

Chapter V

The 1985 Anti-Reservation Agitation and Dalit Writing on Migration

Dalits face many forms of oppression in India. They range from subtle humiliation and harassment in day-to-day life to murder, physical assault, rape, the setting of fire to houses, molestation etc. In Gujarat also during the last five decades, Dalits have been oppressed in these ways. The victims do not always register complaints in the police station because of the fear that the victimization would increase rather than be redressed owing to the collusion between the police and elite. However, when the oppression crosses limits, Dalits do retaliate. In extreme cases, they migrate.

The focus of this chapter is the literary attention of Gujarati Dalit writers have paid to the question of Dalit migration. This attention has gone hand in hand with a series of Dalit migrations during the last two decades of the 20th century. In many ways these migrations can be read as closely related to caste violence that characterized the 1980s and 1990s. I have discussed this phenomenon in relation to the 1981 anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat. In this chapter my focus will be on the 1985 anti-reservation agitation of Gujarat which was subsequently followed by a spate of migrations in the decade that followed.

Migration is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. Migrations fall into several broad categories. One category is internal migration which refers to movements of individuals and families from one area to another within a country. This is distinct from movements from one country to another which is called international migration. Another way of

catagorising migration is by seeing whether it is voluntary or forced. Most voluntary migration, whether internal or external, is undertaken in search of better economic opportunities or housing. Forced migrations usually involve people who have been displaced by governments, war, famine or natural disasters. For example, because of the construction of the Narmada dam, thousands of Adivasis were displaced. Again, when a country refuses any person permission to stay on its land though s/he is a citizen of that country, s/he has to take shelter in another country. This is known as exile.

However, the migration of Dalits is quite different from all these definitions; first, they are attacked and threatened. They are denied safety in the village. This kind of situation leads Dalits to migrate to save their lives and livelihood. I call this migration for survival. In the last 30 years, many migrations for survival have taken place in Gujarat.

For example, during the first anti-reservation agitation of 1981 the Dalits of Biliya (District: Mehsana) were attacked and threatened. Therefore, 400 Dalits migrated to Siddhapur for safety. In another instance, the Chaudharies of Chitrodipura (District: Mehsana) killed Dalit youth named Ramesh Ishwarbhai. When the Dalits registered a case against the Chaudharies, five of them were arrested. This led to the boycott of Dalits, which forced them to migrate. They left their village on 18 October 1991, came to Gandhinagar, and settled down in a tent near the Sachivalaya. This act underlined the government's inability to protect them or not to even intervene in the matter. Therefore the government allotted them land after 8 days near Mehsana town.

A more complex train of events led to the migration of Aniyali. A Rajput boy hit a Dalit person aged 40 years. The Dalit's nephew convinced his uncle to lodge a police complaint. The uncle went to the police station but was assured by the Rajputs that this kind of incident would

not happen again. Hence, he did not register a complaint. However, youths of the Rajput community attacked the Dalits in the night. The Dalit youth and his brother requested the MLA of Ahmedabad to intervene in this case. Before they lodged a complaint, Rajputs threatened to kill them. The Dalit died of a heart attack. The Dalits attempted to lodge a complaint in a police station but it was not taken so they lodged a complaint in the court. The court ordered an inquiry and some of the Rajputs were arrested. The arrest had ignited the Rajput so they threatened to destroy the whole of the vas. Therefore, to survive 60 families of Vankars migrated to nearby village Vadhvan.

However, during this period I argue that there was another kind of migration. Lying between forced and voluntary, I name these migrations as migrations of self-respect. These migrations are not forced by calamities or threat to life. Though they are voluntary in that sense, they are caused by systematic humiliation of Dalits. Migrations of self-respect occur as a mark of protest both against dominant castes who oppress Dalits as well as the government which fails to protect them and prevent such systematic humiliation.

Dalits used the word “Hijrat” for their migration in Gujarat. Hijrat is an Arabic word associated with the flight of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina with his followers on 16 July 922. In India, the Islam started to spread after the establishment of the Sultan dynasty in the 11th century and it continue to spread even today. Dalit have to face caste based insults everyday which are originated from the caste structure. This situation has led Dalits to convert their religion and embrace other religion. Before 1956, Dalits have embraced Islam and Christianity to have a valued identity. Dalpat Chauhan has claimed, “If a survey is carried out across India on the lineage of Muslims, then it will prove that majority of Dalits have embraced the Islam.” (Chauhan 2009, 148) As Hijrat is an Arabic word quite popular among the Muslims, it also

became popular among the Dalits due to close social contact. They are equally discriminated against by caste Hindus. For example, the Dalits and the Muslims are not allowed to reside in a so-called upper caste locale and thus are forced to stay in the same area away from the upper castes. The living arrangements of these marginalized sections of the society have made an impact on the vocabulary of these sections.

My focus in this chapter is the historical context of in which Dalit migrations of the end of the 20th century took place. I have already argued that anti-Dalit consolidation had taken place during the 1981 anti-reservation agitations. This anti-Dalit climate was further consolidated in the 1985 anti-reservation riots. This chapter thus focuses on the period from 1981 leading up to the 1985 agitation. This provides the context and frame through which I read the phenomenon of Dalit migration in the last decade of the 20th century. The two anti-reservation agitations have forced the Dalits to rethink their initiative to convert their religion and move along the path of Hindutva. Nonetheless, the upper caste oppression of Dalits did not decrease. This resulted into targeting Dalits at a micro-level. This targeting has led the Dalits to migrate. I present a detailed account of the three migrations of Biliya, Bhojpara and Sambarda. Finally, I examine the literary response of the Dalits to migrations that they have to undertake forcefully and its role in elevating the Dalit consciousness.

5.1: Between Two Anti-Reservation Agitations

Even after the 1981 anti-reservation agitation, However, the government headed by a “low caste” Rajput Madhavsinh Solanki continued to take progressive steps like the Land Ceiling Act, 20-Point programme, policy of upliftment of the poor and backward classes and the mid-day meals programme during its term of five years from 1980 to 1985. These kinds of pro-poor programmes were not acceptable to the newly formed middle class of upper castes.

The middle class – comprising of all castes and religions – that was formed during the Navnirman agitation in 1974 had gradually changed its composition and by 1980, it became an exclusive group comprising Brahmin, Bania, and Patels. This new middle class of upper castes was vocal, resourceful and in a position to launch a high-pitched agitation even without the support of 70 per cent of the population. The upper castes dominated the press and other media. They also dominated the trade and industries of Gujarat. The Bar Association of Gujarat was also dominated by the upper caste. The employees' organization in Sachivalaya (secretariat), other government offices, Panchayats and semi-government corporations were also dominated by them. The middle class believed that no government in Gujarat could take any decision without their approval. They wanted to prevent the state from functioning as an agent of social change. They opposed the decision of the Solanki government to appoint the Rane Commission to review the Baxi SEBC list.

The First (or Bakshi) Commission for SEBCs was appointed in Gujarat, by the state government in 1972. It identified and listed 82 caste communities as SEBC and recommended 10 % reservation for them. The Janta Front government implemented the recommendation in 1978. Since then, the total percentage of reservation including 14% for ST and 7% for SC has been 31%. The second Commission or the Rane Commission was appointed by the Madhavsinh Solanki government in 1981 with the same terms of reference as the first Commission.

Ghanshyam Shah highlights the attempts made by the upper castes to have a share in the reservations for socially and economically poor sections of the society,

Besides Rajputs, number of Brahmins, artisan and some other intermediate castes including Patels made representations to the Rane commission. Most of the Brahmin representatives pleaded that they should be treated as 'socially backward' because of their priestly occupation which gives them low income. Brahmins and Patel, like the GKS argued that the economically poor,

irrespective of their caste, should be treated as backward and should be given the benefits of reservation.... (1987, 160)

Rane Commission submitted its report in October 1983. The Rane Report upset the expectations of the Solanki Government. It suggested 28 per cent reservation for government employment and higher education for families earning less than Rs. 10,000 per annum and engaged in one of the 67 occupations listed by it and added that similar others that may be added in future. The list included landless labour, marginal farmers, rural artisans, labourers in the unorganized sector and shepherds among others. It rejected caste as a measurement of backwardness on two counts. First, it argued that the traditional caste system had broken down and contractual relationships between individuals had emerged. Second, being a secular state, caste could not be accepted as it legitimized the caste system which ultimately led the commission to adopt economic criteria, i.e. occupation to determine backwardness. The Congress (I) government maintained conspicuous silence over the recommendations of the Rane Commission for almost 15 months.

By the end of the tenure of the Solanki government, in the beginning of 1985, the struggle for power between the two leading Congress (I) politicians Madhavsinh Solanki and Jinabhai Darji intensified. Though the former belonged to the backward caste, he refrained from identifying himself as a caste leader except at the local level. Jinabhai Darji belonged to an artisan caste and he had criticized the high castes for their exploitation of the Dalits, Adivasis and other backward communities. He was champion of the cause of the tribes, the Dalits, and the backward castes. Thus, he was well respected among the elected members of Congress (I) as well as the exploited sections of society. In order to counter him within the Congress (I) and to win the votes of the Backward Castes in the elections, Madhavsinh declared a rise in the quota of reservations for Backward castes from 10 to 28 percent in January 1985; just two months before

the polls. The cabinet used the Rane Commission report to raise the reservation quota. At the same time, it rejected the main recommendations of the Commission of using ‘income and occupations’ as criteria for determining backwardness on the ground that the Commission had gone beyond its terms of reference as it was not asked to decide the criteria for backwardness; it was asked to supplement and complement the 82 castes that were identified by the Baxi Commission as SEBCs. The government appointed a new committee under the chairmanship of Haroobhai Mehta (Congress [I] Member of Parliament) to identify additional castes and communities other than the 82 castes as backward and asked it to submit its report within fifteen days. (Yagnik 1985, 8)

The riots erupted over the decision of the Gujarat state government to increase the reserved quotas for Backward-Caste Hindus. Upper caste Hindus started the agitation against the state policy. Startlingly, within a month, the intra-Hindu caste dispute turned into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. Communal uproar spread throughout the city. The army was called in, but the waves of violence continued. Finally, after seven months of anti-reservation agitation and catastrophic communal violence, the riots gradually abated.

5.2: The Second Anti-Reservation Agitation of 1985

When the new reservation policy was announced by the Gujarat government in January 1985 there was at first no overt reaction from the upper castes. The initiative came from the engineering students of Morbi College in Saurashtra with their boycott of classes protesting against keeping 49 percent of seats reserved for SEBCs on 11 February 1985. The news appeared in the press the next day and students of Ahmedabad felt that they should also take up the issue. When the students of L.D. Engineering College who were also responsible for beginning the Navnirman movement in 1974 in Ahmedabad held their first meeting and decided to agitate

against the reservations for SEBCs in the engineering and medical colleges then the anti-reservation action took shape in mid-February. The students decided to boycott the preliminary examinations, which were scheduled for 18 February. Their parents too entered the agitation.

Yagnik¹ says,

The agitation became more substantial only after the ad-hoc and informal parent's associations of four elite secondary and higher secondary schools of the posh Ellis Bridge area joined with a hefty share of their ward boycotting the coming school leaving examinations. The rest of the higher secondary schools simply followed, or were compelled to follow. Later, the parent's associations of the four schools expanded, as expected, into the Akhil Gujarat Vali Maha Mandal (AGVM) (All Gujarat Parent's Association.) A college teacher became its president. Wider conflagrations and the consequent atrocities followed. (1985, 5-6)

Within a few days, the students formed an All-Gujarat Educational Reform Action Committee (AGERAC), as well as a student central anti-reservation body, Akhil Gujarat Navrachna Samiti (AGNS).

Rajan Gurjar details the caste composition and leadership of the student associations:

The leadership pattern of the agitation clearly shows the dominance of the elitist groups. As much as 80 per cent of the leadership is composed of Patels. Many important leaders of Vali Maha Mandal and the Gujarat Nav Rachana Samiti including Vali Mandal President Shankarbhay Patel, a Janta Party activist (who was the polling agent of Chimanlal Patel at the 1985 elections to the Assembly) owe their personal allegiance to Chimanbhai Patel who is an important powerful leader of Patels. Four out of five the members of the Students Action Committee are connected with the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the students' wing of the BJP. (1985, 161)

The AGERAC called for a *bandh* or shut down in Ahmedabad on 25 February, which was observed in the old city, but had no effect in the predominantly working-class areas on the

¹ This detailed account of the second anti-reservation agitation is based on my reading of Howard Spodek's essay "From Gandhi to Violence: Ahmedabad's 1985 Riots in Historical Perspective," and Achyut Yagnik's essay, "The Wages of Populism: The Second Anti-Reservation Agitation." I also followed the course of the anti-reservation which was given by Achyut Yagnik in this article. For details see these two articles.

eastern side of Ahmedabad. It also gained the support of some Bar Associations and the doctors of Ahmedabad. Almost all the hospitals of the surgeons in the city went on a token strike the next day. Moreover, the AGERAC submitted a memorandum to the government, demanding the abolition both of the new quotas and of the roster system of reservations in government job promotions. On 28 February, a student protest resulted in the death of the passenger in the burning bus.

Congress (I), led by Madhavsinh Solanki, won the 1985 state elections with a large majority, securing 149 out of the 182 Gujarat assembly seats. Solanki formed a government on 11 March 1985, in which members of the KHAM caste coalition held fourteen of the twenty cabinet seats. This led the students to revive the agitation. They were guided by their parents. The agitation now involved stoning private and public vehicles which resulted in the damage of fifteen buses and burning of two. The AGNS and AGVM called for a Gujarat *bandh* for 18 March. In the face of the mounting disturbances the government decided on 16 March to defer the new reservation policy by one year, publish the Rane Report and postpone the examinations in the universities and schools from mid to late-March. Nonetheless, the students hardened their position and announced that they opposed any kind of reservations. No communal incidents were reported during this period.

At this point, the 1985 anti-reservation caste riot turned into large-scale communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. This was unexpected, as Gujarat politics in the 1970s and 1980s had displayed no evidence of endemic or even newly developing Hindu–Muslim strife. This episode raises following questions: How and why, then, did caste disputes over reservations turn into communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims? How was the link between caste

reservations and communalism, which was established in the discourse of reservations, expressed on the ground?

After the completion of voting on 6 March 1985, the caretaker government announced that it had postponed raising the reservation quota for SEBC for a year. This had no effect on the students. Instead, student representatives from different parts of the state met in Ahmedabad on March 10 and decided to intensify the agitation. The anti-reservationists observed Gujarat Bandh on 18 March 1985. As Asgar Ali Engineer mentioned in his report, “On 18 March night when the successful bandh ended, the *Mrutyu Ghant* (death knell) of the reservation policy was sounded at 8:30 p.m. That was when the first reports about the communal disturbances came from Daryapur. At the same time clashes were reported from Vadigam and Naginawadi.” (1985, 630)

The army was called in on 19 March, and the walled city was placed under curfew. Yet during the next three days, the city witnessed a rise in both communal and anti-reservation incidents. (*Times of India*, 20 March 1985) The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, came to Ahmedabad on 23 March. He accused the opposition parties, which had lost the elections, of being responsible for the events. (*The Hindu*, 30 March 1985) The rest of the month was relatively quiet, and by 2 April the army had withdrawn and the curfew had been lifted.

Nonetheless, the fight against the new reservation policy continued with the persistent boycotting of schools, colleges, and examinations from 3 April 1985 to 21 April 1985. Various professional associations supported the struggle and went on a sympathy strike, protesting against the arrest of the student leaders.

The situation deteriorated when, on 22 April, the police revolted after the killing of Head Constable Laxman Desai. The same day, the police attacked and set fire to the building of the

Gujarat Samachar Press. Large-scale arson, looting, rioting, and destruction followed throughout the day and night.

On the same day, a mob of 500 armed with lathis, knives, rags and kerosene tins attacked a Dalit colony named Ambedkarnagar. Around 200 Dalit houses out of 300 houses of Ambedkarnagar were destroyed and the Dalits were mercilessly beaten. As Pravin Sheth and Ramesh Menon report Dalit descriptions of this attack:

We were attacked because we are Harijans and no one wants us to prosper or come up. This feeling got more etched as photographs of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar found in these houses were smashed while photographs of Hindu gods and goddesses were spared. A huge board bearing Ambedkar's photograph and name which had been ceremoniously installed outside their colony in 1982 was the first target of the attackers (30).

Pravin Sheth and Ramesh Menon continue, "On the same day in the Garibnagar (Indiranagar) locality of Bapunagar 300 houses belonging to Muslims were razed to the ground and thus six thousand Muslims became homeless. Over 40 Muslims were killed and 100 were injured in this ghastly attack." (30)

More than 150 business organizations of Ahmedabad such as cloth merchants, food grain dealers, dealers in books and stationeries, edible oil, spices, electrical appliances, radio and television, laundry owners, footwear dealers, bullion merchants, etc. observed a bandh for five days beginning from 5 June 1985, in protest against the government's failure to protect the life and property of the citizens.

In view of the escalating disturbances, the Gujarat government decided to set up a judicial inquiry to probe all aspects of violence in the state, and Solanki agreed to postpone the increase of reservations for the SEBCs until a national consensus on the issue was reached. The government also extended the academic year and released the student leaders who had been

arrested under the National Security Act (*Times of India*, 10 June 1985). Surprisingly, although Solanki agreed to accept the anti-reservationists' demands, they decided to continue their struggle and advanced new claims, demanding that the existing 10 percent reservations for the SEBC would not continue after 1988. The second event that intensified the violence during June 1985 occurred on 20 June, when a Hindu religious procession, the Rath Yatra, that happened to coincide with the Muslim holiday of Id-Ul-Fitr, took place in defiance of an agreement between the temple organizers and the authorities, turned into communal combat (*Times of India*, 21 June 1985). The caste and communal violence continued with intermittent normalcy throughout June and mid-July. Ahmedabad and Vadodara were the worst affected areas, though incidents of clashes between, Hindus and Muslims between caste Hindus agitators and police took place in many other cities and towns in Gujarat. On the directive of the Prime Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki resigned on 6 July 1985 and Amarsinh Chaudhari, belonging to ST community became the chief minister.

On 18 July, the government and the anti-reservationists finally reached an accord over the reservation issue. The government agreed to abandon the 18 per cent increase of reservations for the SEBC and to establish a commission that would look into the question of the 10 per cent reservation for backward castes after 1988. The government also agreed to set up a commission of inquiry into the police atrocities and to release, without charge, all those who had been arrested in connection with the anti-reservation agitation. However, curfew was lifted only at the beginning of August. Pravin Sheth and Ramesh Menon stated, "The communal riots that started on 18 March 1985 and continued up to August 1985 claimed 180 lives" (42).

Howard Spodek has laid down some of the key causes that linked caste reservations and communalism. They are,

(1) Some charged that Congress (I) politicians, in order to divert attention from the caste riots and to unite the Hindu population, had encouraged communal rioting (*Times of India*, 30 July 1985).

(2) Others saw the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) fostering communalism as a strategy for removing Solanki from power. (3) Still another explanation saw Hindu-Muslim violence as a plan by land speculators and developers to push people from their homes which could then be seized for use by the locally dominant group or for commercial sale. (4) A final view saw bootleggers encouraging the riots. A few days earlier, on 12 March 1985 some 28 people had died from drinking illicit liquor and demands of crackdowns on bootleggers followed. The riots sidetracked this attention. (*Times of India*, 29 March 1985)

The police and the press played out the same role that they did during the 1981 agitation. As Pravin Sheth and Ramesh Menon have described the role of press,

Objectivity has been a casualty, as most of the local dailies are controlled and dominated by high caste Hindus. The materials published were by and large slanted towards the agitation. News items heralding the damage done to Hindus were played up, while Muslims attracted only negative coverage. When eight Hindus were roasted alive in Dabgarwad area of Ahmedabad after a Muslim mob locked the doors of their houses and set it on fire, the local press got livid with rage. The *Gujarat Samachar* blew up pictures on its' front page of the charred bodies being removed by the fire brigade.but media ignored the Bapunagar carnage of Muslims and Ambedkarnagar attack on Dalits on 22 April 1985 for obvious reasons. (74)

None of the Backward castes could counter effectively the anti-reservation agitation. Two weeks after the government announced its decision to postpone the increase in the reservation seats for one year, the Baxi Panch Action Committee (BPAC) was formed on 30 March 1985 to defend the reservation. Initiative this time came from the ruling faction of the Congress (I) party rather than the various caste organizations or secular pro reservation groups. The BPAC gave a press statement urging the government to implement the reservation policy immediately instead of keeping it in abeyance for one year. The Anamat Andolan Pratikar Manch (AAPM), i.e. a

platform to counter the anti-reservation movement was formed which announce in early April. AAPM declare its intention to start a counter agitation. The anti-reservation agitators became alarmed as they knew that SEBCs that had a large numerical strength, as mentioned by Ghanshyam Shah:

....the anti-reservation agitators immediately announced that their agitation was not against the Backward castes or weaker sections of society. They accused the government of inciting Backward castes students to attack the agitators. The upper caste agitators were aware of the numerical strength of the Backward castes, therefore they wanted to avoid encounter with Backward castes wherever the latter were in majority. They isolated SC-ST from the SEBC, with an argument that their agitation was against the hike in reservation for the SEBC. Since the SEBC constitute a majority in rural areas, the 1985 agitation was kept out from the rural areas. Whereas the 1981 agitation spread to rural areas where the SCs were in minority, But even at that time it did not spread to the tribal areas where the STs were in majority. (1987, 170)

Thus, the SC-ST leaders initially kept themselves aloof or were indifferent to the pro-reservation committees formed by the SEBCs, and they reminded themselves of the fact that the SEBCs had not supported them in the 1981 agitation. However, when the Dalit localities were attacked in Ahmedabad, SC-ST leaders became alarmed and began to extend their support to the pro-reservation committees. But they were prevented from doing so by those who were in power. Congress(I) leaders feared that mobilization of the SEBCs would lead to confrontation and clashes between the upper castes on the one hand and SEBC and SC-ST on the other. Such clashes would paralyze law and order machinery, which no government can tolerate. Moreover, there was no unity among the various factions of SC, ST and SEBC. Moreover, the leaders of these castes who had gained middle class status had distanced themselves from their own castes. They were respected but their leadership was not accepted. In order to seek support of SC-ST and SEBC members, a few of the leaders visited villages but they did not receive any

encouraging response. They did not understand the importance of the reservation. Members of these deprived groups had their own rationale. They listened to and voted for the educated and well-connected persons of their caste during elections because of the same caste, while other candidates (in the case of non-reserved constituencies) came from other castes.

The performance of religious rituals and ceremonies as well as the process of Sanskritization had always strengthened the social order dominated by Brahminical ideology. As a result, they were repeatedly advised to maintain the Varna system and preserve their dharma to enable them to claim higher social status. Hence, in order to preserve their identity they distanced themselves from those who are below them and look down upon those who are below them. Thus, their anti-Dalit stance created obstacles in the path of achieving the unity of the deprived sections of the society.

Heterogeneity within some of the groups bearing common caste nomenclature was also very noticeable. For instance, the Kolis who constituted a single largest caste cluster among the Backward castes were divided among themselves in socio-cultural and economic matters. The Kolis of Central Gujarat aspired to be Kshatriyas, whereas the Kolis of South Gujarat called themselves Patels and the Kolis of Saurashtra called themselves Kolis. For the Kolis of Central Gujarat, Patels have been their enemies for the last two centuries, the reasons being that the Patels grabbed their land and had been exploiting their labour. However, the Kolis of Saurashtra had similar antagonistic relationships with the Rajputs and not with the Patels.

The middle class that emerged from the SEBC during the last four decades was relatively very small in comparison with the upper and middle caste members of the middle class. Over a course of time, they imbibed the values of the Brahmin-Bania middle class.

The anti-reservation movement of the 1985 succeeded because the government that raised the quota was not sincere about implementing its new policy. It was a halfhearted political measure. Not only the police and the bureaucracy but also the press, the intellectuals, professors, teachers, literary personalities and free-lance writers justified the demands of the agitators which played a crucial role in the success of the anti-reservation agitation.

5.3: Dalit Migrations

The anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985 disturbed the society. The social relationships among the various caste groups became hostile. Powerful caste groups had forced the government to take back its decision to raise reservation quotas for SEBCs and the reservation benefits of carry forward and interchangeability for SCs. The upper castes were empowered with its success in 1981 and 1985. This led the society to stratify on the caste lines more strongly than before. Domination of the upper castes in the each sphere of life increased. The caste superiority syndrome of the upper caste made the lives of Dalits quite miserable in the village. On the other hand, the educated strata of the Dalits started to demand their right to have a respectable life, they strongly resented everyday insults. They were aware about their abilities to earn a livelihood so were not ready to compromise on the issue of self-respect and dignity. For them a dignified survival became a prime goal. They were ready to migrate from their homelands rather than to tolerate caste oppressions. Major migrations have taken place from 1981 to 1997. These migrations reflected two developments. First, caste consciousnesses has become quite acute and vicious across Gujarat including Saurashtra and second, the gradual development of the Dalits' desire for valued survival rather than devalued survival. I think this has been the

major change in the psyche of the Dalits because of the two anti-reservation agitations. I think this is the victory of Ambedkar and his ideology.²

In this section, I have concentrated on three migrations: (1) Biliya, (2) Bhojpara and (3) Sambarda.³

The central cause for the migration of Biliya was the tension prevailing between the upper caste people and Dalits as a consequence of the 1981 anti-reservation agitation. The Patels especially were waiting to teach a lesson to the Dalits. They were furious and eager to take revenge because of three issues.⁴ First issue was economic. Majority of the Dalits were landless but they were not dependent on the farm labour. Majority of them worked as masons at Siddhpur and in nearby villages and received 18 rupees per day. They were ready to work for 14 rupees in their own village but the Patels were not ready to give more than 12 rupees per day. Therefore, the Dalits refused to work. The Patels' could not bear this. The second issue was political in the form of the loss of a Patel candidate in the district panchayat elections. The oppositional candidate of Congress (I) had won as Dalits voted in his favour. Thus, because of Dalits, a Patel had to face a loss. The third issue was of an atrocity case located in social life. A Patel Sarpanch had served tea to a Dalit social worker in a separate cup. The Dalit worker lodged a complaint under

² The details of migrations follow:

1. Village : Biliya, district Mehsana. Dalits migrated from the village in 1981 and settled down near Siddhapur in a separate colony.
2. Village : Bhojpara, district Bhavnagar. Dalits migrated from the village in 1984 and settled at Gundala village of Shihor taluka of Bhavnagar district.
3. Village : Sambarda, district Banaskantha. Dalits migrated and took shelter in the Collector's office compound in 1989.
4. Village : Chitrodipura, district Mehsana. Dalits migrated to Gandhinagar in 1991.
5. Village : Chavand, district Amreli. Dalits migrated to Amreli collector's office and settled down until they were rehabilitated.
6. Village : Aniyali, district Ahmedabad. Dalits settled down first at Vadhwan village and then nearby Dhandhuka where government had provided them land.

³ The three migrations of Aniyali, Chavand, and Chitrodipura are narrated in brief in the Appendix-V.

⁴ The account of migration of Biliya is based on my reading of Bhanu Aidhvaryu's report "Sawal Samajik Buniyadno" which was published in *Rudravina No Zankar*.

the Citizen Right's Protection Act. In this case, one of the Dalits of Biliya registered his presence as a witness in the court. As a consequence of these three reasons the Patels were infuriated.

The anti-reservation agitation of 1981 provided the Patel's an appropriate opportunity to take revenge of the three issues. The Patels had ostracized the Dalits and stoned the Dalit vas. Therefore, the Dalits migrated and camped at the Mamlatdar office at Siddhpur. However, the Mamlatdar intervened in the matter and sent them back with a S.R.P. protection. However, the peace did not last long. The Dalits were again attacked on 20 March 1981 and the mob burnt the Dalit Vas. The mob also beat a policeman and tried to throw the policeman in the fire. Other policeman came to his rescue. Then both the policemen were again caught, beaten and dragged towards the village. One of them was wounded with a scythe. At last, other policeman had to fire to save the policeman from the mob. In the police firing, two of the attackers were shot down and one was injured.

The Dalits migrated to the Punamnath Ashram at Siddhapur on 21 March 1981. They have been living at this place since 1981. No aid was given to any of the Dalit families. 21 years after their migration, the government provided them land for residence in 2001. The brutal physical attacks made on the Dalits forced them to leave their village. They had to migrate to save their lives. The upper castes could not bear to see a Dalit who could argue against them socially, politically and economically.

The second instance that I discuss is that of Bhojpara. Bhojpara is a village of Bhavnagar district situated 20 kilometers away from Bhavnagar. In January 1984, 130 Dalits of 26 families migrated and settled down at Gundala village of Shihor taluka. Almost six months before on 15

July 1983 a Dalit farm labourer named Jeevabhai Gabhabhai refused to work on the farm of a Rajput named Kanubha Bachuba as he was ill. Kanubha beat and threatened to kill him as the Rajput landlord was not ready to hear 'no' from a Dalit. Jeevabhai and the other Dalits filed a police case to save their lives. Kanubha was arrested. After release on the bail, he threatened the whole Dalit vas. In order to survive the Dalits migrated in January 1984 to Gundala village of Shihor taluka and settled down in the tents.⁵

On 24 January 1984, Maisaheb Ambedkar visited the campsite of the migrant Dalits. In the personal talk with Maisaheb Ambedkar the Dalit women said that in every house, there had been illegitimate children. This statement of the Dalit women proved their exploitation in all facets of life. The Dalits presented their anguish thus,

Our sisters and daughters are abused and molested, we receive only six rupees as a daily wages for the farm labour and we receive money at the will of the Rajputs. In order to bring fodder and firewood for the Rajputs, we cannot work at the other's field other than our master. If anyone is ill or died in our house then also we have to do household chores in their houses. Our children have to come to the Dalit vas to drink water from their school. Our children are badly beaten in the school. They cannot ride bicycle, the elders cannot move without a turban on their heads. We have to give money from certain height to the grocer, and have to catch the packet thrown by the grocer.

(19)

The situation was so terrible which led them to say, "Here we live in an open plot, also suffer from cold and heat but we live peacefully and most important we are secure here." (21) The Dalits had passed their years amidst the terrible oppression of Rajputs at Bhojpara so they wanted to reside freely after the migration. They knew that they could do any kind of hard work so they could survive at any place. They did not want only survival but also a dignified and an honoured survival.

⁵ The account of Bhojpara migration is based on the report *Javu Kaye Malak? (Bhojpara Hijrat)* by the Dalit Panthers of Gujarat.

This was the gradual change in the psyche of the Dalits after 1981. As I have described earlier in Biliya Dalits started to counter the position of the upper caste people. This was the first step towards the development of an honoured survival. At Bhojpara after their migration they realized the importance of the self-respect. Initially they migrated to survive but then their psyche was changed and they wished to stay at such a place where they are equally treated as human beings.

The final instance of Dalit migration that I present here is the most detailed. It exemplifies the idea of migration for self-respect. Though we can see elements of self-respect issues in the Bhojpara migration, these elements are prominent in the Sambarda migration. The powerful section of local society – the Gadhvis – harassed the Dalits of Sambarda so they protested against their day-to-day harassment and humiliation. The victims successfully asserted their self-worth by undertaking migration from their native village, and camping in the open before the District Collector's office for 131 days in 1989. Their demand was for an alternative settlement where their life with dignity would be secure. They succeeded in their mission against all odds, and despite collusion between the ruling elite and stakes. The self-assertion of Dalits in an oppressive environment is quite commendable.⁶

Sambarda village is 6 km from Palanpur, the district headquarters of Banaskantha District, North Gujarat. In 1989, the population of the village was 550. The village consists of only two castes: Gadhvi and Vankar, which constitute 45 and 55 per cent respectively of the total population. In the traditional caste hierarchy, both castes occupied a low status. Gadhvi is listed under SEBCs and Vankar falls within the category of SCs popularly known as Dalits.

⁶ The account of the migration of Sambarda is based on my reading of a book *Sambarda thi Swamannagar*. Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheriya. Surat: Centre for Social Studies, 1995. For English account refer Desai Harshad and Chandu Maheriya. "Dalit Assertion for Self-Esteem: From Sambarda to Swamannagar." *Development and Deprivation in Gujarat in Honour of Jan Brenan*. Ed. Ghanshyam Shah, Mario Rutten and Hein Streefkerk. New Delhi: Sage, 2002. 231-248.

Gadhvis were traditionally court poets and folk singers, and also raised livestock. It is believed that about 200 years ago, the then ruler gave Sambarda to the Gadhvis as giras or gratuitous gift. However, they considered themselves Kshatriyas, and followed the rituals and lifestyle of the Rajputs. They insisted that Dalits and others addressed them as ‘darbar’ or ‘bhabha’, as the Rajputs in the region were addressed (Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheria, 4-13).

The Vankars are traditional weavers. Barring one family, they had no agricultural land in the village, nor were they farm labourers. They used to sell their products in nearby towns, which exposed them to market mechanisms and wider social and economic networks.

The traditional relationship between the Dalits and Gadhvis in the pre-1947 days was that of master-serf. The Gadhvis had given land to the Dalits that was just enough to build a small house on. In return, the latter were expected to provide labour without payment, veth i.e., forced labour. The traditional system of veth included fetching fodder, transporting crops, and working as a coolie for the guests of the master and for visiting government servants. After Independence, the regime of the Nawab of Palanpur came to an end, and the system of forced labour also gradually disappeared. After independence, Dalit took education and were able to fetch government jobs.

In 1989, about 46 adult male Dalits held various government jobs in nearby towns. It was the first generation of Dalits who had got government jobs and the mobility to leave the village and migrate to a nearby town. (Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheria, 4).

Of all the Gadhvi families in the village, the Bhairavdan or B. K. Gadhvi’s joint family was the most prominent. Though B. K. Gadhvi was trained as a lawyer, his main vocation was politics. He was Secretary of the Banaskantha District Congress (I) Committee in 1971—72, and

the President of the District Congress (I) from 1972-84. During the incident of the migration, B. K. Gadhvi was the Union Minister of State for Finance. The political position of B. K. Gadhvi boosted the ego of the community in general and his close relatives in particular. Gadhvi youths who were involved in petty thefts in and outside the village began to flaunt the power of B. K. Gadhvi to intimidate and terrorize the Dalits. The incidents of atrocities against the Vankars of the village increased with the political ascent of B. K. Gadhvi. (Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheria, 15).

The Gadhvis had taken over the *gaucher* and wasteland areas. Because of this, the Dalits were deprived of fodder for their livestock. Since the Dalits buried their dead, they had a separate burial ground. For some years, however, they could not enter the place because B. K. Gadhvi's family had not only grabbed it but also built a borewell there. Vankar women were among the worst affected. It was their common experience to endure obscene gestures, name-calling, wolf-whistles and, at times, physical molestation on the road by Gadhvi youths.

A Dalit youth was expected not to wear clean or modern clothes in the village, nor modern accessories like a wrist watch or dark glasses. He was also not expected to walk around in the village with his head held high, i.e., looking straight or askance, instead of submissively down at the ground. There were a number of instances in the 1980s in which Vankar boys were beaten up and insulted for wearing 'decent' clothes. (Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheria, 20).

The Dalits were fed up of such day-to-day harassment of the Gadhvis. Their collective decision to undertake migration was sparked off by an attack on a Dalit youth called Rajnikant. On 11 June 1989, he was attacked by two Gadhvi youths. The attacks caused serious injuries and Rajnikant bled profusely. As soon as other Dalits heard his cries, they rushed to the spot and freed Rajnikant from the clutches of the Gadhvi youth. After rescuing Rajnikant from the

Gadhvi goons, his father and four others took him to the civil hospital at Palanpur by the evening bus. On the same night, Rajnikant's father lodged a police complaint at Palanpur. It was carefully worded in legal language with a cogent description of the crime and its social background, revealing the social consciousness and writing skill of educated Dalits.

As stated by Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheriya in their book *Sambarda thi Swamannagar*,

On the next day 12 June 1989, a memorandum signed by 13 Dalits of Sambarda was submitted to the Collector. It gave details of dates and names, as well as accounts of other incidents in the past in which Dalits had been the victims of the 'criminal activities' of Gadhvi Youths. The memorandum asserted that: (a) the psyche of the Gadhvi youths had not changed with the abolition of veth; (b) the Gadhvis cannot stomach our (Dalits') progress; (c) they consider us slaves; (d) B.K. Gadhvi has power and pelf, and is cunning; (e) what is happening today in the Finance Minister's village would have been shameful even during the feudal 17th century; and (f) we will be compelled to go on a fast-unto-death or commit migration if the guilty are not punished. (27-30)

However, the police took immediate action by transferring the sub-inspector Pandor, who had registered the complaint the next day. Moreover, some Dalits of Sambarda were threatened with death if they supported Rajnikant. Meanwhile, the culprits obtained anticipatory bail on 14 June 1989.

Consequently, 15 June 1989, the Dalits posed to themselves the question: 'What had to be done to survive in this village?' This question was discussed in a series of meetings in which not only the Dalits of Sambarda but also Dalits from other village and from the town of Palanpur participated. A short letter along with a copy of the previous day's migration resolution was submitted to the Palanpur Collector on 19 June. It informed the collector as stated by Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheriya :

...Due to the torture by Gadhvis, Harijans of Sambarda will undertake migration from the village on 26 June 1989 to camp in the compound of your office. We also inform you, sir, that we shall be reaching there with our families and household possessions and stay there until alternative arrangement is made about our safety in the village. A copy of the resolution about the migration by the Harijans of the village is enclosed herewith. (37)

From 20 June to 22 June 1989, not a single official or political leader visited Sambarda. Though the local Dalit leaders initiated the struggle, Panachand Parmar, Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Morbi Engineering College, assumed leadership during the migration. He was a native of the village. Like other Dalits settled outside the village, he used to visit the village on various social occasions. Prof. Parmar came to Sambarda from Morbi on the day before migration began, at around six in the evening. He entered the picture only 15 hours before the migration but his presence proved to be very useful and decisive for the continuity and eventual success of a movement that would last 131 days.

The approach of the authorities was to break the morale of the Dalits by money. The Dalits who were quite aware about the functioning of the government machinery were firm in their decision to migrate. Finally, at 9.15 am on 26 June 1989, all the Dalits of Sambarda left the village in a procession and headed for the Collector's office at Palanpur. All were deeply pained at the idea of leaving their homes and their village, but none cried. The women had already locked their houses by 8.30 am and were all set to leave, and the migration began at the appointed hour.

In keeping with the gravity and solemnity of the occasion it was decided to keep the procession silent, with only two banners bearing the hand-painted announcement "Migration of Dalits due to atrocities by the Gadhvis of Sambarda". A camp was established in a hired tent and mattresses provided. The migrants had the support of the Palanpur Dalits from the moment they

were received at Malan gate. The feeling that the Sambarda Dalits were not to be left alone and that the injustice had to be fought by all the Dalits, without bringing in sub-caste differences, lasted all through the struggle.

On the same day, telegrams were sent to the Governor, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, the Central Home Minister, as well as to the Prime Minister with the text: “Threat to life and property (of Dalits) by close relatives of Finance Minister B. K. Gadhvi. Dalits of Sambarda village are camping near Collector's office. Request attention in the matter and to do the needful” (45-6). On 28 June, the organizers of the struggle disseminated a detailed write-up on their decision through a leaflet entitled “Why our Migration?” On the same day, a few sympathetic journalists from Ahmedabad, like the editor of *Naya Marg* and a reporter of *Sandesh*, visited the migrants. As a result, two days later the whole issue of the migration began to be published in the Gujarati and English newspapers of Ahmedabad. Statements and letters to the editor also appeared, which compelled B. K. Gadhvi to defend his stand.

On 6 July 1989, B. K. Gadhvi and his supporters organized an anti-migration rally. After five days, the Dalits organized a counter-protest rally. Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheriya accurately described the success of the rally,

More than 100000 Dalits and their supporters participated. They marched in total silence and in disciplined rows of three. It demonstrated their mettle, the cold strength of steel. The authority did not grant permission for the rally and a case was filed against two leaders of the migratory for violating peace. Several prominent Dalit leaders, including MPs (Members of Parliament) and MLAs (Member of the State Legislative Assembly) of different political parties, except the Congress, led the rally and addressed it. The organizers tried to draw the attention of national newspapers, to enthuse the local Dalits and to place their problem in a national perspective. Out of the four resolutions passed at the rally, the first one demanded:

(1) Habitable alternative land for the migratory; (2) Just compensation for land and houses in Sambarda; (3) Arrest of anti-social elements of Sambarda under TADA; (4) Educational facilities for the children; (5) Daily allowance for day-to-day needs; (6) Police bandobust for future security; and (7) Withdrawal of notices to government servants who took part in the agitation. (50-51)

News about this massive rally was completely blacked out by all the newspapers of Ahmedabad. In this connection, the Mumbai Gujarati daily *Samkaleen*, dated 21 July 1989, noted as mentioned by Harshad Desai and Chandu Maheriya:

The Ahmedabad dailies suppressed the news of the mammoth Dalit rally of 10 July in support of the Sambarda Vankars. Nearly 50,000 people joined the rally. Apart from the Banaskantha district, Dalits from places as far off as Mehsana, Harij, Patan, Kadi and Kalol etc., participated. This was a silent revolt against continuous atrocities by Gadhvis. It is being said that newspapers in Gujarat suppressed the news due to corruption. (52)

Swaman Jyot Yatra (a propaganda campaign with a torch called “The flame of self-respect”) was undertaken in two jeeps carrying supporters 137 villages and seven towns of North Gujarat from 6 August to 13 August 1989. It made night halts at six places en route its journey from Ahmedabad to Palanpur. Ceremonial reception of the Swaman-Jyot Yatra, small and big meetings, garbas and songs about Sambarda, were the usual features at every halt. Through this, the campaign spread the message of Dalit self-respect very effectively throughout North Gujarat.

The struggle, however, not only continued but also received public support from different sections of society. Pressure was building up from within and outside the Congress (I) party to solve the problem. Following the intervention of Jinabhai Darji and Narsinhbhai Makwana, Congress (I) MP, the Chief Minister (CM) of Gujarat invited the leaders of the migratory for negotiations on 28 August, the 64th day of the hijrat. They made their demands to rehabilitate.

The CM said that he agreed with most of their demands in principle. Since there was no rehabilitation policy for the migrants, it was difficult for the government to rehabilitate them as per their demand. Under the pounding pressure of Jinabhai Darji and Narsinhbhai Makwana and 1989 Loksabha general elections, the government of Gujarat took quick steps to solve the problem. The government designed a 'workshed-cum-residence' scheme for the migrants and allotted 41 plots to the Dalits. On 2 October 1989, and on the 99th day of migration, Narsinhbhai Makwana and representative of the Gujarat government officially declared the government's decision before a meeting of about 5,000 Dalits.

On the morning of the 131st day of the struggle, 3 November 1989 the migratory and their sympathizers set out for Swamannagar from the Collector's office amid great fanfare. The procession reached Swamannagar-Virpur at 10 am after going round the town. The migrators and their followers received a grand and emotional reception from the Sarpanch of Virpur village.

In Sambarda there was an increase in the proportion of the education and government jobs among both the Gadhvis and the Dalits. Their contacts with the city life also increased. There was a marked change in the education and economy of a Dalit. The Gadhvis could not accept the upward mobility of the Dalits as they hold the superior position in the village. Some of the Dalits raised their economy as equal to the Gadhvis. This proved indirectly that the Gadhvis economic condition had deteriorated. Therefore, they wanted that the Dalits should not change their life styles with the new economic strength. Moreover, the Dalits were not dependent on the Gadhvis from the very beginning. So the Gadhvis had to prove their superiority only through the strict implementation of the societal rules, and thus to insult and attack the Dalits.

The Gadhvis saw the positive change in a Dalit's life as a challenge. The Gadhvis who had feudal mentality wanted to maintain the age old caste structure so they opposed modernity and modernization with which Dalits had changed their life. Gadhvis wanted to maintain feudal tradition in order to subdue the Dalits as one could see in the denial of wearing pant and shirt, using spectacles, wearing shoes or to drive a vehicle. Through feudal tradition, they denied constitutional right to the Dalits as we saw in the denial of crematorium land, entry in the school, space for public lavatory etc.

Dalits could not bear these impositions as they had imbibed modernity and modernization in their lives. They wanted to move forward to change their situation. They did not think about their past life but definitely worked hard to have a better future as well as present. They believed in a just distribution of the resources of the society among its constituent members.

Throughout the hijrat movement, the participants had never tried to take help of any political leader of any political party. They had decided to fight for themselves and this was the major reason for their success. From the ruling party i.e. Congress (I) none of the MLA or MPs had visited the campsite except Narsinhbhai Makwana. This showed the failure of the political reservation for the Dalits. All the elected members had tried to save their face and thus not to irritate B. K. Gandhvi against whom the movement of Dalits had been going on. The Dalit MLAs and MPs had not tried to pressurize the government to solve problem of the migrants at the earliest.

The Gandhian workers also kept themselves aloof from the Sambarda migration. They had left the Dalits to fight alone. However, the Gandhian workers had shown keen interest in the opposition of Devnar slaughterhouse but did not pay attention to Sambarda where the lives of the human beings were at stake.

Wherever the Hijrat took place, Dalits had not changed their religion. They remained Hindus as we find in all the cases of Sambarda, Biliya, Aniyali, Bhojpara, Chavand and Chitrodipura. In addition, migration had not taken place where Dalits embraced Christianity or Islam. There, they had received co-operation, warmth, and love from the fellow Muslims and Christians and thus they improved their economic status and their level of education in such villages.

Sambarda is the first success story of the Dalit struggle for self-respect. The Dalits of Sambarda had improved their lot, thanks to education and government jobs that they could get because of the reservation policy. They were exposed to the outside world, and to the political rhetoric of equality and citizen's rights. Expansion of transport and communication had broken down the isolation of several villages located near urban centres. It had also provided the Dalits access to urban ways, to a relatively free life, and to the possibility of participating in modern institutions of education, commerce, politics, etc. Hence, they began to assert a demand for self-esteem. The Sambarda struggle was not for livelihood; it was for human dignity. The Dalits of Sambarda succeeded because of their political consciousness, leadership, and organization.

5.4: Gujarati Dalit Literary Response to Migrations

“In Gandhi's Gujarat, after three and a half decade of independence a Dalit could be killed violently, his house could be set to fire, alas.... he could be also set to fire. If the upper castes failed to achieve this, the Dalits were boycotted socially and economically so that they became helpless. An Indian who is now settled in a foreign country is willing to come back because of his/her love for the motherland while the Dalits have to forcefully vacate their houses and villages and to migrate to a safer place. The upper caste people crush his love for the motherland.”

(1984, 4)

These are the words of Jinabhai Darji, which aptly reflected the situation of the Dalits during and after the two anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985.

Literary response of the Dalits to these migrations is not as rich and extensive as compared to their response to the first anti-reservation agitation of 1981. However, they have written some poems, short stories and a novel as a response to these migrations. Harish Mangalam has written a poem *Bhojparayan* [Devoted to Bhojpara] on the migration of Bhojpara immediately after the migration so that the Dalits across Gujarat could get information about the migration. His poem worked as reportage and as a supplement to the history. In this poem, he has severely criticized the caste order that was responsible for this migration. Dalits have to migrate just because they are marked as a low caste and thus can be treated as a slave as per the will of the upper castes. Therefore, he has advised the mother Earth to be barren instead of giving birth to persons like Manu the progenitor of caste.

....

Beatings rained heavily

Like blowing corn

Identity became water

And

Flowed as a red red blood.

Therefore saying:

Hungry animals of Bhojpara

Were more evil than wolves.

Cock crowed at noon

Here no one is merciful

Therefore

Hariyo- a Dalit said

This is a nod of new age

Stay barren

Don't bear a stupid son like Manu. (1984 a, Vol.10, 14)

Dalits are not considered human beings and thus they are beaten and attacked at any moment at the will of the upper castes. Dalits cannot retaliate also. Dalits' identity is as worthless as their lives. The upper castes oppressors are termed as hungry animals which are crueler than the wolves of the forest. The poem suggests that the law of jungle based on laws of Manu prevail in India. Even the crowing of the cocks also heard in the afternoon, which suggests that the natural order does not exist. Therefore, the poet cursed Mother India to stay barren, as this country did not want another Manu.

Shankar Painter has written a poem titled as *Sambardanu Sambelu* [Wooden Pestle of Sambarda] on the migration of Sambarda. Through the genre of poetry, he has expressed the way Dalits were tormented and forced to live the life of an animal. He has concisely covered all issues of this migration.

Wooden pestle of Sambarda
 Rocks in Delhi
 Jamburiyo opens
 Its hollowness!
 42nd flag is unfurled
 Nephew Mukesh gently smiles
 A Dalit aches terribly
 Bleeds yet shouts 'Bapu'

 If drum beats in a Dalit marriage
 If a Dalit comes in in-shirt
 If a Dalit does not button
 If a Dalit keeps goggles
 Tears clothes, breaks goggles
 Also breaks legs and heads;

Rapidly fires a bullet,
 Also telephones to Delhi!
 (2010, 55)

Wooden pestle is a tool to crush the food grains. It is made of wood and thus it is not hollow. However, here the poet talks about the opening up the hollowness of a wooden pestle. Here the poet calls the Member of Parliament of Palanpur, B.K.Gadhvi the wooden pestle who is from Sambarda and his family members, relatives, and caste fellows crushed the Dalits. The poet has presented the way caste power and political power both have ruined the lives of Dalits and usurped them. The poet has depicted each of the atrocities on the Dalits. He has also talked about how the state has protected the oppressors and not the oppressed. Even after forty-two years of independence, Dalits have not achieved the freedom in its true sense. The poem is full of sarcasm.

Shankar Painter wrote *Wooden Pestle of Sambarda* after two days of this migration. He presented this poem to Prof. Panachand Parmar who led the protest and was the spokesperson of the migrants. The poem made a deep impact on Prof. Panachand Parmar. Therefore, he has decided to print 1,00,000 copies of this poem to spread the message of the migrants through distribution of this poem in the surrounding villages. This poem played an important role in raising and recharging Dalit self-consciousness. Painter has also sung this poem in the camp. Afterwards whoever visited the campsite listened to the recitation of the poem to understand the problems of the migrants not only to spread the information about the struggle, but also boosted the morale of the oppressed Dalits. The poem became a weapon for the mobilization of the Dalits. This poem has raised Dalit consciousness and thus played a pivotal role in the success of the movement.

Savji Rukhda has exposed the state's failure in protecting the Dalits in his poem *Aashvasan Patra* [Consolation Letter].

Brothers, where will you go after migration?

Everywhere

Oppressors have sat.

....

This drudgery, slavery, and abuses

Murder – rapes are

fixed on your foreheads

Like a mark on iron;

What about it?

There are many who believe

That bearing this punishment,

Is your birthright!

Your complaints

Are echoed back in your chest

Yet, to complain!

Then read! listen!

A cyclostyled apology letter

Full of consolations

A printed consolation letter. (Vol.9, 12-13)

The poet has questioned the independence, which India has won in 1947. He exposes the upper caste Brahminical psyche who still believes that Dalits are meant to bear their punishments. Drudgery, slavery, abuses, murders and rapes are like a mark on an iron bar which are not easy to remove. Even if Dalits migrate then also the state does not take any steps to ameliorate their suffering. All they do is to send a printed consolation letter to the Dalits. The state is unable to take any steps against the oppressors as it comprises of the oppressors. The state has taken for granted the Dalits' migration as a routine activity. The state does not bother to write a consolation letter that is personalized and meaningful. In fact, it has already printed cyclostyled

copies of it for all the future migrations. The poet also mocks at the helplessness of the state, which has become a kind of a toy in the hands of Brahminism.

Dalpat Chauhan has presented the socio-economic conflict between the upper castes people and Dalits before independence in *Malak* [The Homeland]. *Malak* is divided in 16 chapters. Chaudhari Gokal is an upper caste landlord. His daughter-in-law Santok has borne a son. The child is conceived by a man of the weaver community i.e. Dalit named Bhago Vankar, because her husband Hatho is impotent. The midwife Fatma tells the upper caste women that the child's face looks like Bhaga's so the upper caste people discuss this matter. For them, it is a question of honour as a Chaudhari woman has born a child of a Dalit man. Many of them suggest keeping the issue quiet because if the matter spreads then the whole community will be dishonoured. Some of them are quite angry and want to take revenge.

To take revenge, Chaudharis have decided to set the whole Dalit Vas on fire. However, before they do so, Chhagan Vankar comes to know about the upper castes' plan. Therefore, in the night the whole Dalit Vas decides to migrate to a safe place, as they are afraid as well as helpless. While walking in the starry dark night the Dalits remember the past events of their life in this village which will never be their own now forever. They are just walking in search of new homeland where they can settle down. While walking, Chhagan remembers cruelty of upper castes, particularly of his master:

He had to get up early at 4 O'clock and had to join the farm work like a bullock! No, not like a bullock. During the winter season, bullocks were given crushed *tal* and jaggery. Two or three brass jars full of oil was given to the bullocks, but if Chhagan secretly ate the crushed teel and jaggery left by the bullocks then he was bitterly treated.... (1991, 12)

Thus, the description proves Chhagan's claim that Dalits existence is considered lower than a bullock. He has also compared himself with a bullock of an oil-presser. He said, "I and the

bullock of Memad Ghanchi are same! We have to just circle around, after walking 100 miles; we are at the same place! (1991, 5)

The writer has presented Dalit's lives in the farms, as all of them have worked as bonded labourers. As bonded labourers, the Dalits have very little time to spend with their family. They even cannot attend the auspicious occasions in their family if their master has work on the farms. On the day of Bhaga's sister's *Aanu* (ceremonious sending of a bride to her husband's house for the first time), Bhaga has to work in the farm, as his master did not allow him to attend it.

Here the writer has depicted the condition of the Dalits. Even after independence, the Dalits' world is same as it has been before. Independence has not brought freedom for Dalits; they still live as bonded labourers of upper caste people.

The writer has very minutely presented the emotions and feelings that are endless. The migrants do not know their destination. They just remember their memories in this last village where they have spend their years while walking. Gokal Vankar who is quite attached with the land where they have spent their years while walking says, "I have to quit your lap, please forgive us mother..." (1991, 51)

Wherever Dalits settle down they consider that land to be their homeland and love and adore it as their own. However, they are afraid also because they are not quite sure that this homeland will be their permanent place and that they may have to migrate from this land also. Thus, they spend their life quite uncertainly. The uneasiness of leaving the homeland is not presented only through Gokal Vankar but through the whole Dalit community. The problem of migration harasses them perpetually. It will not stop till they are accepted as human beings. The novel shows Dalits being unable to demand their rights, status, honour, and self-respect. They are shown as belonging to their owners who can use them at will. Dalits cannot reply and retaliate.

Gokal presents the situation, “We have spent many years with these people, assisted them in their pleasures and pains, drudgery, only received sorrows and grief in return. Nothing was useful to us. We are just bullock who just goes on doing the same tiresome work but stays at the same place; we have just the sky over our heads and earth under our feet.” (1991, 178)

In spite of doing the backbreaking labour also Dalits have to become a victim of upper caste hatred. Gokal feels giddy; the author in this way very minutely presents his state of mind thus:

All of these can break the universe and bring water, but this homeland belongs to the upper castes human beings only, we... we are not human beings! We are forcefully telling them that we are human beings but who does consider us? We are all enemies! What to do? Nothing comes to my mind, how can we bear this drudgery— dragging the dead animals, weaving while remaining naked when we have provided them clothes!” (1991, 179)

The mental condition of the Gokal tells the reader and exposes the terrible situation of a Dalit in this unjust Indian society. After independence, also Dalits are considered as a bonded and unpaid labourer where they do not have any choice but just to breathe and move ahead. Dalits are forced to live a life of unpaid labour by the upper caste people, as they are landless. In order to survive they have to work as an unpaid labourer where they have stay on the pity of the upper caste people.

The novel presents a world where all Dalits live in such a terrible world of oppression where they are the lowest among animals. They are so afraid of the upper caste people that they cannot go outside without a cloth on their head, they cannot beat drums in their marriages, and they cannot ride on a camel or a horse in their marriage. The temples are built by the Dalits but they cannot enter after the rite of investing the idol of god with life. If a Dalit enters in the temple, s/he has to face public punishment. When Bhagat has entered the temple to worship the lord

Shiva, Chanduji Pujari catches him. The Pujari beats Bhagat and the Sarpanch of the village fines him, “listen all of you; Bhagat will give 20 kilogram of corn for feeding the birds. Also he has to make a hedge of cactus around the hill of the temple” (1991, 91).

The upper caste males can easily seduce Dalit women. In *Malak* also Dalpat Chauhan has presented the sexual exploitation of the Dalit women. Mana’s sister Suraj is raped and killed.

Chhagan’s wife Rami is harrassed by Narasang. Shivi is raped.

Dalits are also economically exploited by the upper castes. The condition of Chhagan who is working on the farms of the landlord represents this:

In the last twelve years, his wages increase up to fifty rupees but he hasn’t seen fifty rupees in toto even once. Whoever is his master either Mabhubha or Narsang, whenever he was in need he borrows gradually, sometimes he borrowed more than his wages, and thus he mortgaged more and more days of life. He did not know that how many years he has pawned for these rupees. (1991, 12)

Dalpat Chauhan has presented the Dalit life in the North Gujarat Dalit dialect and thus made Gujarati vocabulary rich. *veth* (forced labour), *vaitaru* (drudgery), *oh* (fat of a dead animal), *tes* (rest), *naydo* (boy), *Vanhli* (a bag to keep rupees) are a few words which have been used for the first time in a Gujarati literary text. They have been drawn from the living vocabulary of the Dalit community.

The writer has presented the story in present and past tense. He has used present tense to describe the migration and the past tense to describe the life of migrants that they passed in the village. Within the spatial time of the night, writer has presented the whole story and to fulfill his goal, he has used flashback technique so that the characters can dive into their past life and talk about the Dalit life and their experiences. According to Bharat Mehta, “*Malak* is enjoyable as far as compression of time is considered. The journey of migration in the night that is the only time

in which the writer presents the Dalit world is commendable. The story mainly takes place in the psychological time of the migrant” (1993, 56). In Yashwant Waghela’s view, “The structure of the novel is the special feature of *Malak*.” (2003, 117) According to Ramesh Dave, “The depiction of the migration is a warp while the events of the past life of the migrants are a woof.” (40) Thus, the life and migration are intricately interwoven. *Malak* ends with the search of the Dalits for a new homeland where also they have to depend on the pity of the upper castes to survive as well as to develop.

Hijrat [Migration] is a short story written by B. Kesharshivam. It talks about the way Dalits were forcefully thrown out of the village Jalpardi. There was land dispute. The collector allotted certain land to the Dalits for cultivation. However, the upper caste people—Patels – illegally occupied the land through malpractice and removed the Dalits forcefully from the land with the help of police. Dalits opposed the move of the Patels furiously. Therefore, the Patels attacked the Dalit vas. The atmosphere of the village was so tense that nobody could come out their houses. Only a Dalit named Rameshbhai, a school teacher who resided in the vas was able to go the school. He was the only informant for the Dalits and told them about all the happenings and activities that had taken place in the upper caste locale.

Rameshbhai told them that the Patels had decided to set on fire the whole Dalit vas. So all the Dalits discussed about the possibilities of how could they be saved from such a calamity. Rameshbhai suggests that they migrate to Gandhinagar with all their livestock and family members and to fast until death before the Assembly. Dalits had no option except to accept the suggestion of Rameshbhai. They decided to migrate at four o’clock in the morning. Therefore, throughout night they packed all their precious things, food, utensils to migrate at the decided time.

Throughout the story, we find that the state machinery the police and the revenue department is working only for the upper caste people. They do not have any sympathy for the Dalits and work against them. In such an inhuman world, a Dalit has to migrate in order to survive and to protect his dignity and honour.

The police did not spare even an old Dalit woman. An old woman ninety years aged Pali Doshi and seventy-six years old Samuma were not left. "After beating publicly, the women of the vas were imprisoned. Revli who had a year old daughter was also imprisoned. Santok had a month old child. In one room of jail twenty-five Dalit women were kept. How could they breathe?" (2006, 23-4).

It is not Dalits had passively received the upper caste beatings. They responded fiercely. Champa says, "I have bitten him on the hands so badly that he cried out" (2006, 23). Jashi says, "Do they rule here? Now we have to oppose them." (2006, 22) The author has also mentioned the role of Ambedkar through the character of teacher Rameshbhai in the lives of the Dalits, "Babasaheb fought for us throughout his life. After his demise its like darkness under the lamp." (2006, 24) The author also talks about the lack of unity among the Dalits, Oghad says, "This happens because we are not united. This is a Vas of thirty houses. Does anyone have courage to harass us? But some of us try to have relationship with the Patels." (2006, 25)

The Dalits expect the home to be safe and the state to be its protector. But their expectations always fall short as a Dalit has to pass through the caste violence every day.

Dalpat Chauhan has aptly presented the traumatic world of the Dalit who was migrating from his home in his short story *Jo Truck Na Upade To* [If truck will not start]. Home is considered as the safest place for human beings. But this safe place is always targeted by the upper caste people who are supposed to be protectors. In the story the State is shown favoring the

caste structure. State is not interested in an egalitarian world so the Dalits have to leave the home and has to search for one more temporary stay until the next migration as I have pointed out earlier.

He has been lost in the midst of Time and Home. This is the same Home and same Chawl. At this place, he has spent invaluable years of his life. He has breathed with everyone. Then why have all the Dalits flown away? Every one's family has grown here. Studied, learnt, settled at other place and new ones have arrived. Someone has died also. Now suddenly why everyone has started to move away? (2009, 68)

This is the aesthetic of the Dalit writing where the distinction between private and public breaks down, pain moves outward from the narrator to the narrator's community. Dalit Writers exposes Indian society's pretence. Dalit writing is significant because it exposes shameful secrets in the public domain. In fact, Dalit writers' aim is to break the silence around issues of caste oppression and social inequality.

Thus, the two anti-reservation agitations in Gujarat were essentially a struggle within the middle class. There were fights between the upper and middle class members on the one hand and the new entrants from the low castes on the other. The fights were not between the two equals. The upper and middle castes not only enjoyed dominance but also had a larger numerical strength within the middle class than the low castes. The former possessed not only large resources of their own, but they also had the backing of the capitalist class, as social and ideological links between the two are strong. They controlled the media and educational institutions, which were the sources of ideological penetration in society. They dominated the bureaucracy and police who supported the agitations directly as well as indirectly by flouting the orders of the executive heads. Dalit writing which was written during and after the agitation is an

attempt to expose not only the Brahminism and its protectors but also to show a path to the new generation of the Dalits.