

Introduction

On 26 June 1989, the Dalits of Sambarda (a small village just 6 kilometers away from Palanpur, district headquarters of Banaskantha) migrated and camped in the District Collector's Office for 131 days where they finally won their constitutional rights. Their demand was for an alternative settlement where life with dignity would be guaranteed by the State.

Dalits of Sambarda who had not only united but also protested against caste oppression were the first generation of educated and employed Dalits who were the beneficiaries of reservation policy instituted by the independent Indian state. The change in the psyche of the Dalits was the product of Ambedkarite efforts that promoted the ideas of education, unity, and agitation. Before the 1970s, Dalits in Gujarat were not able to raise their voice against the exploitation of the upper castes. However, after 1970s there was a visible change in the attitude of the Dalits who had taken to education and had understood the logic of caste exploitation. In Sambarda, however, when an educated Dalit had to follow the orders of upper caste Gadhvis who largely represented the feudal organization of Gujarat and were often illiterate, the Dalits Sambarda rose in protest and in the process they came to oppose both the structural inequality of the caste system and state violence. In real terms, they were pitted against the central level minister B. K. Gadhvi from Sambarda and to put up a fight against a central minister was not an easy task. However, the Dalits put up a united effort and fought for their identity, with self-respect being a key component of this identity struggle. The question of motherland or homeland did not preoccupy them. They worked with the idea that there is no homeland for them without self-respect. In fact, for them the first condition for a homeland was peace and self-respect.

After their migration, Dalits wanted to spread the message of self-respect in the surrounding areas of Palanpur. The chief motive was to raise Dalit consciousness so that others could also join the protest in their villages. Dalit literature played a very important and crucial role in achieving this goal. Nitin Gurjar has mentioned in his article how at this time Shankar Painter's poem on Sambarda— *Dai Dyo Panchayatne Power* (Give Power to the Panchayat)¹ was sung and recited at the protest site. One lakh copies of the poem were printed and distributed. This poem played an important role in raising and recharging the Dalit self-consciousness. Shankar Painter also sang this poem in the camp. Afterwards whoever visited the campsite listened to the recitation of the poem to understand the problems of the migrants, and shared in their pain and agony. As this poem drew on Dalit folk traditions, it allowed for group recitations and a participatory involvement. Thus, this poem boosted the morale of the oppressed Dalits. It became a weapon for the mobilization of the Dalits. On 10 July around a lakh Dalits and their supporters attended a rally organized by the migrants. They marched in total silence and in well-disciplined rows of threes. After their march, this rally was converted into a public meeting in which Shankar Painter was also invited to present his poem. Nitin Gurjar reports that, "The agitation, which was moving slowly until then suddenly became like a live gelatin bomb. Shankar Painter then sang another song *Tras Ni Same Takkar Letu* (Fighting against Oppression) which had the same effect" (2013, 15).² These songs reached every village of Banaskantha district and people sang it at gatherings and meetings until the agitation was over. These songs woke Dalit consciousness and played a pivotal role in the success of the movement. These songs became a memorable and indivisible part of the movement. Thus, the migrants who felt alone also got a moral support from their Dalit brothers and sisters.

¹Subsequently published as *Sambardanu Sambelu* (Wooden Pestle of Sambarda) in *Hachche Hachchu Bolan Faddya*. Ahmedabad: Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Pratishthan, 2010.

² All translations from Gujarati into English are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

These songs paved the way for “Swaman Jyot Yatra” (a propaganda campaign with a torch called ‘The flame of self-respect’) which was undertaken in two jeeps carrying supporters through 137 villages and 7 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. In this ‘Yatra’ also *Dai Dyo Panchayatne Power* was daily recited. This song influenced the illiterate Dalit women also and they responded by composing *Garbas* on the migration of the Dalits. Through this, the campaign spread the message of Dalit self-respect very effectively throughout North Gujarat. This episode illustrates the close association of the Dalit movement in Gujarat and Gujarati Dalit writing.

In Gujarat, there are many sub divisions of every caste and it is often difficult to distinguish between the main caste and the units or subdivisions.³ Brahmins, Baniyas and Rajputs—together 12 per cent of the total population—belong to the upper castes. Brahmins and Baniyas are spread throughout the state and account for about 4 per cent of the population each. Rajputs were the erstwhile ruling class. Although majority of Rajputs are landholders, some are in white-collar jobs and a few are in business. The Patels constitute around 12 per cent of the population. The main divisions among them are the Leuva, Kadva, Anjana and Matiya. All Patels do not enjoy the same status as the Leuva Patels of the Charotar area—Anand, Borsad, Nadiad and Petlad talukas of the Central Gujarat—who enjoy the highest status among the Patels. Patels were earlier known as Kanbis (agricultural cultivators). The change of name is a result of a marked improvement in their status.

The Kolis, spread throughout the state, form the largest caste cluster in Gujarat, constituting around 24 per cent of the population. Broadly, the Kolis are divided into coastal

³ Caste enumeration from the census data is not available for the last 80 years so I have used 1931 census data to delineate a broad pattern except the category Scheduled Tribes (STs) for which 1981 census data is available.

Kolis and mainland Kolis. The Kolis are cultivators—small and big landowners—farm labourers, fishermen and sailors. Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Dalits constitute 7 per cent of the population. They are spread throughout the state. Besides being small and marginal farmers and landless farm labourers, they carry out traditional functions such as sweeping the streets, carrying carcasses, and weaving. In urban areas, many of them are factory workers and white-collar employees. They are divided into several social groups such as Chamar (tanner), Bhangi (scavenger), Shenama (Drumbeater), Vankar (weaver), and Garoda (Dalit priest). Unlike the SCs, the STs, who constitute 14 per cent of the population of the state, are concentrated in a few districts of Eastern and South Gujarat. The majority of them are small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. Muslims constitute 8 per cent of the population. The Parsis are refugees from Persia, settled in South Gujarat since the eighth century. They constitute less than half a percent of the population but have conventionally wielded great economic influence. From this overview of the caste structure of Gujarat it is quite clear that only 12 percent of the total population enjoy the caste superiority while another 12 percent have earned the upper caste status. The remaining 76 percent fall in the backward category.

Caste has played a critical role in the political and social life in Gujarat as elsewhere. During the period of nationalism two important Satyagrahas were organized—the Kheda Satyagraha of 1918 and the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. Gandhi took up issues related to land revenue collections and harassment of farmers by the administration in order to win over the peasants. During the first Satyagraha, the Kheda Satyagraha, he was not able to mobilize a large section of the peasantry but the Bardoli Satyagraha paralyzed the administration for two months. The Bardoli Satyagraha compelled the government to yield to the peasants' demands. The most important element of the Bardoli Satyagraha was the emergence of Vallabhbhai Patel

as the ‘Sardar.’

Although both Gandhi and Patel believed in the caste system, they did not use caste structure and ideology in mobilizing the peasants in the first Kheda Satyagraha. Yet, within a few years, they started to appeal to caste sentiments for purposes of political mobilization. For instance, Gandhi exhorted the Banias in 1920 to do their duty as good Vaishnavites by boycotting the courts and schools run by the British government. In his book *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934* David Hardiman quotes Gandhi as saying: “Would a devout ‘Vaishnava’ ever send his or her children to the schools of an irreligious government?” (119). Such appeals couched in caste ideology were fully exploited in the Bardoli Satyagraha by Vallabhbhai Patel and his associates as Ghanshyam Shah has highlighted:

Patel peasants were asked to stop paying land revenue to the government and to raise the prestige of the Patels. Appealing to the Rajputs in the name of their warrior spirit, Sardar Patel said, ‘You must have seen the sword as you are Rajputs. But if you have not seen it and remained cultivators, never mind. But now I want you to behave like the Kshatriyas, and you should support the Satyagraha.’ (1990 b, 100)

Caste also played an important role in the post- independence Indian politics. After independence, the Kshatriya leaders succeeded in forming a Gujarat level caste association called the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha in 1948, although it was mainly active in Central and North Gujarat.⁴

⁴ On the eve of Independence, the Rajput *girasdar* keenly felt the threat posed by land reforms to their economic interests and power and formed a caste organization, which widened their social base by including various Koli castes such as the Bareeyas, Thakarda and the Patanwadiya. During the 1950s, the Sabha used traditional symbols like the saffron colour turban and the sword to mobilize the lower Kshatriya masses. Kshatriya consciousness and unity were fostered by invoking a feeling of a common culture and a glorious past; this elated the ego of the poor Kolis, particularly those of Central and North Gujarat. These Kolis felt closer to the Rajput leaders of the Sabha because the latter were hostile to the Patels who were also their exploiters. Moreover, the Bareeya and other Kolis of this region had no direct conflict with the Rajputs. In order to strengthen the bonds of the Kolis of Central and North Gujarat with the caste organization, the Sabha demanded the inclusion of Kshatriyas in the list of Backward Classes, so that the Kshatriya masses could get certain privileges regarding jobs and education. The Sabha passed resolutions about the problems of poor cultivators, tenants and labourers, and raised its voice against the Patel landowners who

Caste played a key role in establishing and maintaining the unity of different categories of the same varna which was then utilized to gain political advantage. After 1947 when the Congress became the ruling party in Gujarat that was a part of Bombay state the Patels came to occupy positions of power in the Congress because of their long association with the party. However, when Gujarat came into being as a separate state in 1960, initially, small elite drawn from among the Brahmins and Banias ruled it. The Patels deeply resented this. Rich Patel farmers from the Central Gujarat and Saurashtrian Rajputs among the Kshatriyas formed the Swatantra Party in 1959. In the 1962 and 1967 Gujarat assembly elections, the party gained support from the Kshatriya Sabha. In the 1962 elections the Swatantra Party evolved an alliance called *Pa Ksha*, an alliance of the Patel and Kshatriya and narrowly missed the majority at the hustings.

In the state elections of 1975, Congress (I) which had almost continually been in power since the inception of Gujarat, received a major jolt. It could win only 75 seats on account of Navnirman agitation⁵ while the Congress (O) and Jan Sangh gained a lot from it and jumped up from 16 to 56 and from 3 to 18 seats respectively.

ill-treated Bareilly labourers. See Ghanshyam Shah, "Caste Sentiments, Class Formation and Dominance in Gujarat." *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*. Vol. II. Ed. Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990. 59–114 and "Middle-Class Politics: A Case of Anti-Reservation Agitations in Gujarat." *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 22 No.19-20-21 (1987): 155-72 for a detailed account of the Kshatriya Sabha.

⁵ The Navnirman Samiti was formed on 4 January 1974 under the leadership of Achyut Yagnik and Manishi Jani. The Navnirman Samiti was formed to protest against the price rise of the essential food grains and edible oil and corruption in the government machinery. It gave a call of statewide bandh on 10 January 1974 and thus began the Navnirman agitation. The middle class (in which no SC-ST members were included) were the initiators of this agitation. The bandh erupted in violence all around. The Congress (O) and Jan Sangh smartly joined the agitation though it was a student agitation to gain political advantages. The Jan Sangh led the agitation in Saurashtra and North Gujarat, while Congress (O) in the Central Gujarat picked up the leadership. The agitation continued for more than ten weeks. In the course of these agitations 103 people died. The struggle in Ahmedabad initially reflected a consolidation of middle-class grievances and did not include participation by mill workers. Under the growing pressure of the students and the opposition parties, Chimanbhai Patel, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, resigned on 9 February 1974. The opposition parties, particularly the Jan Sangh, and Congress (O) slowly took over and reoriented the students' agenda for social justice into one which consolidate political power. See Nagindas Sanghavi, *Gujarat — A Political Analysis*. Surat: Centre for Social Studies, 1996 and Ghanshyam Shah, "The Upsurge in Gujarat." *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 9 No. 32-33-34 (1974): 1439–54 for a detailed account of the Navnirman agitation.

The Congress (I) party decided in 1975 to change its policy systematically. It focused on working only for the oppressed and exploited sections of the society i.e. Kshatriya (K), Harijan (H), Adivasi (A) and Muslim (M) popularly known as KHAM. The party leaders distributed party tickets and positions in the party among the members of these castes in the 1980 elections and won 140 seats out of 182 seats. This led to political ascendancy of the “lower” castes.

The discrepancy between political power and social dominance came to the surface in Gujarat. The Patels, the Banias, and the Brahmins dominated not only trade and industry, but also the co-operative sectors, which generated wealth and distributed resources. The Rajputs were Ministers, MLAs, MPs, and Presidents of Zilla Panchayats but the Patels, who had the required investment and managerial skill, controlled the co-operative banks, co-operative sales and purchase societies, co-operative oil mills and co-operative milk societies. The Patels who enjoyed dominance in this field tried to control the Rajputs, which the latter resisted by using their political power. The Patels were the new entrants in the middle class of Gujarat. They were able to achieve this status after almost fifty years of hard work. Their rise led them to maintain their status even at the cost of societal friction. In terms of land distribution, most of the land was in control of upper castes. According to the 1981 Census, Patels, Rajputs, Kolis, STs, and Brahmins were the main landowning groups (Shah b 1990, 83).

Until 1975 Brahmin, Bania and Patels dominated the middle class. However, after 1975, there were new entrants from SC and ST communities who moved up with the help of benefits of reservation policy in education and employment. The spread of education among the weaker sections and particularly among the SCs was startling and conspicuous. At least one person from each of households from these castes had received college education. In the increase of level of education and employment of SCs and STs, the reservation policy played an important role.

Ghanshyam Shah has highlighted the increase in the percentage of SCs and STs in the government services especially in the class III cadre, “The proportion of SC and ST in Class III positions increased from 4.8 and 4.4 per cent in 1971 to 10.7 and 8.9 per cent respectively in the state government administration in 1978” (1987, 163).

The rise in the employment of SCs and STs in government sectors obviously meant a curtailment in ‘white collar’ jobs available to the upper and middle castes that had previously monopolized government services. Their condition deteriorated further because of increasing unemployment (Shah, 1987, 163). The middle class of the upper and middle castes, who were adversely affected by the increase in educated unemployment, blamed their inability to find jobs because of the reservations for the SCs and STs. The presence of persons from these communities as colleagues, as well as their relatively quick promotion under the roster system, upset upper and middle caste employees who harboured deep-seated prejudices against the SCs and STs and considered themselves superior to them. Moreover, in 1980, the government recognized eighty-two caste/community groups as Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC), and granted them 10 per cent reservations in government jobs.⁶

Reservations for SCs, STs and SEBCs reduced the share of the education and employment opportunities available to the middle class of the upper and middle castes. Most of the caste groups in the KHAM alliance which were backed by Congress (I) were either entitled to or being considered for reservations. This increased aversion of the middle class of the upper and middle castes against the Congress (I) and the beneficiaries of the reservation policy. This

⁶ The Government of Gujarat appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Justice A. R. Baxi in 1972 to identify socially and educationally backward castes, races or tribes who deserve special treatment and grants of special concessions similar to those being granted to the SCs and Scheduled Tribes. The Commission identified eighty-two castes/ classes/groups as socially and educationally backward. The Commission submitted its report in 1976 when the Congress party was in power. The government of Janta Morcha accepted its recommendations and provided reservations in government jobs and admissions in educational institutions to the eighty-two castes/communities in 1978.

led to the 1981 anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat.

The attack on the Dalits during the anti-reservations of 1981 was so harsh and widespread that it marked a watershed in the Gujarati Dalit consciousness. Historically, Gujarati Dalits never developed Dalit consciousness that characterized the Ambedkarian movement in neighboring Maharashtra. They remained under paternalistic influence of Gandhi as his Harijans as a part of Hindu community. The Dalit Panther movement in 1970s stirred the educated Dalit youths in urban areas but could not reach out beyond them. For the first time the statewide 1981, riots awakened the Dalits across Gujarat to the ground reality and impelled them towards the Ambedkarian Dalit identity. The violence of 1981 riots achieved in one shot what could not be done over many years. Ambedkar and Ambedkarian ideology became strong among the Dalits while the grip of Gandhi and Gandhism was loosened. Dalits not only defended the reservation system but also wrote in favour of it. The answer given by the Dalits was more literary and less physical. Dalits recognized that these were attacks on their identity and that this identity needed to be protected and projected through literature. Thus, I argue that it is through literary writing that Dalits have sought to, one, contest the concept of ‘other’ as it operated in conceptual frameworks of the upper castes and, two, escape their categorization as ‘subhuman’ and have successfully overcome their conceptualization as animals/beasts by asserting their human identity.

It is useful to read the rise of Dalit writing in Gujarat against the caste engagements of mainstream Gujarati literature.⁷ The medieval Gujarati literature was pre-dominantly occupied with notions of ‘purity’, ‘pleasure’ and the ‘aesthetic’, which had been grown out of the legacy of Sanskrit literature. Writers in this age were chiefly saints (Bhakti poets) who wrote poetry on

⁷ For a detailed history of modern Gujarati literature see Raman Soni. Ed. *Gujarati Sahityano Itihas*. 2nd ed. Vol. 3, 4, 5. Gandhinagar: Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, 2005.

devotional and philosophical themes. Like all devotional literature, the literature of this phase was God-centric though it did offer some social commentary too. Western education, ideas, and missionary activities led to a reformist attitude in the writers of the Sudharak Yuga or Age of Reformation. Social evils such as the practice of sati, child-marriage, female infanticide, superstitions were attacked and widow remarriages, education of the girl-child, etc. were applauded in the literature of this period. Writers were reformers, who used social, mythological, and historical themes in poetry, drama and fiction with the sole motive to circulate reformist ideas. Caste was also an important theme during this phase. Upper caste writers such as Durgaram Mehta, Dalapat Ram, Naval Ram, Manilal N. Dwivedi, Goverdhanram Tripathi, Ichharam Desai and D.B. Ambalal Desai were the leading literary figures of this age. The early writing of Narmadashankar who was popularly known as Narmad was a passionate crusader for reform. His poem entitled *Hinduoni Padti* [The Degradation of the Hindus] described the fallen state of the Hindus who were a great nation. Narmad opined in this poem that the caste-hierarchy was one of the causes of the fall of the Hindus.

The Pandit Yuga or Age of Scholars, the counterpart of the Victorian age, followed the age of reform. In this period, scholar writers whose recipient readers were highly educated and cultured wrote literature. Themes of social reform were pushed aside to make way for lofty themes of love, nature and divinity (satyam, shivam, sundaram). However, there was no noticeable protest against untouchability in this age with the exception of Ramanbhai Nilkanth who criticized the scourge of untouchability, casteism, etc.

The age of Gandhi roughly comprises the period from 1920 to 1960. It is dominated by Gandhian ideology. Addressing the 12th convention of *Gujarati Sahitya Parishad* in 1936 Gandhi who was also the president of *Gujarati Sahitya Parishad* said, “I entreat our writers to

begin writing for our dumb masses rather than for our city-dwellers. I am the self-appointed representative of that dumb public. On their behalf, I ask you to take a plunge into that field. (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*⁸, Vol.70. 1979, 37).” The underprivileged and deprived common person occupied centre-stage in the literature of this period. Gandhi denounced literature created for entertainment. It was the beauty of truth that was sacred to him. Dalit figures began to appear as powerful figures in Gujarati literature. Zaverchand Meghani, R.V. Pathak ‘Dwiref,’ Sundaram, and Umashankar Joshi are some of the important writers who engaged with the question of caste.

In the Anu-Gandhi Yuga (Post Gandhian Age) i.e. after 1960, modernism gradually consolidated its presence. As a result, traditional concepts of literature changed. The writers of this age did not write in the traditional meter of prosody. They preferred rhythmic prose instead. The writers of this age ignored society and its problems. They started to follow western style of writing. Gandhian influence on the mainstream Gujarati literature gradually lost its grip. Consequently, the engagement with caste in literature disappeared. It is against this backdrop of Gujarati mainstream literature which is considered central, mainstream, great and aesthetic that Dalit literature is marked and is still considered marginal, peripheral, little and unaesthetic.

Mainstream literary critics did not consider Dalit literature as literature because they did not find artistic features in Dalit literature. The idea of art for art’s sake first developed out of Hegel’s philosophy and later out of Croce’s idea that art is autonomous. As a result, art was seen as divorced from life. Art was severed from the society also. Beauty became the only aim while form and style became of paramount importance in which content had no importance. Suresh Joshi was the leading figure in Gujarati literature who worshipped the concept of art for art sake.

⁸ Government of India. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. 14, New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1965. Henceforth referred to as *CWMG*.

These norms led the Gujarati literary writers to believe that the writer writes for himself or for a group. As a result, there developed in the literary world small, mutual admiration circles of writers and poets who wrote for themselves. Thus, this concept had made the writers bereft of social consciousness. M. N. Wankhede quotes Jean-Paul Sartre in his speech who had discussed the social responsibility of the writer: “Writing is not simply writing, it is an act, and in man's continual fight against evil, writing must be deliberately used as a weapon. It is necessary that he understands this” (2009, 324). In the light of the Sartre’s views on art, I could say that writing and people are mutually interdependent, but because of this self-imposed isolation in Gujarati mainstream literature, there developed a great gulf between people and writing. The writing that emerged to challenge this dominant view was Dalit writing.

Dalit consciousness is an essential component of the Dalit literature. If Dalit consciousness is portrayed in a literary piece then it is part of Dalit literature. Ajit Thakor has stressed Dalit consciousness in his article, “the literary piece which talks about Dalit life and Dalit society can be termed as Dalit literature” (1995, 5)⁹. My thesis partially accepts this but also suggests that only depiction of Dalit life and Dalit society is not enough but it should also include struggle of the Dalits to overthrow the Brahminical ideological regime and commitment to the Dalit society.

⁹ Many Dalit writers have given their opinions on the components and characteristics of Dalit literature. For more information see also Harish Mangalam, “Dalit Varta: Shesh-Vishesh.” *Gujarati Dalit Varta*. Ed. Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam. Ahmedabad: R. R. Sheth & Co, 1987. 193-214; Mohan Parmar. “*Veesmi Sadee nu Gujarati Dalit Sahitya*.” *Gujarati Dalit Sahitya: Swadhyay ane Samiksha*. Ed. Mohan Parmar, and Harish Mangalam. Ahmedabad: University Granth Nirman Board, 2001. 1-16; B. N. Vankar, *Pratyayan*. Gandhinagar: Author, 1994; Neerav Patel. “*Bhooodevo and Baki Sau Pamar Jeevadao*.” *Sarvanam (An Anthology of Gujarati Dalit Literature)* Vol.1 (1989): 148-155; Manishi Jani. “*Dalit Sahityani Pahechan: Dalitmoolya*.” *Sarvanam (An Anthology of Gujarati Dalit Literature)* Vol.1 (1989): 156-164; Arjun Dangle. Ed. “Dalit Literature Past, Present and Future.” *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2009. xix-liv; Sharankumar Limbale. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*. Trans. Alok Mukherjee. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004.

My central argument in this thesis is that through the medium of literature, Dalits have been trying to challenge the upper caste social structure as well as the Brahminical literary environment and that they are slowly but quite successfully moving in the direction of creating an egalitarian society where everyone has his/her rights and self-respect. Until the arrival of the British, Dalits were mere objects in texts, as writing was solely meant for the upper castes especially the Brahmins. Through the process of education and critique, Dalits had sought to transform themselves from beast to human and from object to subject positions. After independence, Dalits got the constitutional guarantees of citizenship and also the benefits of reservations. Dalits utilized reservations to uplift their economic and political life and thus knocked at the doors of social life also. But this knock was taken as a blow to the social hierarchy by the upper castes and as a consequence Dalits have had to face multiple layers of violence, both overt and covert. Worli BBD chawls caste riots in Bombay between Shiv Sena-Dalit Panther in January 1974, 1979 Marathwada caste riots, 1981 and 1985 anti-reservation riots in Gujarat are examples of this phenomenon.

Dalit writing is an attempt to overthrow the upper caste hegemony. Dalit writing is not a writing of a Wordsworthian concept but it is a fight for the rights for which Dalits are waiting for centuries. Thus, the Gujarati Dalit writers have presented and published their ideas in order to have a dignified human identity. They have raised the consciousness of the Dalits, and consequently had to face criticism from non-Dalit writers. They have not changed their way of writing but have been able to hold on to their position. This has led mainstream literary writers to rethink their stand on commitment in literature.

Though Gujarati Dalit literature is not well received and accepted by the mainstream, it has continued its journey as an aspect of the Dalit movement in contemporary Gujarat. I have

studied Dalit Writing in Gujarati in order to examine the nature of the Dalit narrative. I have focused on the question of narrative not only to offer an account of Dalit writing per se but also to enable a sharper understanding of the manner in which the narrative style and texture of Dalit writing affect their translation into English. I have tried to find out the growing status of translation as far as Dalit writings in the field of English Studies are concerned.

Today a major part of Dalit literature is available only in regional languages. In this context it is pertinent to examine the place of translation in Dalit writing. The only access to Dalit literature in different languages is through translation in English. Translation of a regional text into English serves two functions. First, it liberates a text from its regional limitations, and establishes a national and international network and visibility and second, it helps to generate cross-cultural and multicultural study of the oppressed sections of society. But translation of a Dalit text into English serves one more important function of transforming the mindsets of the flag bearers of the caste superiority and thus paves the way for creating an egalitarian society. Tejaswini Niranjana has analyzed early British translations of Indian texts into English and has concluded that translation is a political activity and it is underpinned by the power structure. I agree with her and extend her argument to Dalit writing in English translation in India and Gujarat also. From its active presence in 1975 to till date, only eleven texts of Gujarati Dalit Writing have been translated into English from Gujarati Dalit writing. On the basis of my analysis I argue that translations of Dalit texts are less preferred because they create and mobilize Dalit consciousness and question the nationwide caste based power structure and thus strengthen the Dalit movement.

The aim of my dissertation “Gujarati Dalit Writing: Questions of Narrative and Translation” has been to examine how the violent experiences of 1981 and 1985 anti-reservation

agitations worked as a catalyst for Gujarati Dalit writers who sought to voice oppression through narratives of experience. I have examined these moments as critical to the formulation of Dalit identity in Gujarat. I also argue that Dalit writing articulates demands for social justice set up by the Dalit movement in Gujarat.

My thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, “Rise and Development of Dalit Movement” presents not only historical account but also the factors and the social thinkers who had opposed or protested against the Varna and caste system. This chapter outlines how Phule’s and Ambedkar’s efforts were different from Bhakti poets’ analysis of caste and Gandhi’s theory of change of heart. The chapter also analyses the development of the Dalit Movement especially after the death of Ambedkar, the birth of the Dalit literature and its role in the Dalit movement. The chapter also examines the Dalit movement in Gujarat from the nineteenth century to the present. The chapter is not only a historical examination but it is also an analysis of the shift of Dalits from Gandhian notion of identity creation which is based on the notion of ‘Change of Heart’ to the Ambedkarite notion of identity which is based on the notion of self-emancipation and self-respect.

The second chapter critically assesses the spread of the Dalit writing across India through three sections: with sections on Marathi, Hindi and Tamil Dalit writing. The first section—Marathi Dalit Writing—explains the role of Phule and Ambedkar in the development of Dalit writing especially in the Marathi language. The second section—Hindi Dalit Writing—presents an analysis of the Hindi Dalit literature historically. This section also attempts to give an overview of the Dalit life in the Hindi belt area through a reading of Om Prakash Valmiki’s *Joothan*. The last section—on Tamil Dalit Writing—not only talks about two texts of Bama *Karukku* and *Sangati* but also gives glimpse of the Dalit life in Tamil Nadu. The chapter outlines

some of the salient features of Dalit literature in India and recognizes it as a creative medium for expression of the pain and agony felt by Dalits whose experiences are astonishingly similar, although experienced differently at different places and at different times.

The third chapter “Gujarati Dalit Writing” presents a chronological account of Gujarati Dalit writing. In this section, my major argument is that Gujarati Dalit writers sought to create an atmosphere of equality to break caste structures through their presentation of Dalit values. By Dalit values, I refer to the idea that most Dalits did not want to create a world of hatred. Though the upper caste mainstream writers presented Dalits as ‘mean’, ‘ugly’, and ‘cultureless’ in their writings, most Dalit writers did not want to simply invert the structure. Instead, they sought to construct a new world structured by humanitarian goals. Towards this end, I argue, they have used all the prevalent genres: poetry, novel, short story, life-sketch, drama, and autobiography.

The fourth chapter “Anti-Reservation Agitation (1981) and Gujarati Dalit Writing” is an attempt to reveal how social mobility of Dalits is questioned by the hegemonic Brahminical caste structure. In this chapter, I have argued that the political use of caste and reservations has undermined the ultimate goal of the reservation policy of all round development of Dalits. I have presented a detailed analysis of the caste atrocities and have argued that it is through literature that the Dalits have tried to construct a new identity. The early literary response in the late 1960s was also an attempt to break the caste structure. Shankar Painter’s poems “*Bungiyo Vage*”(Drum Beating), “*Tod Chapaniya*”(Break the Begging Bowl), and “*Besi Na Rahevay*”(We Can’t Sit) are examples of this. The analysis of caste atrocities has also led me to investigate mainstream representations of Dalits in media and history writing. Based on my analysis of political use of caste and reservation in the first section of this chapter I argue that the Brahminical society has always tried to protect the upper caste interests. I have found that mainstream media strongly

represented the upper caste hegemonic society of which Dalits are not a part. Upper caste perspectives, too, frame their depiction of Dalits. I argue that media representation of Dalit history has played an important role in Dalit self-representation. The profound difference between these dominant images and Dalit self-representation in literature has provided the scaffolding for my literary analysis. I have shown how educated and awakened Dalits of this period were well aware of the ideological content of upper caste history writing. I have argued how this awareness led them to document atrocities against Dalits in pamphlets, little magazines, and *Panther*, a monthly magazine and a mouthpiece organ of the Dalit Panthers organisation in Gujarat.

My analysis of the anti-reservation agitation led me to examine the role of the state, press and police in the victimization of Dalits. Dalits were the sole target of 1981 anti-reservation agitation. I have shown how they felt humiliated, isolated, and alienated as a consequence of this. I argue that Dalit response to the caste violence was more literary and less physical; they turned to literature to construct their identity. Usha Makwana's "*Harijan To Bani Jo!* (Try to become a Harijan!) and Jeevan Pattani's "*Ha, Hun Dalit Chhu*" (Yes, I am a Dalit) attempt to construct Dalit identity. The analysis of Savji Rukhda's "*Anamat Ange*" (On Reservation), B. N. Vankar's "*Anamat Hatao*" (Abolish Reservations) and Balkrishna Anand's "*Shadyantra*" (Conspiracy) shows how these poems set up critiques of the upper caste point of view on reservation. B. Kesharshivam's *Shool* (Thorn) critically assesses the life of a Dalit during the anti-reservation agitation. Raju Solanki's *Bamanvad Ni Barakhadi* (ABCD of Brahminism) exposes the Brahminical ideology, the upper caste resentment against the upward mobility of Dalits and shows how it is at the root of the anti-reservation riots.

The fifth chapter “The Second Anti-reservation Agitation (1985) and Dalit writing on Migration” in its first section provides a critical account of the anti-reservation agitations of 1985. It also offers an analysis of the conversion of the caste violence into communal violence. The social mobility of Dalits led to their victimization during the anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985. Dalits, however, had come to be aware of their self-respect, dignity, and honour. In extreme cases, they migrated en masse from their places of residence in order to protect their dignity. It is not that Dalits started to migrate after the 1985 agitations; migration has been an age-old phenomenon. Before these agitations, Dalits migrated to save their lives or in search of livelihoods but after these agitations there have been instances where Dalits migrated to protest against upper caste humiliation. These self-respect migrations or ‘hijrats’, I argue were an aspect of the new Dalit consciousness after the second anti-reservation agitations. The psyche of Dalits had changed because of the Ambedkarite notion of self-respect. This section has an in-depth analysis of three migrations- Biliya, Bhojpara and Sambarda. The last section throws light on the literary response of Dalits to these migrations. Shankar Painter’s “*Panchayat ne Dai Dyo Power*” (Give Power to the Panchayat) or “*Sambarda Nu Sambelu*” (Wooden Pestle of Sambarda) and Harish Mangalam’s “*Bhojparayan*” (Devoted to Bhojpara) offer an account of Dalits of Sambarda and Bhojpara. Dalpat Chauhan has aptly presented the traumatic world of Dalits who were migrating from their home in his novel *Malak* (The Home Land).

In the concluding chapter, I summarize the arguments made above and suggest new directions for research. I discuss the manner in which Gujarati Dalit Writing is able to question the upper caste structures and address the millennia long literary gap. I conclude that while Gujarati Dalit Writing has attained its primary goal of constructing Dalit consciousness, it is yet

to attain its larger goal of reshaping the upper caste as well as Bahujan psyche to bring equality in society.