

# **Gujarati Dalit Poetry: Influence of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

## **Introduction:**

Today  
The self sits on the open palm  
On the tips of the fingers  
A shining word hisses.  
Since how many centuries  
The blood  
Sleeping covered with a sheet of darkness  
Breaking all the shores  
Riding on the fingers  
Galloping  
Rushes  
Roaring.

“The Movement Day” Madhukant Kalpit

Gujarati Dalit poetry, as a recent cultural phenomenon, emerged as if somebody has woken up a sleeping person. My thesis is an attempt to read and understand Gujarati Dalit poetry that is written by marginalized voices. This thesis focuses on the question of caste and its expression in Gujarati Dalit Poetry. It concentrates on the study of Gujarati Dalit Poetry to observe how it has been directly or indirectly written under the influence of Gandhi and Ambedkar.

The aim of my dissertation has been to examine Gujarati Dalit poetry in the context of the Dalit movement in Gujarat. I identify different trends, the thematic patterns and major issues relating to Gujarati Dalit poetry and discuss them in the light of modern theories of caste. I also critically analyze some poems in the light of social and political ideas of Gandhi and Ambedkar, more specifically their ideas on the caste system. My central argument in the thesis is that

Gujarati Dalit poetry has been trying to offer resistance to the hegemonic upper caste Hindu social structure. The poetry also offers a strong alternative to the mainstream literary practice, and transfers Dalit discourse from the objective position to the subjective. I attempt to show that how Gandhi and Ambedkar, with their social and political ideologies, consistently hover over creative process of Gujarati Dalit poetry.

My thesis focuses on caste as a social structure and presents a study of heterogeneous manifestations of caste as well as perceptions of caste as experienced by people who are at the lowest stratum in the caste hierarchy. In India, caste divisions are dominant in the Hindu religion. People of all the four *Varnas*: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra belong to the same religion but are vastly different in their social status. There are also some castes which do not fall in any of the *Varnas*. They are considered as the *ati-Shudras* or the *Untouchables*. The caste system is based on hierarchy where caste is determined by birth. The concept of purity determines the relationship between individuals of one social group (here caste/*varna*) with other individuals (inside and outside the caste/*varna*). It is observed that as a consequence of their social status, they also bear different psychological characteristics. Their psychological condition can be seen as a result of their social circumstances, their traditions and their relations with other *varnas*. People who belong to the *shudra varna* and *ati-Shudra* consider themselves, and are considered by other *varnas*, as socially backward people. Generally, they are engaged in professions which are traditionally considered low and demeaning. People of this *varna* have to suffer indignities from people of other *varnas* and more ironically even from their own *varna*. For centuries, the Shudras and *Ati-Shudras*<sup>1</sup> have been discriminated against on account of their

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<sup>1</sup>According to *Varnavyavastha*, many of the castes, particularly the artisan castes, though they fall into the Shudra *varna*, they do not suffer from the stigma of untouchability as the *Ati-Shudra* suffer. In the modern times they are

birth and have systematically been assigned lowly occupations. This socially excluded community has, over the last few decades, evolved a specific kind of expression to convey their feelings of anger, despair and dissent through language, particularly through poetry.

‘Dalit’ is a self-designation for groups of people who were regarded as the untouchables. The term ‘Dalit’ has acquired a great deal of political and social connotations. The term, ‘Dalit’ became popular with the advent of the Dalit Panthers, a political group formed in 1972 in the state of Maharashtra. In Marathi, ‘Dalit’ means ‘ground’, ‘crushed’, ‘broken down’ and ‘reduced to pieces’. ‘Dalit’ has become a substitute for Scheduled Castes and Untouchables. Yet it is argued that ‘Dalit’ does not refer merely to a caste identity. For the Dalit Panthers, it is a very comprehensive term as it includes, “members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion” (Omvedt 2008b: 72). But for those who use a sociological analysis of caste, ‘Dalit’ still means, “the people within Hindu Society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation” (Webster in Michael 2007:76-77). ‘Dalit’ is a contemporary substitute for ‘Harijan’ or ‘Children of God’, as Gandhi called them. Today, most untouchable castes prefer to use the term ‘Dalit’ as a marker for assertion of identity. Prior to this adoption of the label ‘Dalit’ as an identity marker, the untouchables were addressed by different names in Gujarat such as *Chamar*, *Dhed*, *Achhut*, *Antyaja*, *Panchama* and so on. These caste names carried with them stigma, segregation and contempt at large. ‘Dalit’ is a term coined and put into practice by Dalits themselves. It conveys a sense of unity, inclusion and dignity. At the same time, it reveals the rejection of the age old caste system. The term ‘Dalit’ had become widespread since 1930s and

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generally not identified as Shudras. Here in the thesis, I have used the term “Shudra” for the untouchable castes. They are also named as ‘ex- untouchable caste’, particularly after the independence.

1940s. In 1937-38, K.M. Munshi, the president of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, used the term ‘Dalit’ in his presidential address on the occasion of 13<sup>th</sup> Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Conference.<sup>2</sup> Zaverchand Meghani, a well-known poet of the Gandhian era, also used the word ‘Dalit’ in one of his songs which appears in the collection *Yugvandana* (1935).

‘Dalit’ has “a greater ability to reach out to the large sections of the people”, argues Gopal Guru (2005: 67). The term ‘Dalit’ offers us a revolutionary meaning to a specific category. It is, as Gopal Guru says, “not a mere linguistic construction but on the contrary is constructed through the revolutionary struggle of the Dalit people” (67). Gandhi’s ‘Harijan’, a euphemism for untouchable was not so inclusive and not radical; it has rather an odour of upper caste sympathy. The term ‘Harijan’ has already lost its political vigour and it is no longer used in its original sense by politicians, academicians or social activists except by some Gandhians. ‘Harijan’ includes only untouchables whereas the term ‘Dalit’ offers larger possibilities; both Dalit and non-Dalit Indians see the term relating to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The term ‘Harijan’ was imposed whereas ‘Dalit’ has emerged after a long struggle by the Dalit people.

The use of the category ‘Dalit’ by the Dalit Panthers offers a distinct understanding which represents those who have been depressed and oppressed by the upper caste. In a very specific sense, the category Dalit involves the caste and religious dimensions of Dalit exploitations. Many scholars like Ghanshyam Shah include converted untouchable Muslims in this category. Neerav Patel, a Gujarati Dalit poet, shows his aversion to the Dalit Panthers’ inclusive definition of ‘Dalit’. He believes that to serve political purpose the definition of Dalit is

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<sup>2</sup> *Parishad Pramukona Bhasano* (Speeches of the Presidents of the Parishad). 13<sup>th</sup> Conference. Ahmedabad: Gujarati ShityaParishad,pg 514-515 and also quoted in B.N. Vankar, “Gujarati Dalit Sahitya: Vihngavlokan” [Gujarati Dalit Literature: A Birdview] *ShabdaShrusti*, November 2003.pg.145.

‘stretched to its extremes’ (Patel 2011: 03). He is more specific and includes only those who suffer from the stigma of untouchability. ‘Dalit’ becomes an imposition when we consider the Dalit Panthers’ definition seriously because it includes ‘the working people’, ‘women’, and ‘all who are being exploited’ without any class or caste distinction. For example, even those women of upper castes, who may or may not be socially or economically exploited, will not identify themselves as Dalits. They usually and firmly consider themselves of higher status than any Dalit woman. They do not suffer the kind of segregation that an untouchable woman suffers. On the other hand, a Dalit (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe) woman is doubly marginalized, as a woman and as a Dalit too. The same argument is also applicable to the category ‘the working people’.

Dr Ambedkar used the word “Dalit” in his Marathi speeches and in his work *The Untouchables* (1948). He translated ‘Dalit’ as ‘broken men’. In 1930, there was a Depressed Classes newspaper in Pune called *Dalit Bandhu*.<sup>3</sup> Dr B.R. Ambedkar in his fortnightly publication *Bahishkrut Bharat* defines the term Dalit. He says: “Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes” “Brahminical ideology” (Guru 2005: 69).<sup>4</sup> Thus the category Dalit is used in different ways by different scholars. Moreover, it is also used by various political parties and activists all over India. However, it seems that the category Dalit has not become a part of everyday language or a usage of the common people. It is still on the superficial level and many caste Hindus still use the

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<sup>3</sup>For detailed discussion, see John C.B. Webster. “Who is Dalit?” S.M. Michael. *Dalits in Modern India*. Pp 76-88.

<sup>4</sup>It can be perceived while going through his writings and speeches that Dr Ambedkar did not use the term ‘Dalit’ very often. He preferred different terms depending on the contemporary situation and purpose— social or political or administrative. He used the terms ‘Untouchables’, ‘Depressed Classes’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ more often.

traditional category, 'Harijan' given by Gandhi or 'Achut'. Thus the category Dalit hasn't closed off its linkages with its earlier meanings.

Guru in his article "Understanding the category '*Dalit*'" tried to establish the category Dalit in terms of 'its hermeneutic function, its epistemic roots and its ontological basis' (2005: 70). He firmly believes that the category of Buddhist cannot be in opposition to Dalit and Dalit to Bahujan. He is of the view that the category Dalit is "historically arrived at, sociologically presented and discursively constituted" (76). Though it is 'discursively constituted', the dynamics of politics require constant amendments and manipulations in its meaning and implementation. Mayavati's shift from Dalit to Bahujan and Bahujan to Sarvajan is an example of political compulsion or a strategic manipulation of the category 'Dalit'. For political purposes, the Dalit Panthers' definition of 'Dalit' is useful because it is quite inclusive. But when we concentrate on a specific mode of expression, especially literature, 'Dalit' has certain implicit meanings. It conveys the revolutionary fervour that has emerged through a long struggle.

When we consider Dalit literature we should inevitably remember the inspirational force behind this literary creativity. The Dalit literary movement is a progressive social movement. I believe that three major personalities—Jotirao Phule, MK Gandhi and BR Ambedkar have significantly influenced the Dalit movement. It is their philosophy and socio-political activities that have inspired and shaped the Dalit literature in general. Firstly, Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) forcefully rejected the caste system and social inequalities. For Phule, the primary opposition was between Shudra, Ati-Shudra and women on one side and the *Shethji-Bhatji* (Moneylender and Brahmins) on the other side. His criticism of caste system simultaneously included the question of women's emancipation. He raised certain important questions and provided a new reference and perspective as a critique of the Hindu social order. He founded the *Satya Shodhak*

*Samaj* which became the turning point in the socio-religious life of the Dalits in Maharashtra in the late nineteenth century. He made people think in new directions and inspired many to question the established social norms. He believed that without social equality human rights could not be observed. For him, the very thought of social equality is the basis of human dignity.

### **Gandhi and Gujarati Dalit Poetry:**

After the arrival of Gandhi (1869-1948) in the Indian political sphere; Dalits found a strong reformer and advocate of their cause. Gandhi considered all human beings equal. He also wanted to establish his principle of equality in society through his deeds. He had to face many obstacles in doing so and it seems that his efforts were whole-hearted. He was misunderstood by many but his aim was to reform society. He wanted to remove untouchability. He gave the same importance to all manual labour, whether it was sweeping or drafting a letter. By the spinning wheel and weaving activity, he consciously or unconsciously gave importance to the work of the Vankars, a Dalit caste. As a consequence, spinning and weaving were taken up by many people in India, whether *Brahmin* or *Baniya*, who joined the freedom movement. In all the Ashrams established by Gandhi, sweeping was done by the inhabitants of the Ashram without any caste discrimination.

After 1915, Gandhi became a major inspirational force for Gujarati literature. His approach to the freedom movement was quite different from that of the earlier leaders. He showed keen interest in social issues along with political issues. He harmonized social, intellectual and political movements. His impact was so powerful that he got responses from various strata of society. Before this period, Gujarati literature did not pay attention to the issues

of the downtrodden. Gandhi's movement brought in the realism which addressed the issues of 'dumb', the downtrodden people. We can find his influence on each form of literature of the period. In fact, this period is known as the 'Gandhi Yug' in contemporary Gujarati literary historiography.

Gandhi, at the convention of Gujarati Sahitya Prishad in 1936, advised creative writers "to begin writing for our dumb masses rather than for our city-dwellers." (CWMG Vol.63: 420) It is clear that by 'dumb' population he meant the miserable masses of society. Gandhi inspired and guided an idealistic generation of writers to look towards the direction of the "dumb". Gandhi wanted learned writers to use literature as a means of reform and awareness. Gujarati literature during the Gandhian age aimed at raising voice against the problem of social exclusion. So, the issues which were of value to Gandhi like truth, non-violence, peace, anti-untouchability and love towards the oppressed became major themes of literary creation. The Dalits, oppressed, suppressed, peasants, illiterates and women found their place in literary expressions. Kishorilal Masharwala, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Mahadevbhai Desai, Swami Anand, R.V. Pathak, R.V. Desai and Dhumketu were some of the major Gujarati writers of the Gandhian school of thought. Poets like Sundaram, Umashankar Joshi, Snehrashmi, Karshandas Manek, Zaverchand Meghani and Indulal Gandhi show influences of Gandhi's ideology. Dalit characters and their feelings from an upper caste perspective were represented in Gujarati poetry for the very first time during this period.

Sundaram, a well-known Gujarati poet of the Gandhian age, experienced poverty and social inequality himself. So, he presents such experiences in his poetry. On the other hand, Gandhi's social movement ignited certain emotion in him to write poetry to address social issues. He wrote *Koya Bhagat ni Kadavi Vani* [Bitter Talk of Koya Bhagat] to bring harmony into



society. '*Bhangadi*' [An Untouchable Woman], '*Vadko apo Chhas*' [Give Me Bowlful Buttermilk] and '*Tintodi*' [A Bird] are his main poems which give expression to the feelings of the downtrodden classes. His poem '*Child Vishnu's Guilt*' expresses love towards the Dalit community in particular and humanity in general.

Inspired by Gandhi, Umashakar Joshi wrote about the oppressed people in his poetry. In poems like '*Panchali*', '*Simadana Paththar Par*' [On the milestone], '*Ukarado*' [Garbage mound] and '*Vasliwalo*' [Flute Seller] he gave voice to the pain and sufferings of the Dalits. Joshi's *Gangotri*, an anthology of poetry, shows his bent towards Gandhi's social philosophy. Zaverchand Meghani also condemned inequality in his folk songs. '*Chhelli Salam*' [Last Salute], '*Ghan Re Bole*' etc. are the poems composed by Meghani which seem to show the influence of Gandhi. These poems raise issues related to the poor.

Snehrashmi's poetry shows his love toward the Dalits. In two anthologies of his poetry; *Ardhya* and *Panghat*, he tries to spread awareness of various social issues and he preaches Gandhi's social doctrine. Krishnalal Shridharani conveys his strong dislike to social and economic inequality in his collections, *Lamp* and *Punrapi* [Once more]. Karashandas Manek in his poems like '*Shane Avu Thay Chhe?*' [Why Does it Happen?], satirizes discrimination between the poor and the rich and between the high and the low. Indulal Gandhi, a minor poet of the Gandhian era, shows his inclination towards Gandhi's concept of social equality in his poems like '*Bhani*' [Niece] and '*Andhali Ma ne Kagal*' [A Letter from a Blind Mother]. For the modern Gujarati Dalit poetry, Gandhi and the critique of his ideology have remained significant subjects to deal with.

## **Ambedkar and Gujarati Dalit Poetry:**

Dr Ambedkar (1891-1956) is widely considered to be the father of the Constitution of India in recognition of his role as the Chair of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India. Ambedkar attempted to establish equality by law. However, mere equality before the Law, as Ambedkar himself says, cannot achieve social equality and it has not been achieved yet. But the law has, to some extent, given some social security to Dalits. Many Dalits consider Ambedkar's interventions to be more important than Gandhi's endeavours for social reform. From 1920 to 1956, Ambedkar played an active role as a social and political reformer. He believed that there would be no end to agony and humiliation of the Dalit community, if the caste system continued to exist. The exclusion of Dalits is based on birth into a particular caste; it is not by choice and it cannot be escaped until death. Ambedkar was against the caste system. He wanted to bury it, with its ugly by product of untouchability. He looked at the problem of untouchability as an aspect of caste. He argued that it was not the injustice committed by one individual against another but is produced by the logic of caste.

Three major events in the year 1920 are landmarks responsible for Dalit literary activities in Maharashtra— (1) Dr. Ambedkar became the president of a public federation of untouchables in Mangaon (Maharashtra)<sup>5</sup> (2) *Mook Nayak*, a daily, was started by him and (3) he organized *Akhil Bhartiya Bahishkrit Samaj Parishad* in which people from all over India were invited to participate. These three events provided the platform to Dalit ideologues to propagate their views. The Mahad Satyagraha (1926), the first untouchable liberation movement, to drink water from the town tank, was the result of Ambedkar's organizational activities that he started in 1920s. The Mahad Satyagraha did not end in getting water but it reflected Dalit anger towards

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<sup>5</sup>ShahuChattrapati, the Maharaja of Kolhapur met Ambedkar in 1920 and organized a two-day conference at Managaon on 19 and 20 March to felicitate Ambedkar. (See in SharmilaRege. *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahminical Patriarchy*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013. Pg.37)

the Hindu scriptures and Brahminism with the public burning of the *Manusmriti*. By the 1930s, Ambedkar emerged as the most articulate Dalit leader. He presented the points of view of the Depressed Classes before the Simon Commission in 1928. He was also invited to the Round Table Conference in 1930. His clash with Gandhi regarding the separate electorates to untouchables created a debate on the caste system. The events of Gandhi's fast and the Poona Pact (1932) disillusioned Ambedkar and the untouchables about the limitations of the Hindu reformism. These events opened up the radical period for Ambedkar. Without relying on Gandhi's reform measures, he began to offer the radical ways to get rid of the caste system. In 1935 at the Yeola Conference, he announced: "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu" (Keer 253). He asked his people to stop the Kalaram temple satyagraha, considering the futility of such agitations. He emphasized to create a separate community outside the Hindu fold. In 1946, Dr Ambedkar established 'The People's Education Society' and started Siddhartha College (Bombay). He emphasized the importance of education for the Dalits and because of his political and social efforts; some Dalits got a chance to access education. The educated Dalit youth established '*Siddharth Sahitya Sangh*' in 1950 which later on transformed itself into *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh*. The above events played a major role in the cultivation of the Dalit consciousness throughout India. Magazines like *Mook Nayak*, *Bahiskrit Bharat*, *Janata* and *Prabuddh Bharat* played a significant role in encouraging Marathi Dalit Literature. In 1958-1959 two Dalit literary meets were organized in Mumbai and the third was held in Poona in 1961.

In Gujarat, the Ambedkarite movement had started from 1924. The reports of Dr. Ambedkar's social and political activities were published in various Gujarati magazines. As literacy increased among the Dalits, they began to give expression to their anguish in creative

writing. Ambedkar advised the creative writers: “One should not forget that in our country marginalized, Dalits and poor have their own world. Understand their pain and their suffering and devote your creative power to uplift their lives. Real humanity lies in it only.”<sup>6</sup> The arguments presented by Ambedkar for the emancipation of untouchables captured the space in Gujarati Dalit magazines. These magazines made the Gujarati Dalit aware about the Ambedkarite social and political thinking in the 1930s and 1940s. In Gujarat, Dalits offered considerable resistance to the incidents of caste discrimination at various places in Gujarat in the early 1940s. Thus, the Ambedkarite movement in Maharashtra and its influences in Gujarat region began to cultivate Dalit consciousness among the Untouchables in Gujarat. The influence, in written forms, was first captured in the journalistic activities of the Dalit magazines and quite late in the literary activities. In 1956, after Dr Ambedkar’s death, many amateur Dalit poets and mill workers paid tribute to him in the verse forms in various Dalit magazines. It is believed that it was the first conscious literary expression in Gujarat that dealt with Ambedkar and his activities as a subject.

In Gujarat, after the establishment of a Dalit Panthers’ unit in 1974, literary activity flourished. The Panthers’ activities made Dalits aware about the Ambedkarite ideology. *Aakrosh* and *Panther*, the two magazines of the Dalit Panthers, ignited the literary spirit among the Dalits of Gujarat. On 14 April 1978, on the occasion of Ambedkar’s birth anniversary, *Aakrosh* published a special issue on Dalit poetry. Ramesh Chandra Parmar, the editor of *Aakrosh* and member of the Dalit Panthers comments: “Its (Dalit Panthers’) poetry journal *Aakrosh* and mouth organ *Panther* has contributed immensely in defining Dalit literature and keeping young generation of Dalit writers engaged in the literary pursuit” (Patel 1987: Preface). The first

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<sup>6</sup> See in Patil Parmar 2004: 01 and also in *Shabd Srusti*, a Literary Journal published by Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, November 2003.p145.

anthology of Gujarati Dalit poetry, *Dalit Kavita* was published in 1981. Edited by Ganpat Parmar and Manishi Jani, it contained one hundred and thirty nine poems by sixty nine poets. The publication of Gujarati Dalit magazines like *Aakrosh*, *Kalo Suraj*, *Garud*, *Dinbandhu*, *Panther*, *Dalitbandhu*, *Naya Marg*, *Dalit Mitra*, *Samanta*, *Hayati*, *Dalit Chetna* etc. have played a prominent role in the establishment of Gujarati Dalit literature.

### **Structure of the Dissertation:**

My thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter “Question of Caste: Gandhi and Ambedkar” discusses the question of caste and its implications for the Dalits. Caste as an important social category operates in almost every domain of life in India. The social relations, political ideologies and strategies, economic crisis and development and literary expressions largely reflect the influence of caste system. The pre-modern social conditions in India were highly driven by the caste norms; and they have not left their grip yet. The chapter discusses the role of caste system in the context of ‘modernity’ when the industrial developments, modern forms of livelihood and new social and economic changes have considerably influenced the institution of caste system. The chapter discusses how Gandhi and Ambedkar recognize and categorize the caste system in different contexts—social, economic, religious and political. To eradicate untouchability, Gandhi took a reformative stance whereas Ambedkar took a revolutionary one. Ambedkar, grasping the impossibility of reforming the caste system, to bring equality into the social structure, advocated annihilation of the caste system itself. Thus, the chapter discusses the caste as a social category; and also throws light on the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the light of modern theories on caste.

The second chapter “Gujarati Dalit Poetry: A Survey” tracks the history of Gujarati Dalit poetry, its origin and development. The act of dealing with the verse form by the Dalits can be tracked from the mediaeval age to the modern period but the practice of poetry writing for the purpose of protest and assertion of identities is a recent phenomenon. The lower classes/castes got chance to acquire formal education largely during the late colonial and post-colonial period. The education coupled with strong anti-Brahmin movements in different parts of the country in the nineteenth and twentieth century brought social and political awareness among the lower castes and made them express their discontent in literary forms, especially poetry. As a result, we find Dalit poetry as politically charged. In Gujarat, the Dalit movement can be traced from the 1930s. Ambedkar’s active participation in social and political movements caught the attention of untouchables of Gujarat in the early 1930s. It was first reflected in Dalits’ journalistic activities and gradually in literary activities. In Gujarat, many Dalits (mostly the first generation of educated Dalit youth) started little magazines to report and advocate Ambedkar’s ideology and activities. The chapter follows the journey of these magazines. During the freedom movement, Dalits became more aware about their social and civic rights. They offered stern resistance to the atrocities of the caste Hindus at various places in Gujarat in 1930s and 1940s. The reporting of such incidents of resistance helped in creating the Dalit consciousness. Later, in the 1970s, a unit of the Dalit Panthers was started in Gujarat and systematic and organized efforts were put into practice to mould the Dalit consciousness. In 1978, the official inauguration of Dalit Literature took place with the publication of a poetry journal *Aakrosh* by the Dalit Panthers. The literary magazines like *Garud*, *Kalo Suraj*, *Dinbandhu*, *Hayati*, *Dalit Chetna* etc. played important role in creating readership and giving space to the emerging creative writers/poets. The educated youth began to express their concerns in literary forms. Eventually, the poets like Babaldas

Chavda, Dalpat Chauhan, Shankar Painter, Harish Mangalam, Praveen Gadhvi, Pathik Parmar, Neerav Patel, Chandu Maheriya, Sahil Parmar etc. emerged with their revolutionary poetry collections. The chapter also deals with the events of anti-reservation agitation and their impact on the Dalit poetry. The anti-reservation agitations/riots in 1981 and 1985 substantially affected the social relations of the Dalits and the caste Hindus. The discourse on the concept of reservation has also influenced the Dalit poetry, and consequently in 1980s, the literary activity accelerated and dealt with the issue of violence and ‘modern’ forms of untouchability. The chapter also surveys the translation activities in the field of Dalit literature.

The third chapter, “Shankar Painter: Dalit Struggle and the Question of Folk Culture”, deals with Shankar Painter’s poetry and the mode of articulation that he employs. Painter started composing poetry in the late 1960s. His father used to sing *bhajans* and folksongs. His family’s spiritual Guru Laxanandji also composed *bhajans* and songs. Laxanandji composed bhajans and song taking Dr. Ambedkar and his ideology as a subject early in the 1940s. So, the family background charged with folk-singing traditions and Ambedkar’s teaching influenced Painter’s poetry. Later in 1970s, his stay at Ahmedabad brought him in contact with Ambedkarite activities of the Dalit Panthers and other individuals and groups involved in Dalit movements. Painter uses the folk rhythm and tunes to make his poetry suitable for singing with music. The art of singing which he inherited from his spiritual guru and from his father, he develops for the cause of Dalit movement. After the anti-reservation riots in 1981 and 1985, he changed his ways from describing the conditions of Dalits and moved towards a much more action-oriented and rebellious poetry. In this later phase, he enacted his poetry by singing it in public to mobilize the masses. His poetry volumes *Bungiyo Vage* [Drum Beating] (1984), *Dateda na Devata* [God of Sickle] (1989) and *Hachche Hachchu Bol ne Fadya?* [Tell the Truth] (2010) are mostly written

in folk song style and in a dialect of north Gujarat region. The chapter discusses the folk traditions in general and their role in creating public space. It also discusses Dalit folk and spiritual tradition of Gujarat which has given many folk-singers and spiritual masters. The chapter explores the links of Gujarati Dalit spiritual tradition with Kabir and Raidas, the bhakti poets of the mediaeval period. The chapter traces the Dalit folk and spiritual tradition and locates Painter's poetry in its context. Painter as a performer of poetry participates in various protests. His active participation in the Sambarda Satyagraha, with his poetry recitations, has its own historical value. His poetry often presents the incidents of atrocities with details. His poetry, in a sense, is a document of inhumaneness of the Caste Hindus and Dalits' response to it. The chapter discusses his poetry in the context of its value as a historical document. Thus, the chapter analyses Painter's poetry to understand the facets of the Dalit movement in Gujarat, its influences along with the poet's development and his role in general.

The fourth chapter, "Praveen Gadhvi: Village, *Vas* and the Question of Authenticity", deals with Praveen Gadhvi's poetry in order to understand the role of village in the Hindu social structure and its effects on the Dalits' life. The village as a social and political category occupies a major space in Gandhi and Ambedkar's thinking. The category village places Gandhi and Ambedkar on two different axes. For Gandhi, village is a site where possibility of human emancipation is greater, while, for Ambedkar village represents backwardness and limits to the chances of Dalits' emancipation. The chapter discusses the idea of village as envisioned by Gandhi and Ambedkar and its reflection in Gadhvi's poetry. The chapter also concentrates on the location of the *Vas*, a Dalit ghetto to comprehend the Dalits' place in the larger geographical and social space. The chapter deliberates the issue of the authenticity of lived experience which is often considered to be the central criterion in the writing and evaluation of Dalit texts. Praveen



Gadhvi, an OBC (Other Backward Caste) poet, presents his understanding of the Dalit issues in his volumes, *Bayonet* (1985) and *Dalit Vani* (2006). Later on, his selected poems were translated into English by the poet himself and published in a collection *The Voice of the Last* (2008). His involvement in the Dalit movement and Dalit literary activity since its commencement has established him as a Dalit poet in the context of Gujarati Dalit writing. The chapter draws attention to the relationship between lived experiences and authenticity; and examines Gadhvi's poetry in this context.

The fifth chapter, "Neerav Patel: Modernity and Caste Consciousness" discusses Patel's poetry. Patel has been composing poetry since 1970s. The Dalit Panther published two of his anthologies of poetry in English—*Burning from Both the Ends* (1980) and *What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue* (1987). His Gujarati Dalit poetry is collected in *Bahishkrit Phoolo* [Ostracized Flowers] (2006). The translation of *Bahishkrit Phoolo* into English was published as *Severed Tongues Speak Out* in 2013. The chapter examines Patel's poetry in the context of modernity. Modernity may have brought the modern ways of production but it falls short in bringing the modern human values such as equality and liberty for the Dalits. Patel's poetry, presenting both rural and urban life, exposes the continuity of inhuman treatment to the Dalits. The chapter examines how Patel's poetry reveals Gandhi's 'village' and Ambedkar's 'city' as utopias. The chapter also discusses the role of poetry as a historical document. Patel often employs the act of poetry writing in the form of history writing. His poetry presents incidents of atrocities on Dalits with minute details. His poem "Jetalpur Massacre: A Report" has its own political-social value; it exposes the casteist and feudal mind-set of the caste Hindus behind the murder of a Dalit youth, Shakrabhai. Another important feature of Patel's poetry is the theme of hierarchy within the Dalits. In Gujarat, the hierarchy within Dalits is very sharp. The identity 'Dalit' has not been

able to eradicate the sub-caste consciousness. Patel's poetry addresses this inequality and brings out the connotations of this inequality. The chapter also, drawing examples from Patel's poetry, focuses on the issue of sub-caste consciousness.

The sixth chapter "Sahil Parmar: Poetry, Caste and the History of Dalit Education" discusses Dr Ambedkar's slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organize' and its reflection in Gujarati Dalit poetry. The chapter argues that education is a major weapon that encourages and empowers the downtrodden and the oppressed to fight against the unjust social order. The chapter traces the efforts that have been made in accessing formal education to the lower castes from the late nineteenth century. It tracks the efforts made by the British regime, the Christian missionaries and the princely states to democratize the formal education. Ambedkar's intervention during and after the colonial period in this matter is also discussed. The chapter discusses Gandhi's thoughts on education and his new education scheme, *Nai Talim*. Emphasizing the importance of education and struggle in acquiring it to Dalit lives, Sahil Parmar concentrates his attack on the unjust social order through his poetry collections, *Vyatha Pachisi* (1984), *Ek Rakabi Futi* (1991) and *Mathaman* (2004). The chapter examines Parmar's poetry in the context of the Dalit movement for liberation in general. The chapter reveals that poetry as a weapon and as an instrument for spreading awareness is often used effectively. Parmar, along with other Gujarat Dalit poets, uses this medium for spreading the message of Phule and Ambedkar.

The concluding chapter summarizes the arguments made in the above chapters and suggests further areas and directions for research in the field of Dalit literary movement. The chapter discusses the continuous presence of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the Dalit poetry in the form of arguments, aspirations and personality. I conclude with an assessment of Gandhi's and Ambedkar's place in the context of Gujarati Dalit poetry.