students were misusing," 3)

This report also exposes the caste prejudice of the doctors. For them a Dalit should work as a Dalit and should not become a doctor or engineer. Moreover, after being published in media the credibility of such generalizations becomes strong and thus people started seeing all the SC/ST students in the medical courses through the lens of the media.

Such observations were prejudicial. Publication of these views in vernacular and English newspapers gave them credibility. Counter views did not find place in the newspaper columns. Hence, one-sided observations not only strengthened the prejudices of the upper and middle castes against the SC and ST, but they also boosted spurious morality for those who were organizing the agitation.

Thus, one can say that the role of the press was biased. During the agitation, more or less the press remained silent as far as atrocities on the Dalits across Gujarat were concerned.

When the medical students met the Chief Minister of Gujarat and gave statement for the abolition of reserved seats in post-graduate medical courses, he replied “Your demands are just and proper, our heart is also pinching. However, what can we do! The reservation quota was fixed and Janta Government framed reservation rules. You suffer due to Janta Government Policy” (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 67)

Shri Babubhai Patel opposed the Chief Minister’s statement and he issued a statement “to the effect that the reservation policy was adopted during Governor Rule in 1975” (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 67).

Dalit representatives went to the Health and Supply Minister Shri Manoharsinh Jadeja and opposed the steps taken by him to cancel the ‘carry forward system’. He said, “I am Jadeja Darbar Prince. My words would not be changed” (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 67). The fact-finding committee of PUCL observed in its report, “During the entire course of negotiations, the State Government paid scant attention to the opinions of the SC students. None of their representatives was ever consulted; no SC postgraduate medical students were called for negotiations before the decision was taken on 9th of January” (26).

Thereafter Dalit leaders and medical students went to the Chief Minister Shri Madhav Sinh Solanki and requested him to withdraw the Government orders cancelling carry forward seats. He said, “There is neither serious movement nor agitation from your side, what can I do? I am forced to hear and obey the agitation from the other side, without agitation no one could get better prospect” (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 67).

The Government authorities from the very beginning could not check the Gujarat daily newspapers spreading communal poison in general public throughout the State. The State Government did not issue any notification or press release contradicting false news to assuage the feelings of Caste Hindus. Even if the Government could not have curbed the newspapers, its information department could have easily placed the correct picture before the public through the public bulletins. However, the Government remained silent.

Some learned and distinguished persons from caste Hindus made a Public statement in newspapers *Sandesh* and *Jansatta* dated 4 February 1981, “Gujarat Nu Kalank, Anamat Virodhi Andolan” (Black dot on Gujarat, Anti-reservation agitation) giving clear justification for reserved seats in post-graduate medical courses. They clearly stated,

the gap between Dalits and other forward castes being widened on a false argument and propaganda that the reserved seats are only for Dalits out of 25% reserved seats in post-medical courses for SC/ST and other backward classes, whose population is more than 60% only 5% reserved seats were utilized for these castes. As such, the demand to abolish reservation of seats in post-graduate medical courses for these depressed and suppressed communities is not just and fair. (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 68)

On this statement, the Gujarat Junior Doctors Association and Medical Students Union issued a contradiction which was published in Gujarati newspapers dated 7 February 1981. However, Government did not come out with correct data and facts to wipe off false impression and feelings created by the false statements of Junior Doctors Association amongst caste Hindus giving completely false and incorrect data and information and appealed the public to take severe action against those who dared to oppose their demands.

Thus, Government showed sympathy towards medical students and their demands prima-facie, when they submitted their representation to the Chief Minister for abolition of reserved seats in medical post-graduate courses.

Some Dalit workers also requested the Government to put some ban, restriction or if necessary censorship upon such news papers spreading sensational communal poison. However, the government did not take any action against the dailies. However, a Dalit journalist Mr. Jayantibhai Subodh publishing a fortnightly paper *Tamanna* was arrested, as he was covering the correct facts and informing the Dalits (*Anti-Reservation Agitation- A Caste War of Caste-Hindus Against Dalit (S.C.) in Gujarat (1981)*, 69).

Anti-reservation committee day by day arranged and publicized various programmes such as Mashal procession and cycle processions, mob courts, burning effigies and putting blood mark on the forehead of Mahatma Gandhi's statue, though there prevailed 144 clause of Indian Penal Code.<sup>10</sup> The Government neither put restriction nor did the police officers object in carrying out such programmes.

Thus, based on the above-mentioned reasons one can easily say that the Government remained silent during the course of agitation as far as the victimization of the Dalits was concerned. The state government's approach towards the agitators and Dalits proved the state as a protector of Brahminism.

#### **4.3: Gujarati Dalit Literary Response to Anti-Reservation Agitation**

The response given by the Dalits to the anti-reservation agitation was more literary and less physical. For Dalits it was an attack on their identity. One of the things that Dalits learnt and

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<sup>10</sup> Section 144 in The Indian Penal Code: Joining unlawful assembly armed with deadly weapon. Whoever, being armed with any deadly weapon, or with anything which, used as a weapon of offence, is likely to cause death, is a member of an unlawful assembly, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

understood during the course of the agitation is that they should protect and project their identity through literature. Therefore, they turned towards literature and not arms. In their view, pen would win their battle rather than sword in the due course of time. Dalit writing served two important functions for the Dalits. First, it documented their emotions and feelings and secondly it mobilized the Dalit consciousness.

Between 1975 and 1978 Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan and Praveen Gadhvi were encouraged by the leaders of the Dalit Panthers, Gujarat Unit – Ramesh Chandra Parmar, Shri Naran Vora and Valjibhai Patel – to write. They were not only Dalit activists but also wrote regularly in the *Panther* journal about the issues related to Dalit life and its problems. These Dalit Panther leaders were given the responsibility to start literary magazine *Akrosh* with Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan and Praveen Gadhvi as editors.

Mainstream Gujarati literature was dominated by the values, ideas and thoughts of the Savarnas and middle classes during this time. Thus, mainstream writers were not ready to consider Dalit poetry as poetry at all. It could be easily seen that along with mainstream writers some progressive writers who were also writing with social concerns, even for them Dalit poetry was not easy to understand. They were always trying to measure the value of Dalit poetry with the meters of the aesthetics. During the decade of 1975 to 1985, it was very difficult to write and publish Dalit literature. “The mainstream literary writers were telling irritatingly in the face of the upcoming Dalit writers that what literature has to do with Dalit, Lalit and Palit? Literature means literature” (Jani, 1989, 156). They considered Dalit writers as more orthodox and narrow minded. In their view, a Dalit writer wants to continue the caste system. In such a critical and tough time to write Dalit poetry was an act of swimming against the flow; and such courage was shown by Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan and Praveen Gadhvi.

The first volume of *Akrosh* had 34 poems of Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan, Praveen Gadhvi and Yogesh Dave. Neerav Patel contributed 7 poems in this volume. Out of these seven, one was “Better Illiterate.” In this poem, Neerav Patel has presented the uneasiness of the educated Dalit. The opening of this poem presents the pitiful life of the Dalits. The science teacher tells a story of a sudden fall of an apple, which ultimately led Newton to present the law of gravity. However, here a Dalit student who has not seen an apple at all has a wish to eat it. A law of gravity could not reach a Dalit mind, as its empty belly did not allow it. Mainstream writer cannot write a poem on such an issue with such a startling example, as they had not experienced the hunger at all.

while studying science,  
the falling apple of Newton  
had first led me to think to eat it. (1980, 9-10)

The concluding lines of the poem present the distress of an educated Dalit. Education could raise the desires but not fulfill them. It could incite hunger but not provide food. The poet was frustrated and angry at such an education. So he says

..... better remain illiterate  
than to be conscious of insults,  
hatred and oppressions and to tame passivity,  
had I been illiterate,  
I could have beaten the unjust with the babul-pole  
I carry the dead cattle with  
or could have swallowed the discrimination  
with a juicy peg of mahuwa flowers. (1980, 9-10)

In *Akrosh* the Dalit poets presented the feelings and emotions of the whole Dalit society. In the words of Bhanubhai Aidhvaryu, “I hoped that these epoch-maker songs will be discussed

or criticized by any renowned Gujarati writer. When this did not happen, I thought- though I have certain limitations as far as literary criticism is concerned- to talk about these poems and criticize them” (2). He has pointed out how dalit literature was received in the eighties. However, there was, by and large, no response from mainstream literary critics.

Some young poets stayed in Ahmedabad and encountered the followers of Ambedkarian ideology. They started to depict situation of Dalits before *Panther* in 1975. Ambedkar’s call to protest the caste violence and to break the root cause of caste violence i.e. Brahminism was also ingrained in their psyche. Shankar Painter is one such poet. He started to write poetry at the very young age of 17. His stay with Jethalal – a Buddhist, a volunteer of Samta Sainik Dal, and a mill worker – played a crucial role in the making of Shankar Painter. Shankar Painter’s stay with Jethalal who embraced Buddhism with Ambedkar in 1956 explained him the terms ‘Dalit’ and ‘Dalit Identity.’ The poet has captured these ideas and presented them very powerfully. Shankar Painter’s poems –*Besi Na Rahevay*, [We Can’t Sit] (1970) and *Tod Chapaniya* [Break the Begging Bowl] (1974) – present Ambedkarite ideology.

In his poem, *Besi Na Rahevay* [We Can’t Sit] Shankar Painter awakened as well as encouraged the Dalits to fight against varnavyavastha.

....

Look, in our courtyards,  
The sound of the revolution is roaring! Dalits  
Your identity has crushed for centuries! Dalits  
Set on fire the Circles of Varnashram

....

To fight against the oppressions  
Come along all united! – Dalits  
Tighten your fist like a warrior,

Raise your hand towards the sky! – Dalits. (2010, 76)

The poet has presented the poem in folk form so that it could reach the Dalits very easily and ignite the Dalit's mind for the Dalit movement. The poet called for a revolution against all the oppressions. The poet has also highlighted 'unity' as an essential parameter of the success of the revolution. Thus, one can see the poet as the forerunner of the Dalit Movement, which demands equality.

In his poem, *Tod Chapaniya* [Break the Begging Bowl] Shankar Painter had not only identified the core of the untouchability and directed the Dalits to break the core. He exposed the Brahminism and its rotten culture.

....

Brother, break the begging bowls of tea.

In the brain of Brahminism

Rubbish is rotting for centuries!

In the new age without resistance,

You can't get anything!

You burst the hypocritical drums of the rotten culture

Brother, break the begging bowls of tea! (2010, 84)

Towards the end of the poem he highlighted to break the 'Begging bowl' and 'hanging saucer' which are identification marks of the Dalit community and the representative of the Brahminical ideology. This breaking of 'Begging bowl' and 'hanging saucer' will lead Dalits to break the Brahminism.

Shankar Painter wrote poems quite early in the 1960s but they were edited by Harish Mangalam and published in 1984 in his first collection *Boongiyo Vage* [Drum Beating].

Neerav Patel's poem's title "dr. bhaga manga m.s, and dr. mhera mohan f.r.c.s." made fun of the doctors. The names – dr. bhaga manga m.s and dr. mhera mohan f.r.c.s.–encircle illiteracy,

ignorance and therefore they are meant to do menial, unskilled jobs, and certainly, they could never be taken as respectable medical professionals. The names suggested crudeness while the degrees suggest medicinal expertise. To lend aesthetic value to the poem, the poet juxtaposed the paradoxical terms. They were doctors nonetheless, mending the sanitary system of the gluttonous city. They were manhole divers and gutter specialist Dalits.

The two Dalits clean the sewage lines and thus protect the citizens of the city from severe diseases. Doctors cure body diseases but the scavengers protect the body from the disease. Thus, their importance is more than the doctors. However, their status is extremely low in the varna order and thus no one celebrates them. Both the sweepers Bhaga Manga and Mhera Mohan lost their lives while cleaning the gutter line. Presently too, the cleaning of the sewage lines is done manually across India and in this process; hundreds of sweepers lose their lives. However, the Central as well as State governments are not taking any steps to prevent such untimely and terrible deaths of the Dalits. The poet raises this issue and presents the misery of a sweepers' life mockingly in this way:

with bamboo baskets on head  
and hoes in hand,  
dr. bhaga manga m.s.  
and dr. mhera mohan f.r.c.s.  
lifted open the lid of an overflowing man-hole  
and slipped into the nether-land.  
without any gloves or gumboots,  
But dr. mana mehtar (abz in sanitation)  
The head of the department of hygiene  
Dozed under lattha influence  
With the aristocratic air of

dr. vani or dr. dani

.... (1987,18-19)

Neerav Patel never tried to write in meters. He is not a poet of meters; he is a poet who broke the meters. In subject matter, he breaks tradition while in presentation he breaks meters. Yet, the simplicity of his expression has such a tremendous chemistry, which gives harmonious shape to his poems and thus easily touches the hearts of the common people. He presented the contemporary social reality from a Dalit point of view and thus tried to develop the Dalit consciousness. He is not a poet who is interested in presenting emotions only but he is a poet who dives and swims deep enough to understand the repercussions of a certain incident on a Dalit life and one such incident is the killing of Shakrabhai at Jetalpur.

The Jetalpur event of caste violence of 1980 is perhaps representative of the complex forces at play with regard to the Dalit issue in Gujarat. As I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Patel youths of Jetalpur came to the Dalit was in search of Shakrabhai. He was dragged in a semi-conscious state to the Panchayat office, where kerosene was poured on him and he was set on fire. To understand this event of 25 December 1980, we need to recognize that Jetalpur was the first village where the Dalit Panthers attempted to organize Dalits in 1974. The Dalit Panthers formed a co-operative (Shramajivi Sahakari Mandali) and demanded that a part of the village *gochar* (grazing) land of the village for cultivation to the Scheduled Castes (SCs). In 1975, the *gochar* land was granted to them for a year. Before the end of cultivation period, the village Panchayat transferred the land to the forest department for the plantation of trees under 'Grow more trees' scheme. The Dalits of Jetalpur village united at that time under the leadership of Dalit Panthers and a procession of 150 to 200 people went to the land and collectively uprooted the saplings. Besides this *gochar* land incident, there were other land related problems. The Panchayat refused to grant to the Dalits the use of stray land around the village pond. Patels

also controlled nine acres of land allocated under “Nutritional Food” programme. Legally the produce from this land should be distributed among the children and pregnant women of Dalits and other weaker sections but in reality, they never received any of it.

The unity of the Dalits had hurt the Patels’ ego badly which ultimately resulted into random clashes between the Patels and the Dalits. Apart from this, for many years, land question was the centre for the struggles between Dalits and Patels. The land-owning rich Patels used all possible oppressive feudal methods against any attempts of Dalits and other weaker sections to get their rights. The Patels wanted to justify their higher caste status and therefore they killed Shakrabhai on 25 December 1980.

On 26 December 1980, Dalit Panther leaders in Ahmedabad were informed and they arrived just in time to prevent an ambulance from taking the burnt body to the hospital. On their insistence, Shakrabhai was not moved until the police were called. He was then taken to the Civil Hospital where his dying declaration was recorded. The Dalit Panthers organized a huge funeral procession the next day and the shok sabha (mourning) which was publicly held at Jetalpur on 27 December, attended by a crowd estimated between 15,000 and 30,000 people.

The organized protest of the Dalits aroused anger of the Patels. They replied it with a social boycott. The Patels stopped calling Dalits for farm labour, which deprived most of the Dalits, as it was the only source of livelihood. The Patels of surrounding villages also joined hands with Patels of Jetalpur and refused to hire the Dalits from Jetalpur village. The moneylenders demanded the money back from Dalits. Patels also refused to give water from their bores and thus the standing crop in the meager fields of Dalits was destructed.

The Patels who successfully faced the challenge of land reforms lost their battle in the field of polity. The new political collusion of KHAM was not easy to counter. The three events –

Ranmalpura, Mandala, and Jetalpur – offered new sociological challenges from the Dalits as they were also moving up socially with the help of reservation, education and urbanization. The Patels knew that with the benefits of reservations, Dalits achieved the voice to protest. Therefore, under the pretext of opposing the reservation policy they attacked Dalits and gave violent answers to the challenges offered by the Dalits.

A key function of Dalit writing is to document the atrocities on the Dalits in the form of literary output. Instances of caste violence were hardly given any media coverage. The Dalit poet therefore, has to step in and take the twin role of reporter and poet, to both document the atrocity and sensitize the masses. He is required to give all details of geography, history, economics, and politics of the incident and urge the reader to be sensitive and thoughtful to take stock of the aggravating situation in the country. He has to provide not only condolence to the bereaved and dispossessed, commemorating the victims as the martyrs of the Dalit cause but also to inspire the Dalit masses to agitate and organize for struggle of emancipation, exposing the barbaric social system based on varna and caste. Thus, the Dalit poets have devised a new form of poetry- Poetry of Reportage.

The anti-reservation riots of 1981 and 1985, Jetalpur, Golana, Ranmalpur, Detroj and many more incidents of atrocities in Gujarat led the Dalit poets to transform the predicament of the victims in the form of poetry of reportage. Such poems are usually long in form. Neerav Patel is very famous for his reportage poetry.

One example of the poetry of reportage is Neerav Patel's poem on the killing of Shakrabhai that took place on 25 December 1980. In the funeral rally of Shakrabhai, Dalits condemned the atrocities committed by the upper caste people. As I have discussed earlier, after a very short time of this incidence, anti-reservation riots irrupted. Not only in Ahmedabad, but

also in the villages of the North and the Central Gujarat. Dalits were attacked physically. It was during this agitation that the leaders of the Dalit Panthers (Gujarat) decided to restart the publication of *Akrosh*. One of the first themes that they took up was the Jetalpur massacre. In the volume on the Jetalpur killing, Neerav Patel wrote a long poem *Jetalpur Hatyakand* [Jetalpur Massacre] which covered minute details of the life of Shakrabhai. The poet also talked about why and how Shakrabhai was killed. In addition, he talked about the impact of martyrdom of Shakrabhai on the Dalits of Gujarat. Through his poem, the poet tried to articulate the voices of Dalits. I include below an excerpt:

....

Masked mobs beating him black and blue  
 half-dead and bleeding,  
 Shakro entreats them with the SOS vow:  
 beg your pardon, kind hearts  
 i am your cow,  
 allow me to leave, my lords  
 I would never return to the Jetalpur village.  
 but he was dragged by his hair  
 his battered body etching a way  
 from Patel-farm to the Panchayat Office  
 the abode of jungle justice

some caught hold of him by shoulders  
 some tried to strangle him by foot  
 but Patel took a matchstick  
 and Kadvo bathed him with kerosene  
 and lo, there was Holi fire !  
 and Shakro was all flames

whole village began basking on his blazing cries  
 Shakro became silent dead soon  
 but the flame stealthily reached the city of Ahmedabad  
 and all the dalit bastis around  
 .... (1981, 3-14)

Manishi Jani, the editor of this special volume has commented in *Swaman Mate Sangarsh Chhedati Dalit Kavita* [Poetry That Fights for Self-Respect] that,

“After reading “Jetalpur Hatyakand; A Dastavej” (Jetalpur massacre : A document) again and again I feel that how Neerav Patel has made temperament of the poem, so penetrating and pervading while linking the local political, social and religious wickedness with an event of oppression of a Dalit. Repetitions of certain statements and sentences give it a specific harmony. And this is the special quality of this poem and also an achievement of this poem.” (2006, x-xi)

The main purpose of the Dalit literature is to inspire the Dalits to reject the Varnashram system, revolt against it and to challenge the ideology, religious and social power that validates it. In this literature, anguish is primary while literariness is secondary. Pure aesthetic experience is not mandatory term for the Dalit literature. Here literature is a weapon for the social movement. In this literature, propaganda is not a fault. The social history of the Dalits has not been written but it is recorded in literature. The classical history i.e. academic and mainstream may marginalize or corner it, but this history of the nightmares of their life is saved in the form of literature.

Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan, Praveen Gadhvi and Madhukar Chaudhari started *Kalo Suraj* in December 1979 as financial hurdles led to shutting down of *Akrosh* after only two volumes. *Kalo Suraj* was started to provide platform to young Dalit poets and Usha Makwana was one such poet. She presented in her poem *Harijan to Bani Jo* [Try to become a Harijan]

precisely an apprehension of being a Dalit in India. She asked the God very sarcastically to be a Dalit if he dared to do so.

You have born many times  
 As a son of a queen  
 Try to take birth to a common woman  
 You have used many chakra, bow and arrow  
 Try to walk with a broom in your hands on the road.  
 Hari, it is easy to call oneself Hari  
 Only once you try to become a Harijan. (Vol.8, 16)

In the following poem *Ha, Hun Dalit Chhun* [Yes, I am a Dalit] by Jeevan Pattani one can easily see how the Dalits writers present their world which is unwillingly fixed on their foreheads. Now, Dalits question the status quo quite fiercely through their literature. They are now able to say, “We won’t do what you say, you do whatever you want to do.”

Yes, I am a Dalit,  
 You have forcefully tied this word  
 To our neck  
 To wear it out I will fight  
 With all my vigor.  
 ....  
 Be alert,  
 Be cautious,  
 I am a Dalit of a new age. ( Vol.10, 17)

The Dalit as depicted by Jeevan Pattani is different from Neerav Patel’s “dr. bhaga manga m.s, and dr. mhera mohan f.r.c.s.” Bhaga Manga and Mhera Mohan lost their lives while performing the caste duties cleaning the gutter. However, Jeevan Pattani’s Dalit refuses to perform caste duties and prefers to fight against it. While fighting he may die but it will be a

death of his choice and not like a death of Bhaga Manga and Mhera Mohan. More importantly, it opposes the Brahminism of the Hindu culture. This is the change in the attitude of the Dalits, which the agitation brought in the psyche of the Dalits.

During the agitation of 1981, Dalits answered the anti-reservationists and retaliated. When the upper caste people attacked the Dalit Vas during the 1981 anti-reservation agitation, Ratanben, a Dalit woman, fought alone with the help of few young kids of the vas against the fierce mob. She saved not only the Dalit Vas but also saved the dignity and self-respect of the community. Shankar Painter presented the brave efforts of Ratanbai in his poem *Bai Ratanne Rang* [Proud of Bai Ratan].

....

Mob is attacking on the vas,

Drumbeats were beaten for a war !

Heads were broken, bones were broken,

When women showed bravery

Oppressors were defeated,

....

Proud of Bai Ratan ! Proud of her mother !

Proud of the youth of Jotana !

.... (2010, 73)

In my view, all the Dalit writers are the volunteers of the Dalit movement and thus for them literary activity does not mean an activity of individual spiritual joy but it represents the structure of feeling of a whole community. For them literature is not “art for art sake” but it is an “art for life’s sake.” Dalit writer writes a literary piece to spread the motto of “equality, fraternity, and unity.” If a Dalit writer exposes an upper caste hypocritical world it does not mean that he is cynical but that he wants to bring change and to bring change to expose the society is mandatory.

All the political parties and their governments always present a rosy picture of development and use it as propaganda. Actually, at the ground level the situation is quite demeaning. Therefore, the Dalit writers present their own bizarre world, which is so terrible and repressive. This world is not of their choice but it is a forceful compulsion, which they have to bear until they die.

Joseph Macwan, the well-known Dalit writer, articulated the issues facing Dalit poetry this way:

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 not to worry for rhyme schemes as it comes naturally. Because of this it does not have to follow the meters 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, Dalit poetry and the Dalit poet have to follow his own dictums and not to move on the wrong tracks. (1984, 12-13)

By 1981, Ambedkar was the main source of inspiration for the Dalit writers. There are numerous poems written on Ambedkar during this period. Among these poems, a few talk about Ambedkar's ideology. Dalit poets have presented these poems in the Dalit vas around Gujarat to promote the Dalit awakening and these readings played a major role in 1981 agitations for the unity of the Dalits. These poems have not only provided spirit to literate people but also to illiterate people as they were written in the folk style. Shankar Painter's *Vandan Chhe Bhimrao* [Salute to Bhimrao] is one such poem.

Revering Bhimrao! To you,

Revering Bhimrao!

....

Ponds and lakes are dug

For camels and donkeys

But a Homo sapiens Dalit

has problems of water

problems of water.

Revering Bhimrao! To you,

Revering Bhimrao!

You are the true prophet

Born amidst the oppressed

Shankar salutes you a million times

in every age whose name is immortal

in every age whose name is immortal

Revering Bhimrao! To you,

Revering Bhimrao! (1984 b, 26)

The 1981 anti-reservation riots were marked by upper caste fear of losing their structural advantage based on caste. They could not accept a Dalit as a clerk or as a teacher or as a doctor. For them, reservation was the tool with which Dalits moved up, so they targeted reservation policy and started an agitation to abolish reservations. Savji Rukhda captured the upper caste notions of reservations in his poem *Aarakshan Ange* [On Reservation]

Our ancestors

Have not educated them,

Also their shadows have not touched

Then

What is the need of this reservation ?

An untouchable, a son of the Shudra

Being educated, becomes a teacher

Will teach us?

....

Register your opposition

Cancel reservations. (Vol.9, 12-13)

Savji Rukhda represents upper castes' fear of losing caste superiority that led them to oppose reservation policy. Balkrishna Anand presents Dalits' views on the upper castes' demand for the abolition of reservation in his poem *Shadyantra* [Conspiracy]. He terms the anti-reservation agitation as a conspiracy of the upper castes to see the Dalits as their slaves just as they were before independence.

Dalits

the present agitation of the opponents

is not only anti-reservation

movement only

but it is

a nation-wide a move of a

conspiracy against you

which will again make you slave

to tie you again with the iron chains

which is made up of ink of Manushahi. (Vol.11, 14)

The root cause of the 1981 anti-reservation agitation was the Dalits' upward movement on the caste hierarchy. Indian villages are structured on the caste pattern and every caste resides in the areas marked according to their status. The upper caste people want to maintain the same structure of residence (as they have in their villages) in the towns and cities also. At present too, if a Dalit wants to buy a house in high caste locality, he is refused and advised instead to buy

house in the areas reserved for them. Their children also face caste violence. Somebody will advise them to change their surname so that they will not be identified as a Dalit. Thus, if a Dalit moves upward economically he will not receive the honour and the status for which he is eligible. He has to accept the upper caste norms. He has to abandon his identity and wears others' identity which is not his own but borrowed. After such borrowings, if the issue of untouchability repercussions are put to an end then it may still be acceptable but this is not so. In *Shool* [Thorn, 1995] B. Kesharshivam has talked about the Dalits who are considered as creamy layers i.e. those who have occupied government services. These services included from a sweeper to judge, Mamlatdar, Sales-tax officer, and Member of Legislative Assembly. If a Dalit achieves any position, he is not changed at all in the eyes of the upper castes person. In their eyes, he was a Dalit and remains a Dalit until his death. A Dalit has to face the insult of backwardness from the very beginning of the learning process until he achieves his desired goal. He has a hope that once he will achieve his goal he will be recognized at par with the other members of the society. However, even after achieving his goal his designation changes but not his caste, and the society is interested in caste status and not in the designation of a person. He has to face continuously the insults of being a backward.

B. Kesharshivam presents the frightful situation of the Dalits through the character of Govindbhai Makwana in *Shool*. Govindbhai Makwana works as a judge in the court. When he is transferred from taluka to the district, his family members are very happy. He thinks that in the city the social norms for the Dalits will be different. He thinks that cities are developed so people of the city do not believe in the caste system. However, when he arrives in the city he is shocked. He cannot get a house on rent just because he is a Dalit. He enrolls his son Gautam in an English medium school so that he can receive a good education. However, Gautam's friends tell him that

he is backward. He could not understand the meaning of backward. He inquired with his father: “Papa, are we considered as backward” (1995, 10)?

Govindbhai cannot answer his son’s question. During the agitation, he has to demand for police protection because he is terribly harassed by the neighbors. Even after receiving police protection, he cannot live peacefully in his own home. He has to sell his house quite cheap.

Govindbhai remembers experiences of his past life,

Earlier a Dalit could not wear good clothes, could not move without a loincloth on his head, could not beat drums in a marriage ceremony, could not cut his hair in the village, could not have a cup of tea in the hotel of the village and could not fetch water from the well of the village. Nobody can utter a word. Earlier they were physical attacks, now they had started mental tortures. (1995, 9)

Jayesh is one of the characters of this novel. He is a Mamlatdar. He is very enthusiastic about work for the poor. In spite of being a Mamlatdar, he has to face the agony of an untouchable on a regular basis. He allots grazing land to the landless Dalits co-operative society for cultivation according to government rules and regulations. However, not only the village residents but also the whole taluka opposes his decision. He is killed in the anti-reservation riots by the mob. Nobody knows about his death and it appears like a murder of a common person in the news headlines. Govindbhai’s wife tells him, “Today there is news of a murder also. Someone called Jayeshbhai Mamlatdar has been killed by the mob near the garage” (1995, 229).

The major reason for the killing of Jayeshbhai was the caste to which he belonged. He was appointed directly as a Mamlatdar of Amalner taluka. Being a Dalit how could he be a government officer! How could upper caste people call him ‘sir’! The novel suggests that he was killed because he was treating Dalits humanely and was giving them rights of the Indian citizen. Thus, the killing of Jayeshbhai clearly suggests that Dalits cannot enjoy the rights of Indian citizen, if any one wants to enjoy the rights he has to face violence.

In *Shool* not only Jayeshbhai, Vasantbhai who was a member of legislative assembly is also killed in this agitation. He was a Dalit and wanted to inculcate the feeling of self-respect and honour amidst the Dalits. He had successfully led the Satyagraha for fetching water from the public well. He knew that one day he would be killed. In spite of such fear, he wanted to die with self-respect and so he continued his work of awakening the Dalits. Vasantbhai fought against the whole village to have a cup of tea in the village hotel. In the night, the upper caste people stoned the Dalit Vas. "I am an M.L.A. and in my presence my vas is attacked, how shameful this condition is" (1995, 126)!

After successfully completing the water Satyagraha, he was insulted publically. He was gheraoed by the notorious persons of his village as he stepped down from the bus on a Saturday evening. Balaji, a notorious man said,

Aye ! Vasant, today we will make an extraordinary tea for you. Hot tea was poured on his head.

Vasantbhai breathed out loudly.

At that time, Veero spoke, 'On that day your nose was left along with your hairs to cut down, today we will complete it.. .'

further he was forced to drink urine.

No, no today we should force him to drink him urine.

Aye ! Mafa, bring the begging bowls and urinate in it. Today we will show him his caste.

(1995,130)

Vasantbhai was thus insulted even though he had political power. He had to visit his village with police protection during the riots. He also received a threat letter on the day of his murder, "On the coming Janmashtami your Vas will be set on fire and you will be also killed"(1995, 233). He did not take this threat letter seriously. However, a notorious man, Jorubha kills him at midnight. A Dalit named "Kachra," gazing at the face of the dead Vasantbhai, suddenly remembers Vasantbhai's words: "Kachara, till now you have heard about

the attacks on the Dalit was but had you ever heard about an attack by the Dalits on someone else's was" (1995, 236). Dalits' decided to take revenge for their M.L.A.'s murder and make a unified attack on the *mohalla* of Jorubha where Kachara kills him.

B. Kesharshivam had also interwoven the narrative of Sheela who refused to change her surname and could not pass her M.B.B.S. exams and became a psychic patient.

After getting admission in the medical course my seniors gave me different advises. One of them was: Did you change your surname? I laughed at this advice because I was confident of hardwork and talent. I had a firm belief that with sheer hard work one can achieve the desired goal. Results of first and second year were satisfactory and my belief was proved true. I don't have any doubt now.... In the last year also my friends were telling me to change my surname.... But I did not follow their advice and I completed the study of third year with full vigour and also took the examination with full confidence. I was confident about my good result. I was eagerly waiting for the day of result and the day arrived. I opened the newspaper quite eagerly. My number was not there. I could not believe. I thought it may be an error, but truth remains truth. I was declared fail. My parents were shocked. They could not believe that I could fail.... I started giving trial examinations. Every time I got the same result. I thought it is the result of avoiding my friends' advice. I have given six trials. I am now depressed. Once I took sleeping pills for suicide. Now only one subject is remaining. Then also trials are going on. My hopes and ambitions were totally ruined .... (1995,70-71)

Her friend Rukhi who has changed her name to Rekha Patel has successfully completed the degree-engineering programme and has a job in a reputed private sector company. She can easily rent a house with this changed identity. However, during the agitation when two agitators named Subhash and Paresh came to know about the actual caste status of Rekha Patel. They kidnapped and raped her. This incident exposes the upper caste mentality towards Dalits.

Dalits are not able to change their identity even after religious conversion. They opt for religious conversion just to save themselves from insults, hatred, and rejection. However, the

Savarnas harassed them even after conversion. Gautam's School principal Mr. George is a Christian. However, he is still harassed as a Dalit. In the words of George, "I know the notorious youth. I can't do anything years ago my great grandfather has converted himself and adopted the Christianity, to be free from all the sorrows. But even after religious conversion and being a Principal of the school also, I bear all these insults" (1995, 101). Upper caste people are so curious to know about the sub caste that they inquire about the history of the ancestors and find out that identity. Even after changing religion, a Dalit remains a Dalit in this country. Dalit Muslims, Dalit-Christians, Dalit-Buddhists and Dalit-Sikhs are the famous example.

Dalit writers are the primary witness of the event which they are depicting. The narrative is a retrospective account of their experiences. Pramod Nayar has termed the Dalit writers as 'Primary Witness' of the caste atrocities in his essay,

The sheer singularity of events is recorded as they occurred to them. In my view, the primary witness in Dalit Writing makes a move from seeing to voicing. Witnessing is about the reconstruction of seen/experienced events in verbal narrative elsewhere. In short, the witness through his speech/textualization has attained narrative clarity and coherence over the experience. That is, there are two parts to Dalit Writers' retrospective testimonial act: his experience of events in his village and at his workplace and his narration of it elsewhere, years later. (91-92)

B. Kesharshivam wrote *Shool* on the background of 1981 anti-reservation agitations. In the preface of *Shool* one can see the move from experience to narration. According to B.

Kesharshivam as he mentions in the preface "*Shool* is only a preface to the Dalit Society and its history" (1995, vi). He begins by stating that what follows is a narrative of his experiences: B.

Kesharshivam is the witness of the rendered experiences in the text as Nayar has proposed in his essay. This could be termed as Nayar proposes, "This is the first part of his function as primary witness.... Dalit Writers are also speaking for another, bearing witness to another's suffering. In

the course of their narration of his own experiences, Dalit Writers moves from individual to collective” (92). We can see this process in the following excerpt.

Sir, because of this anti-reservation movement we have received an advantage also. The quarrels between Vankar (weaver) and Chamar (tanner) community has been curtailed and forgotten. Today they are united.....Dr. Ambedkar said that if we are not able to move forward the Kranti-Rath of development then there is no problem but please do not take it back. Govindbhai feels that the slogan given by Ambedkar “Be Educated, Be United and Do Agitation” is torn into pieces. How can we agitate without unity? (1995, 39)

According to Nayar, “an act of advocacy is a programme of action for the entire Dalit community. The Dalit writers have moved into the role of advocate via the role of witness. Dalit Writers have already documented their problems that resulted from their social identity. Their sufferings, as noted earlier, metonymically stand in for the entire community” (92). B. Kesharshivam has depicted the experiences of 1981 anti-reservation agitation which have been faced by the entire Dalit community during the agitation.

Dalit writing asks the reader to respond and thus engages the reader in the construction of truths. Witnessing here involves looking at the text and beyond the text, at the present, the past, and the potential for the future. Dalit writing is a record of trauma and survival, as *Shool* shows. Once truth has been established through Dalit writing, it demands justice and thus demands the construction of a casteless society.

Thus, B. Kesharshivam has exposed the hollowness of the creamy layer system. Even after entering the creamy-layer zone, a Dalit remains a Dalit in the eyes of the upper caste people. Not only the writer has splendidly presented the terrible situation of the Dalits during the anti-reservation riots but also presented the agony and anguish of the Dalits experience every day.

*Sher'ni Vahu* [Bride of the City] is a short story by B. Kesharshivam is based in the context of the anti-reservation agitation. Until the end of the story, the reader is not able to guess Kamu's behaviour.

In the beginning of the story, Kamu, the protagonist of the story is introduced. She is recently married. There is a nine-year-old boy Karshan whom she likes the most at her in-laws residence. Wherever she has a work related to market, she gives 10 paisa coin to Karshan and asks him to do a favour. Karshan too likes Kamu's company. Karshan's mother Punjiben cannot understand the relationship between Kamu and Karshan. Karshan does not share his and Kamu's talk with his mother. This creates vortexes in the mind of the readers as in Punjiben's mind. When Kamu has been coming back from the well along with Karshan, Garbad Patel abuses her. Kamu replies him strongly. However, Garbad Patel, a notorious man, catches her hand. In order to save Kamu, Karshan bites his hand, so Garbad Patel falls on Karshan. Karshan is injured as the edge of the water pot strikes him. Kamu cannot bear this, so she throws her water pots on Garbad Patel and falls him. She starts beating him very badly. She also catches his throat and presses it fiercely. But Nagar Rabari, a villager, saves Garbad Patel's life. Before she reaches her home, the message of the fight has already reached. Her in-laws explain her situation in the village, "You are now not young. This is not your city; this is a village. Here you have to show respect to upper caste people. You have to listen the wrong things" (11).

When Kamu and her husband, Kesho discuss the issue, Garbad Patel comes with his brothers and cousins and attacks their house. Her in-laws apologize for Kamu's reply. Because of Kamu, his parents have to apologize so Kesho beats Kamu. The next day her in-laws send her to her parents' home.

After a month, Kamu comes back. During her stay in Ahmedabad, Karshan remembers Kamu many times and always inquires with Kesho about Kamu's return. Kamu is very glad when she hears that Karshan inquires after her. Therefore, she decides firmly that she would not go to Ahmedabad now.

The spread of the anti-reservation agitations reaches to villages also. Kamu's village also witnesses the riots. On the day when riots take place, Karshan has been in the school. When he does not return from the school on time Punjiben and Kamu go to the school to fetch him. On the way back, they are gheraoed by the mob. Stones are pelted at them. Karshan falls down as somebody hit him on his head. Kamu cannot bear this and catches hold of the person who has attacked Karshan. He is Garbad Patel. Kamu is furious. Before Garbad could think anything,

She catches the neck of Garbad Patel and bites his nose. She bites the nose so badly that his nose has come in her mouth. Her mouth is full of blood. She bites his ear also and cut it down. It seems that she has rabies. She bites Garbad like a tigress to eat him up. Punji is stunned. She catches the hands of Kamu. She feels that fire is lurking from the eyes of Kamu. Kamu again runs after Garbad. She cuts his face with her nails. When the mob sees the condition of the Garbad, all of them run away. Punji has tried very hard to control her. Nobody can go near to Kamu except Punji... Punji consoles her and brings her to consciousness. She cries loudly and says: 'Mother, my brother has been killed by the anti-reservation mob in the same manner. Karshanbhai's face is like my brother's. (16-7)

Kamu's statement dissolves all the suspicions that have gripped Punji's mind earlier. The story of love between a sister and a brother is interwoven so subtly with the account of anti-reservation riots. The readers could not guess about Kamu's behaviour until the end, when she takes revenge of her brother's death. She has lost one brother and does not want to lose one more. Though she is a Dalit woman, she is not taken aback but strongly retaliates and saves not only Karshan's life but also teaches a lesson to the upper caste society. Thus, through Kamu the writer shows a new

path of retaliation to the Dalits to save their honour and respect. B. Kesharshivam's use of violence as a decisive power to end the story is not a simple violence. It carries a past which lives in the present.

*Anamatna Hullado* [Anti-reservation riots] is another short story by B. Kesharshivam. Baldev who is a District Collector is a protagonist of this story. The story opens with the note of the riots. Being a Dalit, he faces several allegations. In the meeting of the police officials, he discusses at length about the areas, which needs special protection. The D.S.P. knows that Baldev belongs to Lakhpipal, so it requires special attention. D. S. P. tells him, "Sir, in Lakhpipal there is a man called Raju Vyas. He is instigating people for riots" (2008, 88).

Then the writer has described the whole story of Baldev's development as a Collector. He has minutely presented the difficulties faced by a Dalit while pursuing education. Because of Sayajirao Gaikwad's order, Dalits could receive education and Baldev is one of them. The writer has also talked about Ambedkar's and Gandhi's role for the upliftment of the Dalits. The writer has presented the whole story in the psychological time. The reader comes to know about the whole growth as a Baldev's thought process. Suddenly the process is interrupted by a call from the D.S.P.

Baldev receives message that the Dalit Vas is set on fire by the upper caste mob. Baldev and D.S.P. go to Lakhpipal. Dalits have been crying as they have lost everything. The police has arrested the oppressors. When Baldev reaches Lakhpipal, he remembers his primary school teacher Shri Kanaiyalal Vyas and wishes to meet him. However, in such a turbulent situation he thinks it is not a proper time to meet to him. Baldev consoles the Dalits and orders the D.S.P. to arrange more police bandobast.

When Baldev is about to leave the village, an old man comes hurriedly, falls down and says, “Sir, my son has lost his balance. In spite of my denial, he has committed this crime; he is an offender. I apologize for his offence, please release him.” (2008, 94)

When Baldev gazes at him, he realizes that he is his teacher, Vyas sir. He bows his head and says:

Sir, have you recognized me?

No.

I am Baldev, son of Rama Jetha. You helped me in my admission in the Patan School.

Vyas Sir cried and said,

‘Did we get independence to see such a day?’ (2008, 94)

Thus, the end of the story opens two fronts. The first front presents Gaikwad, Ambedkar and Gandhi’s vision of India. In order to make India’s independence more fruitful they have started upliftment programmes for the Dalits and education was one of them. Gaikwad and Ambedkar both emphasized on the education of the Dalits.

The second front presents situation of Dalits in post-independence India. The Indian states have followed the path of Brahminism. The Indian constitution talks about egalitarian society, however, the state behaves like a protector of Brahminism. In such atmosphere, caste overrides the egalitarian concepts. Vyas sir is the man whose vision of India is based on Gaikwad and Ambedkar’s vision so he helps a Dalit boy to get admission in a school. While his son’s life is cultivated in the post-independence atmosphere, in which caste dominates. Therefore, he is an active agent opposing the reservation policy and uses violence to retain caste superiority. The poignant yet ambivalent question, ‘Did we get independence to see such a day?’ with which the writer ends the story and pushes the reader to think about the Indian social life especially after independence.

*Tame Paba ne Jyo?* [Have You Seen Paba?] (1981) is a short story written by Dheeraj Brahmhatt. The setting of the story is the anti-reservation agitation of 1981. A dog dies in front of the protagonist's house. The couple waits for Paba, the sweeper, to come and are happy on seeing him. The mistress starts telling Paba how the dog has died. There was no effect on Paba because of the great impact of the 'anti-reservation agitation' on his mind. Though the mistress describes at length the death of a dog, she does not think about the Dalits who have lost their lives in the anti-reservation agitation. Here, the writer exposes inhuman behaviour of the upper caste people.

Paba who hears the story of dog's death, thinks about the upper caste attitude for the unclean work. Their negative attitudes for the work and strong belief in the caste system have born the anti-reservation agitation. The upper caste people are against the socio-economic development of the Dalits. Therefore, they have demanded to remove reservations from such jobs. Paba's mind is filled with such thoughts and so he replies to the mistress, "Sir, we believe in sharing, sir, why don't you throw it out. The people of the whole street will give you bowlful grain" (27).

The couple is enraged on hearing Paba's outrageous words but they keep silence, as they are unable to dispose the dead dog. The mistress pleads to Paba but he does not yield to her request. On the contrary, he says mockingly, "We have kept such jobs reserved for the *savarnas*" (27).

Paba offers 'reservation' to the *savarnas*: "In Municipal Corporation, twenty sweepers are going to be recruited. Out of twenty, seven are reserved for Brahmins. If not filled immediately they will be carry forward. Twenty-five vacancies to be filled to lift the excreta of the open latrine. In these vacancies also, five seats are reserved for Patels" (27).

Thus, one can see how Paba answers those who just want to exploit the Dalits on the basis of varna system, and also talked about reservations in such unclean jobs. As I have earlier mentioned that, the upper caste people cannot see a Dalit as a doctor, engineer, as these are status jobs, or as a Class -1 & 2 officer. Only for cleaning and sweeping work, they need Dalits for which they never demand reservations as these kinds of work carry a stigma so they were reserved for the Dalits. Thus, the upper castes are shown in this story as not fighting to remove reservations but rather they are fighting to protect their own structure of reservation-the Varna system.

The Varna system has never given importance to those work in which physical labour is used. It has given value to that work which is performed as an in-house activity and not in the public, under the sun. The upper caste feared that because of reservations a day would dawn when they would be required to sweep roads, hone shoes, turn pots and graze cattle. They would be forced to perform labours that they deeply resented. Moreover, while performing the unclean duties the Dalits became untouchables and they are not able to erase this stigma though they work as a doctor, teacher, engineer, or a lawyer. Therefore, they opposed reservation and wanted to stop the rise of such a sun, which brings equality and dignity of labour.

As Kancha Ilaiah rightly points out in his book that in India basic productive occupations are despised and humiliated. He further says,

Our society suffers from lack of dignity of labour because in the framework of the caste system any process that involves labour is projected as undignified. This is reflected in the education system also. As Dr B.R. Ambedkar had said, the caste system is not just a division of labour, but also a division of labourers. The caste hierarchy draws a clear line between physical and mental labour. (8)

Unless this epistemological error of ‘Indignity of Labour’ is erased from the Indian education system, there is the least possibility of eradication of caste system as it is based on division of labour and labourers both.

That is why Paba first suggested to the protagonist to carry the dead dog which not only startled the protagonist but also shakes the beams of the Varna system. Upper castes will do clean jobs and lower castes i.e. Dalits will do unclean jobs. Therefore, upper castes will be respected and Dalits will be insulted. It is kind of a feudal system in which only upper caste people rule and where no democratic system can survive. As Ambedkar wanted to introduce democracy in India, he proposed to give reservations to SCs, STs, and SEBCs. In first phase, it was given to SCs and STs and later on to SEBCs because without reservations they too could not enter the arena of work already reserved by the Varna system. So in order to break Manu’s Brahminical feudal system, Ambedkar has to use the same system of reservations for the Dalits. Reservations were not only given to provide opportunities to Dalits but also to protect democracy that stands on three pillars of equality, fraternity, and liberty. Thus, the author has brilliantly presented and exposed the hypocrisy of the Brahminical ideology, which governs the Indian society.

Raju Solanki has not only explained the Varna system and its repercussions on the Indian society in his street-play *Bamanvad Ni Barakhadi* [ABCD of Brahminism] but also tried to unite SCs, STs and SEBCs who are fighting among themselves instead of fighting against the Varna system and its propagators. The author uses the street-play as a weapon for mobilization. He wants to mobilize these reserved category people for unity and thus answers to those forces who want to protect their own work culture based on Varna system.

There are two scenes in the play. In the first scene six characters – a student leader, a professor, a politician, a builder, an editor and a religious teacher are introduced along with the stage-manager. A student leader organizes a programme of burning the handcarts, small shops, slums, and buses to oppose reservations for SCs, STs, and SEBCs. A professor leads the student to boycott examinations to revive education which has become corrupted because of the reservations system. A builder sets on fire to the slums. A politician boycotts the assembly meeting to protest against the police oppression of the *savarnas* during the anti-reservation agitations. An Editor supports and propagates false propaganda of the upper caste people. A religious teacher opposes the reservations because it divides the Hindus, and to save Hindus communal violence is necessary. Therefore, he propagates communal riots.

The context for the play is the Gujarat government decision to include 82 castes under the reserved category of SEBCs in 1980. When these characters hear this news on radio, they severely criticize the decision in their own way. The builder reacts,

“I am afraid that it will create a problem of class-conflict. We castes like, Brahmins, Baniyas and Patels will lose economic power and status. Is it not a conspiracy to tie a broom on our back and a spittoon in our neck?”(6)

What the upper castes have done to the Dalits is revealed by the upper castes. Thus, they are exposed. After the government’s declaration all the six characters decide to spread the agitation in their own way. The anti-reservation agitation becomes severe and violent. It does not remain limited only to cities but also spread in the villages of the North and Central Gujarat.

In the second scene, there are four characters – Chhanabhai, Kalujee, Bhimsingh and Parmar. The second scene opens with Chhanabhai and Kalujee. Both of them discuss the reservations and agitations. The news is spread through newspapers that only SCs, STs, and

SEBCs have benefited in every field because of reservations and the upper castes have not been able to get anything. Chhanabhai discusses this news with Kalujee. Kalujee's reaction is,

“I haven't seen the reservation at all! Is it fat or thin, long or short, black or white? I cannot understand this at all. But I know one thing and also understand that our caste fellow an SEBC who is ruling as a chief minister is not seen by the Savarnas and so they are opposing the reservation system.” (13)

Each caste tries to compete with the other. Every caste feels that they are superior to the others. Moreover, this is the victory of the Brahminical ideology because it does not allow the backward castes to unite with the Dalits and tribal. Raju Solanki has pointed out that the structure of caste has enveloped the society. He has also shown how these reserved communities (i.e. SEBC, SC, ST) can be united and could counter the Brahminic ideology.

Parmar explains in detail how the agitation is against all the reserved categories. How the upper castes divide the SCs, STs, and SEBCs and rule over the society. He says

“... they will take you on the other side, why are you sitting with a Dalit? They are lower than you.” (16)

Kalujee and Chhanabhai agree with Parmar. Parmar explains the economic exploitation of the SEBCs by the Savarnas. He further says that the upper caste people do not follow untouchability with the SEBCs while they do it with the Dalits. Thus, though they have allowed physical touch, they have taken away all the economic opportunities from the SEBCs. The SEBCs also observe untouchability but are not able to understand how it will prevent them from their growth,

“Parmar: In the hotel, our cups and saucers are separate, broken earthen cups. In the shadow of the cactus or in the hollow of a tree they are kept. We have to clean it and then take tea. The owner of the hotel is a Thakor, an SEBC who will pour the tea from a certain height.” (16)

Further Parmar says:

“If anyone’s cattle dies in the village, they order us to drag it. For whole life of the cattle they eat milk and ghee of it and when it dies we have to drag its carcass? (16)

Bhimsinh says:

“We build dams on the rivers, we dig wells, step-wells and ponds. We build roads, highways, houses, palaces with our perspiration and blood, and our children are without clothes, helpless and enslaved.” (17)

Chhanabhai inquires about the advantage of removal of reservations to the upper castes.

Parmar says that this agitation will not allow unity among SCs, STs and SEBCs. Whether there is a reservation or not, the unemployment remains the same. For one post, ten thousand people apply, one will be recruited, the remaining will be unemployed. Because of unemployment if any one spreads the rumor that because of reservations we are not getting jobs, it will lead everyone to accept it as correct as the information shares the common ground of pain. Even the politicians are interested in such agitations because they do not have any solution to solve the problem of unemployment. So the young students will remain busy in this fight. This is so whether the Congress (I) rules or the BJP.

Towards the end, the writer explains in detail the origin and development of the Brahminical ideology. The writer mentions a booklet “Anamat Hatao” (Remove Reservations) written by Prof. Chinmay Patel in which he compares the reservations system with the piece of bread as the upper caste people give it to dogs and cows. Dialogues explain how Brahminism developed and conquered the Indian society.

Then in the end, the writer gives his idea of a solution to break the circle of Brahminism.

“Parmar : Now, we have to fight against caste-difference and class-difference both. We have to remove the caste and class differences.

Chhanabhai : We will remove the caste differences. It will not create more problems if class differences are not eradicated.

Parmar : They are like two sides of a coin. Whoever see any side, s/he has to fight strongly against it. If we keep one aside then the problem will not be solved.

Chhanabhai : Aye, Kalujee, when we demand our rights after creating awareness the upper castes people believed that it is a class-war. So don't worry about it. You pick scythe. I will take sickle. Call Bhimsing here and tell him to gather all the tribes. We will attack. We will unite. We will destroy this tip of iron very easily. (28)

Thus, Raju Solanki has not only presented the problem but also exposed the hypocrisy of the upper castes and the hollowness of the Brahminical ideology. He has also suggested the solution of unity among the reserved categories.

The political elite introduced reservations first for the SC and ST, and later for the SEBC for political exigency to catch votes as well as to diffuse the rising aspirations of the deprived classes. There is neither any perspective nor desire to use the reservation as a device for social transformation even of a limited nature within the existing system. It has been reduced to a mere political gimmick for electoral purposes. In addition, even for that, the political elite do not have the political acumen to stand by the decisions against pressures from the dominant castes and classes. The anti-reservation agitations of Gujarat have proved that it is almost impossible to unite all the deprived castes for any mass struggle on caste lines to protect their rights. They are not only divided into several high and low status groups among themselves, but also continue to subscribe the Brahminical ideology which was and still is alive in different forms in Gujarat.