

Chapter 4

Print culture, culture of translation and Christian public sphere in Colonial Gujarat

Public sphere is a concept used for the first time by Jürgen Habermas in his *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. Habermas has argued here that the eighteenth-century world of London coffee houses and clubs provided new occasions for free exchange of discourse. These exchanges enabled the emergence of the possibility of reformist, egalitarian public debate. A study of the print material of any kind cannot take place without understanding the ways in which the processes of reading define the textual meaning and the question of readership as well. My inquiry about print and the formation of the public sphere draws from this approach towards print as a key phenomenon that shapes the public sphere in crucial ways. In this chapter, utilizing Habermas's insights, I reflect upon early Christian print culture in colonial Gujarat. I also draw upon the views of Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of actually existing democracy", Veena Naregal's *Language, Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere: Western Indian under Colonialism*, Charu Gupta's *Sexuality, Obscenity and Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* and P. Sanal Mohan's *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* to enable me to analyze the role of print culture in the constitution of the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat. These writers have taken the idea of public sphere from Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in which he discusses the print culture and public sphere in Europe in the 18th and 19th century.

Fraser discusses Habermas' concept of public sphere and adds her own views on it. Habermas in his work discusses the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas 89), whereas Fraser argues that there never was and never should be just one public sphere, but rather a number of public spheres (Habermas, 57). Habermas defines the meaning of public sphere as "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. He means to say that it is a space in which citizens discuss about their common affairs. This space is conceptually different from spaces made available by the state (Fraser, 519)". The public sphere is an arena where citizens criticize the state. The public sphere according to Habermas is also conceptually distinct from the official economy. It is a theatre for debating not a market for buying and selling. The Christian church in modern times can be considered as different public sphere where Christians come together and discuss about their common interest. In the public sphere, in Habermasian sense, printed material was used for conducting critical debates (Fraser, 520). Newspapers, magazines, and other print media were used as the medium of the discourse in the colonial Christian public sphere in the same way as such media helped to consolidate a general public sphere. In colonial Christian Gujarat, print culture helped the new religious public to grow. The emergence of new cultures of print and translation enabled the emergence of a new public sphere.

Habermas's concept of public sphere is that of an open space (Habermas, 5). It is open for everyone for participating and giving their individual opinions. Though people with different cultures with common interest comes together, they have discussion where everyone were free to share their opinion. But Fraser argued that public sphere in the Habermasian sense has many limitations. She quotes scholars like Joan Landes, Mary Ryan, and Geoff Eley to support her

argument that “despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions” (Fraser- 521). According to Landes, the first and very important exclusion was gender. She argues that: “the ethos of the new republican public sphere in France was constructed in deliberate opposition to that of a more woman- friendly salon culture that the republicans stigmatized as ‘artificial’, ‘effeminate’, and ‘aristocratic’. Consequently, a new, austere style of public speech and behavior was promoted, a style deemed ‘rational’, ‘virtues’, and ‘manly’” (qtd.in Fraser, 521).

Landes points out that the public sphere excluded woman from the discussions. Women did not and could not participate in the debates. If you want to participate in the public sphere discourse you have to be a man. Women had no right to speak in the public sphere. In early colonial Gujarat, too, women did not have the right to gain education so they did not have access to the printed material as well as the translations that were so critical to the shaping of the Christian public sphere that was in the process of forming in colonial Gujarat (Fraser 522). Fraser here considers Habermas’ concept to be a liberal conception of a public sphere. Geoff Eley also argues that in the liberal public sphere as proposed by other exclusions also accompanied to the gender exclusion. The other exclusions that Eley discusses are rooted in the process of class formations. These exclusions were essential to the liberal public sphere not only in France but also in England and Germany. He claims that the public which participated in the liberal public sphere was civil society. Eley argues that in an ideal world in this arena everyone should have equal access. But on the contrary, it was in this arena, the training ground and the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men where they were coming to see themselves as a ‘universal class’ and preparing themselves to govern. In this discussion the “citizens interacted as equals with equals but each

trying to do their best to excel” (Fraser 522). Habermas, in this work, emphasizes the role of the public sphere as “the way for the civil society to articulate their own interest and for the self-interpretation developed through the public opinion (Habermas 15). Habermas has also suggested that the literary public sphere plays a very important role in the development of any individual person.

The Public Sphere in Colonial India

Naregal in her work *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere* says that because of print, the existing ideological norms and structures changed. This is similar to the views of Habermas who argues that print affects or changes the social, economic, as well as political norms and structures. Naregal shows, how in the context of colonial India, at the cultural level, print introduced very important changes in the assumptions about language, literacy, and the literary (Naregal 146). The early print culture as well as the culture of translation in Gujarat and in India noted a huge change socially, politically, as well as culturally. Print both enabled the spread of education and supported the literacy engendered by education. The culture changed, and with that, the public sphere changed also. Both, print culture and the culture of translation went hand in hand in building and consolidating this new public sphere.

In this context it is useful to refer to the Benedict Anderson’s characterization of the relationship between print culture and imagined communities in his 1983 book *Imagined*

Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson to analyze nationalism. According to Anderson, print capitalism plays a key role in the construction of imagined communities. Talking about the history of Europe, Anderson argues that printed books in the vernacular circulated widely. As a result, language became standardized and local variations disappeared. People from distant locations could now understand each other, and a common discourse emerged. Anderson argues it is through this process of standardization that Europe began to imagine their identity in national terms. The emergence of national print-languages was crucial for disparate people to imagine themselves as a homogeneous community. He defines a nation as "an imagined political community". As Anderson puts it, a nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 6). The people who are part of an imagined community are not familiar with each other, though they believe themselves part of one group, they are not similar to one another. They do not have personal contact but they all think they are one. It is possible to see the development of the public sphere in colonial India following the same process that Anderson has described. The rise of print culture played a very significant role in the construction of an elite public sphere in colonial India. The reason I argue that this is an elite public sphere is because literacy did not have a wide reach in the colonial period.

Naregal, in *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere*, discusses colonial power and elitism in print. According to her, print was obviously essential in the making of colonial ideology and power (Naregal 145). Print is the one of the strategies which British Empire used for

maintenance of their rule over colonies like India. In these strategies, education, assumed as system of learning, centered on print and individual reading practices. According to Naregal:

Education policy was in that sense a rubric for a whole set of interrelated assumption and practices about knowledge, cultivation, textuality and identity inherent within Western modernity and necessary elaboration and maintenance of the colonial power (Naregal, 145-146).

Naregal says that the introduction of print as part of the colonial encounter resulted in the complex changes in the existing ideological norms and structures. And at the cultural level, print introduced a very important change in the “assumption about language, literacy and the literary” (146). The introduction of print on the subcontinent according to Naregal created “its own area where it had ruled more or less definable by the intellectual desires of metropolitan audience and the interest of colonial authorities” (147). However, she points out that because of discontinuities and the hierarchical differences between the English and Indian spheres, there was anger among “the English-educated elite towards the Indian discourse of the 1860s and 1870s” (Naregal 153).

Secondly, Naregal points out, print also made changes in the structure of the political world. She suggests that the principle of publicity also affected by the norms and the distribution of political power (146). A rich and detailed literature on the new knowledge, mentalities, cultural

and political identities associated with the rise of print in west highlights the “great assurance of power contained in the encyclopedic growth of knowledge (Naregal 146)”

Naregal shows how print changes the social, political, and cultural spheres and thereby effectively changes society. Because of the emergence of print, the assumptions regarding language, literacy, and literary changed. Due to print culture, literacy became widespread. The emergence of Christian public sphere can also be attributed to the introduction of print culture and the growth in education is also substantially influenced by missionary activity in Gujarat as elsewhere. The printing of different Christian magazines inspired the new writers to enhance their skills. The articles promoted reformation to society. The very good example of this reformatory tone can be found in the magazine *Dut* (Messenger January 1911) established by Roman Catholic missionaries in. Not only this, but there are many magazines published by many missions which followed the same path. These magazines were not only effective in the Christian public sphere but in the secular sphere too¹.

Charu Gupta’s analysis of the public sphere in north India can be seen as an extension of Naregal’s discussion. Gupta also offers her views regarding how print and education changed the society, politically, socially and culturally. Gupta’s views are related to print in north India and cover the larger domain of popular Hindi printed materials. In her chapter on obscene literature, she says that in 19th century in India on the one hand there was a huge production and the popularity of diverse material and on the other hand there was a discourse of obscenity (Gupta 58). On the

¹ I am saying this out of my personal experience.

one hand books like *Chumban Mimansa* was not only published but hugely read by readers and simultaneously the educational and reformist materials were also published. So, we can say there was a constant struggle between “obscene” literature and “clean” literature (Gupta 55- 56). The AIWC (All India Women’s Conference) protested against the circulation of obscene literature and on the other hand many leading magazines and writers started to increase the publication of such literature compromising in the face of popular demand and the needs of the people (Gupta 58). Gupta notes the prevalence of many genres like erotic sex manuals, popular romances, entertaining songs, text offering advice on sexual relationships which were often considered as obscene by their critics. This obscene literature was always more popular than clean literature. Gupta gives the parallel Enlightenment France where great Enlightenment philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau were read only by few readers compared to which maximum readers would choose to read “salacious and pornographic books” (Gupta, 33). Gupta also says that in 19th century in Uttar Pradesh, print aroused similar pattern for Indian literature. More importantly, in India the coming of print brought the performance genres like *nautankis*, *sangit*, *qissas* and *kahanis* into print. Languages like Braj, Avadhi modified themselves to the new commercial forms. Print was giving them wider reach. It was the area where printed, oral and visual media found a space in the print (Gupta, 55).

In Gupta’s discussion of the debate on elite and popular literature, she refers to the argument of some scholars about the marginalized situation of popular traditions in India because of the new elite literary sensibilities that print transferred onto performances published as texts (Gupta. 82). At that time the standardization of literary norms was becoming a marker of modern

national identity and culture of the educated middle class (Gupta. 82). Her argument here is closely aligned to Anderson's argument.

What can be understood from Naregal and Gupta's study with regard to print technology in colonial India is that on the one hand, the reforms and new knowledge forms shaped the issue of national identity and brought the clean, idealistic, and reformatory writing and on the other hand, the technology encouraged popular literature and the printing of many oral and performative traditional genres. The Christian print culture was also played leading role in these shifts in society.

The Construction of a Christian Public Sphere

The print culture and translations helped Christianity to establish and consolidate itself in a new colonial context, within a new language and new social structures, thereby, forging a new public sphere. Here, printing becomes the medium that enabled the emergence as well as the spread of Christianity. At that time anyone who was able to read could easily get the benefit of printed texts. Print, in the form of tracts, played a major part in the decision of the early converts who decided to convert to Christianity. Moreover, these tracts also helped them to consolidate their faith in the new religion. In Christianity people imagined themselves as part of one community without considering all the inequality and exploitation which they faced within this religion.

As I have discussed earlier many people converted their religion and tried to change their identity by dreaming a good life without any exploitation precisely because of the inequality and the casteism in Indian culture. However, a reading of the autobiographies of early converts to Christianity show that there were many inequalities that they had to experience even in the new religion. Though they accepted Christianity to liberate their self they still faced inequality and exploitations by other Christians in India. Conversion did not bring much change for converts of the “lower” castes, the Dalit Christians. They were, at one level, part of an imagined Christian community, but they remained always on the outskirts. Though they converted their religion to be part of this community they were always called converts, not Christians in the larger Christian community. Within the Indian Christian community, Dalit Christians were further marginalized as the inequalities and exploitative aspects of the caste system were imported into the community via conversion. In spite of many differences that existed between different sections of Christianity in India, the ubiquity of caste persisted in greater or smaller degree.

The translations of Bible introduced a new culture that was a mixture of the old and new culture. As the translators of the Bible had to used grammar and vocabulary from the language of the people who were receiving those translations, the process of translation led to cross culturation. The vocabulary of not only the songs but also the vocabulary of the Bible was taken from the Hindu religion. The first reason behind this could possibly be because the very early translations in Gujarat of Christian material, as elsewhere, was translated with the assistance of Brahmin pundits. The first translator of Gujarati New Testament William Carey acknowledges this as can be seen in the following statement.

Carey described his translation method in preparing the Bengali translation as follows:

I employ a pundit. With whom I go through the whole in as exact a manner as I can. He judges the style and syntax, and I of the faithfulness of the translation (Carmen, 12)

Hence it is possible to argue that the early translators who translated the religious material of the new religion with the help of Brahmin men who were deeply immersed in upper caste Hindu culture imported vocabulary which was more or less similar to the Hindu religion to vernacular Christian spaces.

William Carey's acknowledgement gives the proof and reason why so many words from the Hindu vocabulary were used in the Bible and other Christian translations. Another reason for the use of Hindu vocabulary can be located in the implied reader of these translations. These early translations were addressed to the non-Christian public who found Christian ideology alien and strange. They were, in fact, already deeply immersed in another religion. The translations in this period were translated for a new audience to make them understand the new ideology easily. In these translations the target language was Gujarati or other vernacular languages and the source language was a European language. These two languages were mediated by another language that was familiar to the target audience of the translation, that is, Sanskrit, a language which was steeped in Hindu culture. Since key scriptures of Hindu religion were in Sanskrit and the receivers of these translations followed the Hindu religion, it made sense to draw on Sanskrit vocabulary during the process of translation. Thus, the vernacular language of the Christian translations bears a strong influence of the Sanskrit language. However, Sanskrit was a language that was restricted

to the elite castes within the Hindu religion; as Sanskrit was the language of the upper castes no one except them knew this language. However, the Christian translations were read not only by upper class people but by people of every caste. In a way, lower caste Christian converts got indirect access to a language which was forbidden to them. However, the concern of the Christian missionaries was to make everyone aware about the words of God and so they made sure that everybody could read and understand those translations.

These translations were used by missionaries as the medium of spreading Christianity. With the spread of Christianity translation came to play the role of spreading the word of God. Translation was also to let the people of non-elite castes have access to the language of the elites. The access that Christian missionaries offered to such translated material via literacy that had been hitherto denied to them became appealing to subordinate castes and attracted them to the new religion.

Gauri Viswanathan, in her work *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* clarifies how people who convert manage in that way to control and confuse state discourse in quite unexpected ways. Early converts to Christianity were in a confused state. Their identity was not very clear in their mind. There was constant conflict between their religious identity and national identity. She says that they experienced ambiguity of a cultural identity split between religion and nation (Viswanathan, 90). This was partly because the Christian missionaries subscribed to colonialist ideologies that had been expressed by Macaulay when he had called for the production of a colonial native who was “Indian in Blood and color but English in taste, in

opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Viswanathan, 11). According to her, conversion is one of the most troubling political events in society. This event is not respected in society whether conversion connected with individual or an entire community, whether it is forced or voluntary (Viswanathan, 11). Conversion creates imbalance in the society as it challenges religious doctrines and practices. In modern times, she argues, society was threatened by the fear of conversion (Viswanathan, 11). Even in contemporary times, conversion is not accepted easily. It is a process which is as difficult for person who is converting as it is for those who are in his/her social world.

Religion is connected with the idea of national community; it is one of the range of markers, such as race, class, and caste, of national identity. In the case of India, these markers sometimes assume the criteria for determining rank, position, and the membership in the national community. (Viswanathan, 11). Viswanathan uses the example of the partition of India to make this point. The partition took place with the bases of the religion, she says, and this forced individual who-lived in closest relations as neighbors and friends to be recast as enemy on the basis of religion. This could lead to isolation of individuals and communities and to modes of self-definition that set their worldviews, understanding, and beliefs in opposition to others. In fact, this could be seen as leading to the hybridization of identity, where nation and religion take on a hyphenated character.

The identity of the Indian Christian was always hybrid. They were very confused about their own identity in colonial times. They always wanted to be modern and drew on the spread of Christian education and the use of print and translated books but, as they were colonial natives

who were racially regarded as inferior by European missionaries, they were always marked by a lack. Beyond this, the question of caste within the newly developed public sphere of converted Christians came to play an important role. P. Sanal Mohan in his *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* says religion was the most important site of conflicts between Dalits and the upper caste in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Kerala (Mohan, 152). Here he mentions about the contact zone. According to Mohan,

Contact zones are ‘social spaces where desperate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination- like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today (Mohan, 152).

Here the concept of contact zone is the similar to what Habermas discusses in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. According to Habermas, contact zone was a place where people come together discuss a common interest, and from those discussions, one conclusion is drawn through which society could transform. Here, Mohan also says contact zone is a social space where people come together to have discussion on a topic (Mohan, 152). As Mohan says there are many effects of such contact zones. He gives the example of the socio religious movement ‘Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha’ which was formed in 1910 as an example of transformation that can take place on account of such contact zones (Mohan, 152). The founder of this movement was Poyikayil Yohannan, who prepared the Parayas, Pulayas, and similar Dalit communities to establish an independent religion

of their own. Parayas, Pulayas and other Dalit communities literally lived the life of slaves in Kerala. Because of Yohannan they to know about the concept of liberation and they tried to make themselves free from that old slavery. The 'Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha' movement tried to engage with problems of caste hierarchy and exploitation and struggled to achieve social equality along with material and spiritual progress. The movement equal emphasis on the spiritual and material scope of life, and this is especially significant in the context of Dalit communities that were battling the centuries old caste slavery (Mohan 152). According to Mohan, Yohannan imaginatively created a hybrid religion by combining several elements of Christian discourses and practices with elements drawn from the Dalit life-world (Mohan 152).

Again, Mohan gives another reference of the Dalit movement in Travancore it was similar to the 'Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha' movement. It commenced in the first half of the 20th century. The most important Dalit organization of that period was Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham [Society for the Protection of the Poor] founded by the most important Dalit leader Ayyankali. This movement was very brutally opposed by the upper caste landlords in South Travancore. This movement challenged the caste hierarchy and demanded access to public spaces and resources (Mohan, 154). There were other organizations mentioned by Mohan such as Cheramar Mahajana Sabha led by Pampady John Joseph, Brahma Prathyaksha Raksha Dharma Paripalana Parayar Mahajana Sangham of Kandan Kumaran, other popular Dalit leaders such as Paradi Abraham Isaac and Vellikkara Chothi (Matthai) who were nominated as the members of Sree Mulam Praja Sabha [the popular legislative assembly of Travancore state] (Mohan, 154).

The term modernity used by Mohan in this context refers to the fact that the Dalits were reacting to and coping with modern social conditions. These conditions brought about new institutional structures that have been associated with industrial modernity in many parts of the world included modern structure of the emergence of public sphere (Mohan, 154).

The Church is also a kind of contact zone where people meet and discuss topics of common interest. The daily mass conducted in the churches can also be considered as a kind of debate because people are not only praying there but are also discussing contemporary issues on which the laity are giving their own views. The form of the discussion here corresponds to the structure of the public sphere. Apart from mass, there are many occasions when people get together in the church and discuss many issues. This is a practice that has been put in place at least since the early 20th century. As I can attest from my own experience in contemporary Gujarat, currently every month, the clergy call meetings for the laity of the church to understand their issues in a way that can characterize church as a locus of a Christian public sphere.

To conclude, we can say that print culture and culture of translation both were very essential for the development of the Christian public sphere from the colonial period and it continues to be so even today. As print culture provides access to knowledge anywhere in the world similarly the culture of translation gives the opportunities to share the information in every part of the world. Print culture plays a very important role in the public sphere allowing all people to take advantage of the circulation of information. In a public sphere that is open and equal, the public can draw upon translated material to have a debate and everyone can have access to public

decision making. With regard to the Christian public sphere then it is more than a place where people passively receive the translated Christian scriptures. It can be seen as a site where there is an active engagement with print and translation. and have a discussion on that information. In the following section, I will discuss the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat as an example of a site that had an active engagement with social questions.

The Christian Public Sphere in Colonial Gujarat

Print culture and the culture of translation that were put in place in colonial Christian Gujarat provided new contexts for the exchange of views, and from such exchanges emerged the possibility of new reformations and the consolidation of the new religion.

The inequality of caste was among the main reasons that led the Dalits in colonial Gujarat into adopting Christianity from the 19th century onwards. Since reading the Bible and other Christian literature was considered to be a central pillar of Christianity, Dalits were taught to read and access education. The Christian gospels introduced them to the concept of liberation which allowed them to think about their own position in society. The Christian gospels and the preaching of the early priests as well as the translation and the printed version of the Bible gospel played an important role in this process of thinking about their own role in society.

The introduction of print affected the textual culture of Gujarat in the 19th century. Arguably, the new public sphere emerged because of print culture and the culture of translation. Following Habermas, I suggest that print material was a key element in the making of the Christian public sphere. This public sphere was related to the rise of a reading public who could take advantage of printing and translated books for the development of themselves and society. In colonial Gujarat, the reading public significantly emerged because of the efforts of missionaries. The negotiation of the culture of translation with Sanskrit and the regional vernacular put in place a hybrid culture, in Gujarat as elsewhere. The entrance of the new religion, accompanied by print culture and the culture of translation, put in place a public sphere that was aligned to the more general public sphere but which had its own unique characteristics.

Missionaries played a substantial role in the constitution of the Christian public sphere. The printed and translated books helped the missionaries to preach between the new public. Apart from their investment in printing and translation, they worked hard to broaden the reach of education. Lower castes, who traditionally were denied the benefits of education, could now access it. The Sanskritized Gujarati that was involved in the translation of Christian Gospels allowed them indirect access to the high culture of Hindu elites. Missionaries also preached a theology that encouraged the new converts to liberate themselves from the old traditions which exploited them.

Many new forms of writing emerged as a consequence of the emergence of print culture and the culture of translation. In the Christian print culture, diary writing, autobiographies,

biographies, and others emerged in colonial Gujarat. It created a new public who could use these books and try to spread the knowledge and awaken the people. These forms of writing had both the influence of English and Sanskrit, and also affected the development of modern Gujarati as a language and as literature. Not only this, but because of printed and translated books the people started to fight for their own self and fought to liberate themselves from old exploitations. In the search for their own identity in colonial Gujarat people used these new forms of writing. Positioned in between old and new cultures, the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat acquired a hybrid identity. It accepted the new religion without leaving aspects of the old religion. In addition, the laity recognized and faced discrimination at the hands of European missionaries, many of whom were sympathetic to the colonial enterprise. As a result, the identity of this new rising public was marked by hyphenation and confusion. According to Bhabha, this state of confusion was a marker of hybridity.

The condition of possibility for the emergence of a hybrid Christian public sphere was the role of print and spread of education in colonial Gujarat. The emergence of education was substantially because of the continuous efforts of Christian missionaries. The first Gujarati-English medium school has started by the LMS missionary Rev. William Faivy at Surat. In 1840 Rev. Alexander Faivy had constructed a high school. After that the IP mission started the Gujarati-English medium schools in Ahmedabad. In 1874, the IP mission has started the first girls hostel and girls high school in Surat (Bhurajibhai 2). These educational initiatives widened in scope, scale, and area. They went hand in hand with the printing and translation initiatives of the IP Mission. The example of Vadil Girdher Rupjibhai, who was one of the early converters in Gujarat will show how significant these initiatives were. Girdherbhai was born at Borsad in Kheda district

in 1820. His father's name was Rupjibhai Ramjibhai and mother's name was Ambaben. He was the maker and the seller of liquor (Bhurajibhai 5). At that time, schools had not yet been established. Those who sought to be literate took tuitions. Some pundits taught people of the Vania caste (trade and business caste) and the Brahmin caste who sought to be educated. Vanias needed education for business purposes and Brahmins needed education to perform religious ceremonies. So, as a Vania, Girdharbhai took private tuitions from a pundit when he was very young. Girdharbhai had read a tract named *Ishurajni Aagnao* [Commandments of God]. Being inspired from that tract in 1844, he chose to convert, finally getting baptized by Rev. Clarkson at Baroda (Bhurajibhai 5). Biographies of other converters such as Vadil Desai Khojidas, Khimchand Nathabhai, and Narottam Trikamdas show that they were converted because they were so deeply affected by the printed tracts (Bhurajibhai, 5). However, it must be noted that they could read these printed books because they were literate, mostly because they belonged to the upper castes. So, in the early nineteenth century, it appears that literacy was an important factor in conversion and played a part as a vital maker of the Christian public sphere. Thus, it is possible to argue that print played a key role in the early formation of the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat. However, as I have noted earlier in Chapter third chapter the period of mass conversion of Dalits comes later in the nineteenth century, at a time when missionaries organized support at the time of famine and when Christian education had widened its reach to include non-elite castes.

I have earlier argued that the Christian church can also be characterized as a public sphere where debates were conducted. Here also exclusions can be found. The lower caste in Christianity was called Dalit Christians. The discriminations faced by Dalit Christians surfaced in many ways. Many Dalits converted to Christianity in the hope of a better life and social status. However, they

faced discrimination in the church. Seating arrangements, which continued even after independence, itself showed discrimination. Dalit Christians were made to sit on the floor and the other higher caste people sat at the pews. Dalit Christians were not allowed to partake of the same communion and could not drink the same utensils from which higher caste Christian converts drank (from the interview of Surendra Asthavadi). The prayer books were also kept separate and would not be touched by other castes. In some places, Dalit Christians had their own Churches where higher castes did not enter.²

Discrimination between castes within the newly converted Christian community was rampant. An example of this discrimination can be found in the life of Girdhar Rupjibhai in the 19th century. His son got married to a Christian girl from the lower caste so Girdhar Rupji and his whole family was boycotted by the protestant society. As Sanal Mohan has discussed many movements and about Poyikayil Yohannan, in Gujarat also there were some movements protesting the suppression of Dalits. It will be appropriate here to recall the experience of early missionaries to understand the situation of lower castes in Gujarat. 1993 is considered to be the centenary year of the birth of the Catholic Church in Gujarat. On 11th of December 1893, pioneer Rev. Manuel Xavier Gomes baptized a group of 18 children in the village of Mogri [Karamsad Parish]. He planted the first seeds of the present flourishing Catholic communities in Kheda District (Suria n. p.). Here Fr. Carlos Suria, S. J. has made an important contribution in establishing the new religion

² Some of these practices continue to prevail and have been a part of my experience.

in Gujarat. In the *History of the Catholic Church in Gujarat* Fr. Carlos Suria S. J. gives an account of the historical and social context of the emergence of Christianity in colonial Gujarat.

During the harvest time of 1932, Christians of Samarkha, a village in Anand district possessed 13 fields. On 4th October a riotous group rushed there screaming with sticks and other artillery. The Vankars ran away seeing that their grain and straw were going up in flames. They approached the Mukhi but he refused to register their case. The gate of the Salvation Army School was set on fire. In this situation the wife of new Salvation Army clergy went to take water from the well as she read a notice on a well that everyone can take water from that. No one knew her but some women there recognized that she was Christian so they screamed: “Well defiled! Water contaminated!” and ran home leaving everything there. Till Ganga water was sprinkled no one approached the well (Suria, 292-93). This incident was a very big example of the way caste system in Gujarat persisted along with the emergence of a Christian public. His book *History of the Catholic Church in Gujarat* has pulled together a lot of information regarding the incidents referring to the practice of caste in Gujarat. Though Vankar people converted their religion, the untouchability they faced continued although history mentions that the lower caste people in very 19th century convert their religion to be equal to others. It was correct that the discovery of education, print, translation all changed the society socially, politically, culturally but it did not eliminate caste oppression.

Fr. Suria, the writer of this book, himself fought till his death against the caste system in Gujarat.³ It was believed that the lower caste people convert their religion and become Christians to liberate themselves from the inequality in Gujarat but the history of Roman Catholic Church have some proofs that even Christianity has casteism within. Fr. Suria S. J. wrote about this in his historical account. When Fr. Suria S. J. went to Kusumbad, Ankav the schoolmaster who was working with him belonged to the *Chasi Paragru*, a compact group of 86 “upper caste” villages, which moved away from the parent Charotar Paragru of 450 Vankar villages, at Napad. Here he mentions that both these group do not have intermarriage and interdining relations (Fr. Suria, 278). Even today these groups have no connection with each other though they are both Christians.

In the culture of translation too, we can observe discriminations. The use of vocabulary in the translation of the Bible and other tracts and prayer books addressed to Dalits are also different compared to others. Tracts addressed to the literate upper castes were more Sanskritized whereas tracts addressed to Dalit Christians used every day easily understandable vocabulary which was accessible to them. This can be shown through a reading of the work of Vahlji Bechar. He is a significant Dalit Christian poet who wrote in the 19th century. His volume of hymns, both written and composed by him, called *Daud na Geeto* (1876) is still sung by the Roman Catholic community in Gujarat. Apart from that, he wrote his autobiography *Aatmabodh* (1864) which must be counted among the first autobiographies in Gujarati. He was a Hindu Vankar [Dalit weaving

³Parmar, Ignasbhai. Personal Interview. During the interview I was informed that Fr. Suria entered Gujarat at a time of inequality. He tried very hard to change the situation. He helped people to fight against the inequality. He joined Panchayat to help the lower caste people. He became Sarpanch and worked for the inequality in Gujarat. He became Sarpanch of Ankav.

caste] from Wadhvan (today's Surendranagar). He was baptised in 1854 and converted as a young married man (Chauhan, 205). He later settled in Borsad.

Daud na Geeto is a transcreation of the *Psalms of David*. It is interesting that he chose to compose the hymns despite the fact they had earlier been rendered into Gujarati by the influential Rev. Glasgow. Perhaps, because he was from a lower caste who faced many discriminations, his hymns used common vocabulary that everyone could understand. Discrimination of language was an aspect of caste discrimination also present in Indian culture. Elite castes used Sanskrit and Sanskritized language that was not allowed to lower castes. Perhaps that is why one can find the use of *desi* words (vocabulary used by lower caste people) in his hymns. Everyone can understand these hymns and without any discrimination, can use it. In his introduction to the collection, he accepts as a converted Christian he doesn't know the original language Hebrew in which the Psalms were created originally. However, what he had was a deep knowledge of *Pingalsastra*.⁴ He has translated the entire book of the Bible called *Geetsastra* into poetry. He has used many *Chands*⁵ in this translation. *Daud na Geeto* [The Psalms of David] by Vahlji Bechar was a collection of psalms translated from the songs of *Geetsastra*. Not only Bechar but Roman Catholic Missionaries have integrated these translations in their *Sampurna Bible* [Complete Bible]. These songs can be sung very well because of the use of accessible words.

⁴ Acharya Pingala was an ancient Indian poet and mathematician and the author of the *Chandahsastra*, the earliest known treatise on Sanskrit prosody.

⁵ The meter and the arrangement of words in Gujarati poetry.

Daud na Geeto [The Psalms of David] has many sections. The writer has collected some songs which gives the reference to future besides some Biblical and some historic stories were composed in the poetry form. In following passage, he addresses the Biblical account of creation.

Bapo e je amne didhi sarve vato bhakhi.

Tej hame sahu suni saimajya, mate dau chu dakhi.

Ae sahu vato aam putro thi rakhisu nahi chani,

Pachadthi sahu pedhima hu varnavu te kani. (126)

(All the stories which our fathers told us

I am trying to understand those stories

We will not hide those stories from our children

I am telling those stories to the next generation)⁶

The above hymn is a great example of understanding how beautifully Bechar translated the Biblical story of creation of world. The theme of the song focuses on how God created the world and though humans knew it very well, they betrayed Him and lost the Paradise. Bechar, in this song, says that the story which his forefathers told them now, he will tell children. At one level, it

⁶ All translations mine unless otherwise mentioned.

can be a reference to the Biblical stories of Yakub, Peter, and other disciples of God. At another level, it can also refer to the historical memories of caste exploitation which he wants to pass on to the coming generation. Other significant hymns refer to the ten commandments which people must follow in the name of God.

Apart from this some prayer songs are collected in this collection which can be sung in eight different occasions. Some of his compositions are songs to be sung at the time of confession. As I mention in the previous chapters this concept of confession is the new concept for non-Christian people. At first, they needed to understand the concept. In Christianity there is a proper process for confession which is again different from other religions. There are more than five songs on this theme composed by writer. As the songs were translated for people who were not Christian originally, in accessible language, they became very popular in the converted public. Maybe these songs attracted them towards the new religion. The lower caste people who were not allowed to enter in the temple could now enter Church, develop an intimate relationship with God, where they could confess the sins and ask for forgiveness. Therefore, these songs were sung with great pride. And maybe the Vankar poet had this intention for creating such song. For example, in the following lines, the devotee directly addresses God:

He dev, krodhe tame bau mane na praharo,

Krodhe tame na mane mar mari vidaro (5).

(O God do not strike me with anger

Please do not kill me in anger)

At the same time, these lines carry traces of violence experienced by Dalits in the social structure that they inhabited.

Some songs are those which can be sung at the time of difficulty. In this collection some songs can be sung by the people at the time of trouble. Songs like these were a great example of how people pray not in prose, in the traditional way, but in poetry, the new way of worship. At the same time, this new way of worship was structured according to traditional chands or prosodic meters. The Dalit Christians, though converted, who still faced problems on a daily basis, used these kinds of songs and may be these songs were made for them. These songs could give the lower caste people some strength to face the problems with a positive attitude and with a will to try to liberate themselves from this difficulty. For example, the following song pleads with God, letting Him know that he is being heeded.

He prabhu, te to je je kamo kidha prachin kal,

Amm karno thi to suniya che tena sarva haval (67)

(Oh God, all the works which you told us to do in ancient time

We had listened to all those with our ears)

There are also some songs that cannot be sung in a carol group. These are personal songs; you can only sing them personally. Mostly people were habituated to worship God in a group. And

in Christianity this process of singing songs in group called carol singing. But these personal songs which Bechar can only be sung alone. As a Dalit Christian, it appears that he recognized the humiliation faced by Dalits in larger mixed caste groups and composed these songs where the lower caste devotee can meet with God alone. For example, in one of these songs he says:

Jem Haran tarse, ichhche che nirman pani kerī dhara,

Tem tane to maro aatma, he prabhu ichche che sahu vara (65)

(As the deer thirsts for clear water,

carry it to the edge, that's how my soul wants you, o Lord)

Some songs are those which can be sung in a group. These tend to focus on keeping trust in God. The singers of such songs were converted so it was very important to keep faith in God. The people who converted their religion wanted to make themselves liberated from the discriminations that were a part of their old life, but they realized that even after conversion, they continued to be discriminated against. These songs address their current situation and acknowledge the pain they continue to experience. The following lines clearly express the pain felt by the convert, his/her doubt is manifested in the last few words:

Vadhe che Ghana shatruo dev mara, Ghana to chade che virodhi nathara;

Ghanao mane to kahanta bake che; nathi dev ma aasro em k che (2)

(Many enemies of my God are increasing, many enemies are climbing;

many times I am afraid that there is no refuge in God).

Some songs have been composed to be sung at the time of prayer. One section of these songs is devoted to thankfulness. The lower caste people who had so many limitations and boundaries in the past found themselves free of these and thus wanted to be thankful to God. For example:

He prabhu tu to bal che maru, tara ma hu prit vadharu.

Maro prabhu che aashro saro, mari sila, moksh maro (18)

(Oh Lord, you are my strength I love you more

My Lord is my refuge, my salvation)

He nyay loko, tamo devma harkh mano,

Shobhe yatha thi janone khara geet gano

(O people of justice, rejoice in your God

Its decorative songs)

Another section focuses on songs of worship. As the biography of Bechar informs us, he was a great preacher and attracted people to convert their religion by means of such songs which could inspire people to have trust in God and accept Christianity. For example

He prabhu, mara aakha manthi, gaavu tari pas

He prabhu tara achrat kamo pragat karu chopas.

(Oh Lord, I sing to you from my whole being,

O lord let me reveal your deeds)

Pruthvi ne sarve temana, e che jano prabhuna vana;

Bhutat ne tema je re che, mano sarve Prabhuna e che (28)

(The whole earth is this house, the Lord of the forest,

The soul and all that is in it belongs to the lord)

Another part consists of moral songs. Christianity was a religion which was a new religion that wanted to flourish among people who had followed a different religion for a very long time. Thus they must have some reason to connect to this foreign religion. Moreover, Christianity had its own moral framework which needed to be established in the life worlds of new converts. The songs with morals work to establish these new frameworks. For example:

He jihoha ishvar mara, hu rakhu chu tujma aasha.

Chalnarathi majne chodi aapo mukti j kera vasa (06)

(O God, I put my hope in you,

Abandon the slanderers and let them live in salvation)

Ishvar kero moto mahima aakasho varne che;

Antariksho pan tena bhujna sahu kamo pragte che (21)

(God whose great glory is even the heaven and

the heaven reveals all the works of his hands)

Bechar was well regarded as a brilliant poet in his time. He was considered learned as he had mastered *pingalsastra*, or prosodic metre. He has used many chhands in the translation of these songs from *Geetsastra*. Chhands like *pomavati*, *narach*, *ajit*, *chamar*, *chopai*, *krindachakra*, *charnakul*, *savaiyabatrasi*, *jhulana*, *dohra*, and *bhujangi* were utilized by him in his compositions. Chauhan has stated that none other than him had used so chhands in the composition of hymns. Though the translation of these songs by Bechar is a striking example of the translation in Gujarati chhand into a Christian framework, these songs nowadays are not widely sung by people in contemporary churches. Chauhan suggests that the reason for this is that Bechar does not use the standard Gujarati language, instead his language draws from the colloquial and the folk, which does not fit in this modern world (Chauhan, 199).

Habermas discusses typical genres of writing, such as letter writing, that became critical to the construction of the public sphere. The eighteenth century became the century of letters

(Habermas, 48) He shows how, through letters, the individual expresses himself with his experience and personal references. In the initial stages of modern postal service, news reports and letters contained “scholarly communication and familial courtesy” (Habermas, 48). The diary, too emerged as an important genre, representing a letter which was written to own self. It is a conversation with subjectivity. Diary writing becomes the first-person narrative, addressed to own self and the sender is also own self (Habermas, 49).

In the context of the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat, different genres came into play for the construction of new public. While genres that Habermas points to in the context of Europe are individual centered, the print genres in the context of the Christian public sphere tend to be community centered. The different genres which I am discussing here are prayer songs, *garba* songs, oral prayers: all these are performance arts. However, with the rise of print culture they are transformed into print. The print culture makes these performing genres textual. As I mentioned before *garba* is a folk dance of Gujarat in which girls dance in the worship of God. The writer Rev. Kanhaji Madhavji Ratnagrahi of the *Subodh Garbavali* acknowledges that the popularity of *garba* in the Hindu tradition for the worship of Hindu gods inspired him to compose some Christian *garba* songs (Ratnagrahi, n. p). So, the performance form *garba* due to print culture becomes textually available. Not only this but other performance genres like hymns and prayers also become textual because of the emergence of printed forms of hymns, prayers and *garbas*.

W. J. Mitchell, in his study about the works of the English artist William Blake, has shown us that the very medium of print makes language ‘visible’. The print culture led the emergence of

a new public. Drawing from Plato, he suggests that “the very history of writing is a journey from picture-writing or hieroglyphs to a systematic alphabetical writing. In that sense, writing/printing makes the language visible in a literal sense (Mitchell, 113)”. A study of the print material of any kind cannot take place without understanding the ways in which the visual aspects of reading define the textual meaning and the question of readership as well. W. J. Mitchell in *Picture Theory* says the basic contradictions of cultural politics and of ‘Word and Image’ are mutually symptomatic of deeply felt shifts in culture and representation (Mitchell, 3). The difference between the culture of reading and a culture of spectatorship is not only a formal issue. Word and image is the name of common place difference between types of representation, a shorthand way of dividing, mapping and organizing the field of representation (Mitchell, 12).

My inquiry about print and the formation of the public sphere draws from this approach and tries to examine print as a crucial phenomenon that shapes the public sphere textually. Images have been part of the range of print production like newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements, books, novels, periodicals, textbooks, children’s books, including colonial documents like the gazetteers and they need to be studied as informants of these texts, and by extension, informants of larger public sphere (Mitchell, 42). *Daud na Geeto* [The Psalms of David], *The Psalms of David*, *Gujarati Bhasha nu Grammar*, *Khristi Geeto*, *Pathmala*, *Subodh Garbavali* etc, are the translated books which came out in printed form, textual forms for sharing information to the readers who could learn about different Christian concepts by reading these translated print books and be the part of Christian public sphere. They have translated the culture of spectatorship into a culture of reading.

The early printed religious books set up a new language of faith that played an important role in the construction of a new public comprising of early converts. The printing of Christian material and more importantly the translation of such materials resulted in the growth of the new religion, Christianity, in the area where other religions pre-existed. Printed tracts and books played a central role in the establishment of the Christian public sphere in debates. These debates which took place in churches, and other places were organized on the basis of a Christian moral framework. My analysis of key texts show how caste is written into print and mediates translation. I have argued, consequently, that the Christian public sphere in colonial Gujarat is marked by caste and community, and is thus structured in a hyphenated and hybrid mode.