

Chapter VI

Sahil Parmar: Poetry, Caste and the History of Dalit Education

Sahil Parmar, one of the leading Gujarati Dalit poets started contributing to the Dalit literature early in the 1980s. In 1981, his poems were published in *Dalit Kavita*, the first anthology of Gujarati Dalit poetry. His early poetry, from 1981 to 1984, shows his commitment towards Dalit cause. His later works concentrate more on the question of aesthetics. His poetry has modern appeal and inspirational force that strengthens the Dalit movement for equal opportunity and equal treatment. His poetry documents Dalit issues and reveals his personal perspectives. Emphasizing the importance of education, he launches a concentrated attack on the unjust social order. Sahil Parmar's poetry collections *Vyatha Pachisi* (1984), *Ek Rakabi Futi* (1991) and *Mathaman* (2006) express his deep concern for justice, equality and education for Dalits.

Education is a major weapon that encourages and empowers the downtrodden and oppressed to fight against the unjust social order and to achieve equality. Ambedkar's famous slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organize' is a significant force for the Dalit movement that leads to the path of empowerment. Ambedkar's effort to democratize education has witnessed unprecedented results for the oppressed in India. Gujarat was a part of this Dalit movement started by Jotirao Phule and strengthened by Ambedkar. The Dalits of Gujarat have shown awareness towards the importance of education as a weapon to fight and also as a medium for economic and social mobility. Education has provided them a systematic path to put forward their argument for the social equality.

Sahil Parmar and many other Dalit poets have attempted to strengthen the Dalit movement, based on the slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organize'. The Dalit movement is, as Ambedkar often emphasized, not the battle for material gain or for political power but for liberation. In the democratic set up, educational development with social concern provides ample opportunity and empowers the victims to retaliate democratically.

The Dalit movement can be classified in various ways depending on its concerns and orientations. It is a revolt against caste system and oppression; at the same time, it is a constructive movement which always attempts to obtain certain rights from the authorities and equal treatment from the caste Hindus. As a counter position against age old caste society, the movement might scriptures that promote unequal treatment to Dalits. On the other hand, it also encourages the oppressed and the deprived to improve their social and economic status and to achieve upward mobility in the rigid social structure. The Dalit movement for education is a constructive and systematic movement. Many activists, social leaders and organizations along with government agencies have been working since long to impart education among the Dalits. Moreover, social sub-caste organizations also concentrate on education considering it as a major means of socio-economic mobility. The urge for education among the oppressed has its roots in mythology and even in recent history. From Eklvya to Ambedkar, many struggled for education that was forbidden to them in an unjust social order.

Early efforts towards formal education of the non-Brahmin castes were linked with British rule and Christian missionaries. The formal education that we understand today was started in the Bombay province in 1815. Archdeacon George Barnes, the Senior Anglican Priest in Western India, preached to the congregation of St Thomas' Church, Bombay appealing for help in educating the children of poor Europeans and Anglo Indians. Immediately after the

service 'The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor within the Government of Bombay' (now known as the Bombay Education Society) was formed, but it was only for limited to the children of the officers who were working in the East India Company. Archdeacon George Barnes, during his limited tenure established five churches and three of them were in Gujarat, Kheda, Surat and Baroda.

In the Bombay Presidency, of which Gujarat was a part, Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859) was appointed Governor in 1819. During his tenure, he promoted education. In 1820, he formed a 'Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor' to reform the native education system which was predominantly the preserve of the upper caste student population. In 1823, he established 'Bombay Native School Book and School Society'. In 1825 a branch of the society was started in Gujarat under the name of 'The Native Education Society'. When Bishop Carr visited Bharuch, he assigned the work of preparing a set of textbooks in Gujarati to Ranchhodbhai Girdharbhai. By 1826, some schools were opened in Gujarat at Surat, Bharuch, Ahmedabad, Kheda, Nadiad and Dholka. Later in 1847, Colonel Jervis, head of the Bombay Board of Education, also emphasized on vernacular education to limit the exclusiveness in the education system. He pointed out that if vernacular education was not given ample encouragement the fruits of education would be limited to "a few enlightened individuals isolated by their very superiority from their fellow countrymen" (Yagnik *et al* 70-71).

The colonial education system did not provide ample chance to the lower castes to be educated but it was successful in creating conflict between the traditional social norms and modern world views. Ramesh Shukla observes in this regard:

The decision of imparting education to natives by the British officials was not completely propitious and selfless. Yet the education of different subjects opened up... We must whole heartedly accept the fact that

education opened up the vision for the revival, breaking off the conservatism and orthodoxy to one's own thoughts and beliefs. (2005: 15)

Durgaram, the first teacher in Gujarati schools began to challenge Brahminic rituals and practices. He formed an association called 'Manav Dahram Shabha'. The association began to discuss certain cultural and social issues with modern perspectives. The association also condemned the caste system and untouchability. Later, after getting European knowledge and inspiration for socio-religious reforms, Narmad (1833-86), Mahipatram Rupram (1830-91) and Karsandas Mulji (1832-71) revolted against the rigid social and religious norms of the caste Hindus.¹ These reformers mainly attempted to influence their respective castes but they were successful in creating an atmosphere of resistance against the caste authority. Gujarati students of 'The Native Education Society' established 'Gujarati Gnana Parasarak Mandali' and started monthly magazine 'Ganean Parasaraka' in 1849. In 1851 some Gujarati youths started another association named Buddhivardhak Sabha. Ranchodbhai was its president. They also started a monthly organ called '*Buddhivardhak*'. Eminent people like Durgaram, Manchharam, Tulajaram Sukhram, Mohanlal Ranchhoddas, Mahipatram Rupram, Sorabaji Bengli, Ardeshir Moos and Nanabhai Ranina among the others were the members of that association. They were the pioneers of Education in Gujarat.²

Sir Charles Woods' Despatch of 1854 was one of the early attempts that made to democratize education. It was based on the principle of open access criterion of admittance, an effort to impart education among the Depressed Classes. The Court of Directors' order mentions that "all schools maintained at the sole cost of the Government shall be open to all classes of its subject without distinctions" (Thorat 2010: 10). Woods' Despatch was an education scheme with

¹ See Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Seth. "Welcoming the British Raj." *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005. 61-97. Print.

² See for further details Ramesh Shukla. *Narmad: Shodh Ane Samalochan*. Amadavad: Parshwa Publication, 2005. Print.

certain innovative aspects. It disregarded the "downward filtration theory" that had led to the providing of education only to the upper classes. Wood's Despatch emphasized the education of the masses and stressed the duty and responsibility of the Government to provide educational facilities to the people of India without any discrimination of caste or creed. Wood's Despatch notes:

Our attention should now be directed to a consideration, if possible, still more important, and one which has been hitherto, we are bound to admit, too much neglected, namely, how useful and practical knowledge, suited to every station of life, may be best conveyed to the great mass of the people, who are utterly incapable of obtaining any education worthy of the name by their own unaided efforts, and we desire to see the active measures of the Government more especially directed, for the future, to this subject, for the attainment of which we are ready to sanction a considerable increase of expenditure. (Aggarwal 18)

After the implementation of Woods' Despatch, within ten years, about 35,000 students were receiving primary education in British areas and princely states in Gujarat. It is believed that among these students almost 70 per cent belonged to the Brahmin and Vaniya castes, 20 per cent were from other Hindu castes and Muslims constituted 6 per cent. (Yagnik *et al* 2005: 71-2)

The struggle for acquiring formal education by Dalits has been a long one. During the British rule, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Jotirao Phule systematically started the Dalit movement for education. He was a thinker, teacher, educationist and social revolutionary. He expressed his intention for the welfare of the Dalits and women before the British rulers and appealed to the upper caste people too. His multifaceted personality certainly gave a breakthrough in the field of Dalit education at a time when even some non-Brahmins couldn't think of it. For Phule, education was not just literacy but a vehicle that could bring social changes.

A humiliating incident changed his course of life; an insult based on the caste system in a marriage procession of his friend made him defy the caste system and serve the Shudras and women who were deprived of important social and political rights. In August 1848 he started a school for girls. Before that he educated his wife Savitribai, at home. He fought bravely against the malicious propaganda of the caste Hindus. Under the social pressure of the caste Hindus, his father had to disassociate himself from him. As a consequence Phule left home. In 1851-52 he opened more schools and in 1882; he described his activities in the field of education before the Education Commission, popularly known as the Hunter Commission (1882). He knew that the British government had been spending enough on the education for the higher classes/castes, but somehow refrained to do so for the Depressed Classes. Phule, in his famous book, *Slavery* states:

We ask the friends of the Indian Universities to favour us with a single example of the truth of their theory from the instances which have already fallen within the scope of their experience. They have educated many children of wealthy men, and have been the means of advancing very materially the worldly prospects of some of their pupils; but what contribution have these made to the great work of regenerating their fellowmen? How have they begun to act upon the masses? Have any of them formed classes at their own homes or elsewhere, for the instruction of their less fortunate and less wise countrymen? Or have they kept their knowledge to themselves, as a personal gift, not to be soiled by contact with the ignorant vulgar... (Phule xxxvii-xxxviii)

He also added:

It is no less the duty of such of my Sudra brethren as have received any education to place before Government the true state of their fellowmen and endeavor to the best of their power to emancipate from Brahmin thralldom. Let there be schools for the Sudras in every village; but away from all Brahmin school teachers! (Phule xxxix)

The government was unwilling to hurt the upper castes, so with caution, the Woods' Despatch was implemented and three major universities were established in 1857 in Calcutta,

Bombay and Madras. It resulted in the rapid growth of colleges and private education institutions. But before that Phule opened schools for the untouchable in 1848 well before the British initiatives. The Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahuji Maharaj also encouraged Mahatma Phule's efforts and founded boarding houses for non-brahmin students. Moreover, Shahuji Maharaj challenged the Brahminical supremacy in administration in 1902 by sanctioning 50% reservation for the Backward Classes in Kolhapur State Services.

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda started schools to universalize education in 1883. In one of his speeches, delivered at Aligarh in 1901, Sayajirao declared "Education is the basis of all reforms and is the only way of salvation from our present condition....Educationally our people are little better than beasts" (Rice 62). However, Maharaja Sayajirao had to rely on Muslim teachers to educate the untouchable students. He made education compulsory for the children of every caste throughout his state in 1906. It is well known that Maharaja Sayajirao awarded scholarship to Ambedkar to study abroad.³ As a major boost to the movement, in 1885, Sir Richard Temple, the Governor of Bombay proposed to reserve fifty per cent scholarship for Muslim and Backward Hindu Caste to keep the Brahmin monopoly in the education system within limits. In 1918, Vitthalbhai Patel introduced a Bill in Bombay Legislative Assembly to make education compulsory and universal.

Moreover, in the first half of the twentieth century, the Hartog Committee (1928-29) also recommended education for the children of the downtrodden. One of its recommendations clearly mentions:

³ See for details Dankesh Oza. "Sikshan" [Education]. *Vismi Sadinu Gujarat* [A Collection of Articles of 20th Century Gujarat]. Eds. Shirish Panchal, Bakul Tailor and Jaydev Shukla. Eds. *Vismi Sadinu Gujarat* [A Collection of Articles of 20th Century Gujarat]. Vadodara: Samvad Prakashan, 2002. 135-141. Print.

Special attention should be given to the lowest class in primary schools and determined efforts should be made to reduce the large extent of stagnation and wastage that prevails therein. (Aggarwal 45)

However, the upper caste students were benefited most and the untouchables could not access the education because of persistent antagonism from the caste Hindus. In this context, Parulekar rightly notes:

They (Dalits) were, as a rule not allowed to attend the indigenous schools whatever might be the caste and creed of the teacher. Tradition held them back with an iron hand allowing no exception under any circumstances whatever. In this prohibition, all castes joined hands and the brahmin was only one of them. (Nabissan 1011)

The British policy makers' liberal stance could not show any strong visibility on the ground. They often compromised with the hegemonic caste traditions. At one level they made policy, 'education for all', allowing access to schools without any caste discrimination, but at another level they were too 'cautious' in implementing it. A Review of Education in Bombay State (1855-1955) notes: "there were several orthodox teachers who refused to touch them [untouchables] and corrected their exercises from a distance.... They often have to sit apart sometimes on the window and thus cannot receive their due share of attention from the teacher" (Nambissan 1013).

Thus, the non-assertive and non-committal attitude of the British rulers in implementing the liberal education policy, along with strong caste discrimination by the caste Hindus, affected the early opportunities of Dalits.

Christian Missionaries and Dalit Education in Gujarat:

Missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of Northern Ireland came to Gujarat in 1840. They started educational institutions like schools, colleges, hostels etc. in rural areas. They began

to impart education without any caste discrimination in Ahmedabad, Anand, Surat and Rajkot. After working for more than hundred years, the Irish Missionaries handed over their activities to the local Indian people, the Gujarat Christian Service Society, in the year 1969. Along with the Irish Missionary as the Government effort, the Educational Inspector for the Northern Division, Mr. T. C. Hope, started the Gujarat Provincial College with the help of prominent citizens of Ahmedabad in 1860. It was the first institution of higher learning in Gujarat. Two of Irish Presbyterian Mission's missionaries, James Glasgow and Alexander Carr selected the Saurashtra region for their missionary activities. They reached Rajkot in 1841. They soon started their work in Rajkot, Ghogha and Porbandar. Before that the London Missionary Society had sent two missionaries in Surat in 1815. They studied Gujarati and later prepared a dictionary and grammar book for Gujarati language in 1818. (Missionary J.V.S Tailor contributed with "Gujarati Bhasha nu Vyakaran" (Grammar of Gujarati Language), the first Grammar book of Gujarati Language in 1867). In 1820 they started the first printing press, the Surat Mission Press. The London Missionary Society opened five schools with 526 students. But later they wound up their activities and handed over their institutions to the Irish Presbyterian Mission (I P Mission). Clarkson, a missionary from Surat, was invited by two local persons, Ghirdhar Rapuji from Ankav and Kuber from Kanvadi to settle on the bank of the river Mahi and to start his work in Borasad and surrounding areas. As a result, a small community of Christian settled in Kashivadi village near Borsad in 1847. By 1862, many Dalits, particularly Vanakars converted into Christianity, and a school for them was started in Anand in 1866. In 1863, Dunlop Moor was appointed in Ahmedabad. He started an educational institution, later called the I P mission School. Moreover, during the drought of 1897-1900, hundreds of poor and Dalit children were given shelter and education by the missionaries. The Salvation Army (Protestant) also started its

activities in Gujarat in 1882 and opened schools in Anand, Nadiad, Vasad, Bhalej, Petlad, Borasad and Matar. In 1895, Sapanish Missionaries came to Gujarat, and Father Gomes started a school and hostel in Gamadi, a village near Anand for newly converted Vankar community. Later in 1914, the German Missionary also started a credit cooperative society to help poor Dalits in money saving and lending. In 1911, the Jesuits started a magazine called *Doot*. They concentrated on educational activities. Most Dalit mahollas were allotted teachers to provide primary education to children near their homes.⁴

In Ahmedabad, Catholic Mission School was opened in Dalit dominated Gomatipur area in 1930. By 1935, many schools were opened in various areas like Khokhara, Mahemdavad, Saraspur, Sabarmati, Nandej, Sarsa etc. By 1944, two high schools each with 1000 students and seven elementary schools each with 250 students were run by the Christian missionaries. The Saint Xavier's High-School and College, Mirzapur and Memnagar were established before 1960. Till 1970, the missionaries mostly worked in the central and south Gujarat. Missionary schools in north Gujarat were started later in 1979 in Kalol because many Catholic families were living in the surrounding areas. Later, the educational institutions were started in various towns of north Gujarat such as Mehsana, Patan, Palanpur, Modasa etc. Missionary schools were started in remote tribal areas of South Gujarat, Dediypada and Unai, the. Missionaries concentrated on adult-education programmes too and started the night-schools for wage-workers. According to the Catholic Directory of India (2005-06), the Catholic Church runs 2 colleges, 91 Primary Schools, 33 higher secondary schools, 90 high schools, 3 P.T.C colleges and 10 technical

⁴ See for more details, Agnesh Vaghela and Ramesh Vaghela. Ed. *Chakado*. Gandhinagar: Joseph Macwan Foundation, 2004. 71-117 Print.

institutes in Gujarat. Though missionaries have mostly concentrated on the poor and Dalit students many upper caste students have also benefited from such institutions.

Father Valles successfully attempted various forms in Gujarati literature. Father Carlos Suria helped the Maharaja of Gondal financially in collecting two thousand rupees for the publication of 'Bhagavat Go Manda', a Gujarati Dictionary.⁵ (Trivedi 2011; Vaghela *et al* 2004; Pol *et al* 2011)

In Gujarat, both Protestant and Catholic missionaries have done tremendous work in the field of education and they have contributed substantially in the development of Christians, Dalits, Muslims, tribals and OBCs. In most of the missionary schools, Christian students have remained less in proportion to Hindu students. Thus, the missionary schools have imparted education to all classes of society irrespective of their religion and socio-economic back ground. While evaluating missionaries' educational activities, Dr Chimanlal Trivedi notes in an article, *Kalyankari Kelvanina Kimiyagar* [Christian Missionaries' Contribution to Education]:

If we remember, in every village of Gujarat, untouchable children had to sit in a separate corner in schools. But the arrival of missionaries has abolished this evil and have established Mission schools for the backward class children.....By establishing educational institutions with hostels, they [Missionaries] have educated the untouchable, poor, suppressed and segregated class of the society, and brought them to the mainstream; and helped them live with self-respect. (Trivedi 72-73)

Though there are many Christian missionary groups and sub-groups from different countries, they, on the whole, have been working with coordination and mainly concentrating on the Dalit community for their education and religious activities.

⁵ See Father Verges Pol and Navin Macwan. Eds. *Vikasna Hamsafar: Gujaratna Vikasma Khristionu Pradan (Co-traveler of Development: Contribution of Christians in the development of Gujarat)*. Ahmedabad: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2011. 52-53 & 65-103. Print.

Most Dalit Christians have social relations with their Hindu relatives those who have not converted to the Christianity. But the important change that can be witnessed is that most Christian Dalits have gradually been alienating themselves from the Hindu Dalits. Though they are still considered untouchables, they mostly refrain to address the issue within their community or in any literary forms. In Gujarati Dalit literature, there is hardly any Christian Dalit writer except Joseph Macwan⁶ who addresses the Dalit issues through literature. Christian poets such as Yoseph Macwan and Philip Clerk occasionally deal with the Dalit issues. Yoseph Macwan's few poems published in *Dalit Kavita* (1981), the first anthology of Gujarati Dalit Poetry but he predominantly composes the mainstream poetry.

Gandhi and Dalit Education:

As a conscious and organizational effort to remove untouchability and uplift the Depressed Classes, Gandhi founded 'All India Anti-Untouchability League' immediately after the Poona Pact in 1932. Later, the League was renamed as '*Harijan Sevak Sangh*'. Dr. Madanmohan Malviya was its president and Amritlal Thakkar, a companion of Gandhiji was its first secretary. Ambedkar was one of the members of its central committee. Ambedkar's acceptance of the membership was, as it seems, a part of the mood of reconciliation after the Poona Pact. He said, "After the Poona Pact, I proceeded in a spirit of forget and forgive" (Rodrigues 359). He accepted a place in the central board of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. It was dominantly an organization of Hindus because out of its eight members five were of the upper caste Hindu in the beginning and later all the untouchable members detached themselves from

⁶ Joseph Macwan wrote many novels dealing with Dalits' issues. His *Angaliyat* (1986) won him a Sahitya Akadami Award. It is also translated into English by Rita Kothari as *The Stepchild* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

the organization. The three Dalit members resigned in the protest against its conservative agenda and approach. When the Dalits demanded to be associated with the Sangh, Gandhiji replied:

The welfare work for the untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of untouchability. The money that has been collected was contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics nor right would justify untouchables in claiming a seat on the Board of the Sangh. (Rodrigues 367)

The Sangh's basic aim was to remove untouchability by bringing change in the attitude of caste Hindus towards the Dalits. It also aimed at bringing reforms among the Dalits. The Sangh's objectives were, as Gandhi said: "I have described the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* as an organization of penitent sinners. Its object is to call upon the so-called *Savarna* Hindus to do expiation for having harboured untouchability" (*CWMG* Vol.85: 26).

Gandhi wished to put into action several programmes like education, temple entry, inter-dinning and inter-marriages, using of public places, use of wells by the Dalits etc. Gandhi gave responsibility to the caste Hindus to bring about change among themselves and among the Dalits as a part of repentance of their sin that they have committed by observing untouchability. Gandhi's approach was religious. He considered the untouchability a blot on Hinduism and he wished to make caste Hindus work for its eradication. If it is looked at objectively, it seems that Gandhi's approach considers the untouchables as "passive objects helplessly waiting for their masters to get off their backs" (Parekh 1993:242). Dalits were never allowed themselves to involve in the active struggle of their own emancipation. As a result of this approach, the Dalits, as Parekh observes, "failed to develop a collective organization, a corporate identity, an indigenous leadership, a tradition of struggle and memories of collective action" (1993: 242).

Gandhi's approach didn't allow the untouchables work for themselves and prevented them from meaningful interaction with the oppressors. Ambedkar writes: "The programme of constructive work had the possibility of being converted into a plan to kill untouchable by kindness. This as a matter of fact happened. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is intolerant of any movement on the part of the Untouchables which is independent and opposed to the Hindus and the Congress and is out to destroy it" (Rodrigues: 367). The Sangh remained an organization that 'worked for the untouchables not with the untouchables'. The caste Hindus remained 'masters', the untouchable as usual the 'passive objects'.

Moreover, Gandhi asked the Dalits for self-purification. He said, "Self-purification means cleaning oneself of all impurities, whether of the mind, speech or body. The untouchable friends were asked to think no evil, speak no untruth or abuse and to keep the body pure by careful wash, pure food and avoidance of carrion or other impure food or intoxicating liquors or drugs" (CWMG Vol.27: 318). This approach was based on the assumption that the untouchability exists as long as the Dalit is impure and immoral. This approach could certainly suggest that Dalits should consider themselves guilty of their condition. Ambedkar showed a kind of displeasure towards such an approach in the efforts of uplifting the Dalits. He wrote a letter to A. V. Thakkar, the secretary of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. He writes:

In my opinion there can be two distinct methods of approaching the task of uplifting the Depressed Classes. There is a school, which proceeds on the assumption that the fact of the individual belonging to the Depressed Classes is bound up with his personal conduct. If he is suffering from want and misery it is because he must be vicious and sinful. Starting from this hypothesis this School of workers concentrates all its efforts and its resources on fostering personal virtues..... which are calculated to make the individual a better and virtuous individual. In my opinion, there is also another method of approach to this problem. It starts with the hypothesis that the fate of the individual is governed by his environment and the

circumstances he is obliged to live under, and if an individual is suffering from want and misery it is because his environment is not propitious. I have no doubt that the two views the latter is the more correct, the former may raise a few stray individuals above the level of the class to which they belong. It cannot lift class as a whole. (Rodrigues: 360-361)

The Sangh desired to make the Dalits 'cultured' through providing education and moral teaching regarding conduct and food habits. The idea of a 'cultured' being is largely an upper caste construct. The Sangh wanted to mould the Dalits to make them acceptable to the caste Hindus. The very conception of the unacceptability of Dalits with their present condition reveals the deep-rooted antagonism among the workers who aimed to work for Dalits. The attempt to develop temperance, vegetarianism and the worshipping to a specific deity among Dalits has been a kind of cultural conversion, if not religious, to increase their acceptability to caste Hindus.

The focus of reformation is actively grounded on Dalits and not on the caste Hindus. The erroneous base of the Gandhian efforts is that Dalits need 'purification' and the caste Hindus require a sympathetic attitude towards the 'sinful wretch'. Thus, Ambedkar was against the approach which concentrated on fostering personal virtues in Dalits. This Gandhian approach has been evident in the education system too. The relationship between the Dalit students and the upper caste teachers and between the Dalit students and the caste Hindu students has always remained conscious and cynical and has never achieved casteless identity. Dalits are considered inferior and 'sinful' and to educate them is the 'holy task', an act of 'expiation'. The patronizing attitude has made Dalits devoid of 'meaningful contacts' at the social level with the caste Hindus and on the other side, the caste Hindus have remained largely unchanged in their attitude towards the Dalits. Consequently, Dalits have hardly felt any equal status with the caste Hindus at any

level, social or political. Ambedkar desired to secure civic rights. By expressing his position, he writes:

I think the first thing the League should undertake is a campaign all over India to secure to the Depressed Classes the enjoyment of their civic rights such as taking water from the village wells, entry in village schools, admission to village chawadi, use of public conveyances etc. Such a programme if carried into villages will bring about the necessary social revolution in the Hindu Society, without which it will never be possible for Depressed Classes to get equal status. (Rodrigues: 361)

Ambedkar's emphasis on civic rights is a modern approach in dealing the issue, while Gandhi's approach is religious in tone and rather voluntary in its application.

As an outcome of the educational philosophy of Gandhi, the Wardha Scheme, (The Zakir Hussain Committee Report) was introduced before the Indian National Congress at its Haripura Session, held in March 1938. Gandhi was not satisfied with the Government education scheme that appeared an alien to him. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* in 1937:

By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man- body, mind and spirit.... Literacy itself is no education, I would, therefore, begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus, every school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufacture of these schools. (*Harijan* 31 July, 1937) (CWMG Vol. 65: 450)

The idea behind the introduction of the craftwork in the education was "to break down the existing barriers of the prejudice between the manual and intellectual workers, harmful alike for both" (Aggrawal: 52). To enable students to attain the goal of education, the following are chosen as basic crafts:

(a) Spinning and weaving.

- (b) Carpentry.
- (c) Agriculture.
- (d) Fruit and vegetable gardening.
- (e) Leather works.
- (f) Any other craft for which local and geographical conditions are favourable....

Moreover, the craft work section is allotted the maximum time in the school timetable. Out of 5 hours 30 minutes of work in a day, 3 hours 20 minutes were allotted to the basic craft training; and social and general sciences are given only thirty minutes. The concept of Basic Education, or *Nai Talim* as it is known, as conceived by Gandhiji, presented by the Zakir Hussain Committee, became the guiding principle for the educational institutes after 1938. The craft categories selected by the committee have been mostly associated with the artisan community and the Dalit community. The artisans like potters, carpenters, masons etc. were traditionally considered as the backward caste people and even in the modern reservation schemes, many of them were included in the category of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs).

The works of spinning, weaving and leather tanning have been associated with the Dalits castes like Vankars and Chamars. By the new Basic Education, Gandhi wanted to bring equality and ‘equalization of statuses’ among the various castes of Hinduism. He did not want to allow any kind of “differentiation between the sons of a weaver or an agriculturist and of a school master.” The *Nai Talim* scheme is indeed a radical effort to educate the Depressed Classes where they can achieve their dominance in the major portion of their study, basic craft training; due to their expertise in their traditional crafts; and the upper castes identify themselves with the lower strata of society. Moreover, the *Nai Talim* shows intention to give importance to manual labour and productive labour where the lower castes are good at. But the ‘new scheme’ is not new for

the artisan castes and the labour castes because they have been practicing such occupations since ages. For them, the *Nai Talim* restricts them to their own traditional occupations and does not empower them to move away from the traditional occupations which are considered lowly and impure. The upper caste students may learn what they do not know about the craft, but it is hardly substantial for those who already have the knowledge of such crafts. Thus, Gandhi's concept of the Basic Education, as it seems, is unable to provide the lower castes the upward mobility, but offers a kind of status quo that they obviously do not wish from education.⁷ The scheme is *Nai Talim*, but it is not *Nai* or 'new' for the lower castes, it does not provide emancipation from the traditional caste occupations. In a sense, it only transfers the training from home to a school building. Apart from this, Gandhi's emphasis on adhering to the 'ancestral calling' for livelihood adds further to the status quo position of the lower castes. He writes; "As per the Hindu Scriptures if a person adopts any other profession in place of his family profession, he commits violence and he renders himself to meanness by not following his ancestral profession" (*Young India*: Nov. 24, 1927).

But Ambedkar was seeking help of the Hindus at different level. He wanted to liberate his people from the caste occupations. He writes, "Much can be done by the private firms and companies managed by the Hindus by extending their patronage to the Depressed Classes and by employing them in their offices in various grades and occupations suited to the capacities of the applicants" (Rodrigues: 363). Both Gandhi's constructive work and education scheme for Dalits,

⁷ For the discussion on *Nai Talim*, I have followed the argument presented by Deeptha Achar "Caste and the Crafting of Education: The Wardha Resolution of 1937" *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*. Eds. Shivaji K Panikkar, Parul Dave-Mukharjee and Deeptha Achar. New Delhi: D K Printworld, 2003. 385-393. Print.

as it appears, fail to counter the evils of caste system, but on the contrary, they support its structure.

Ambedkar on Dalit Education:

Late in the first half of the 20th century, Ambedkar played a significant role in the upward mobility of the untouchables by giving importance to modern education and obtaining some constitutional measures for it. He relentlessly attempted to persuade the British Government to facilitate education for the depressed classes. In 1924 Ambedkar established the *Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha* with one of its objectives to provide education and educational facilities to the untouchable students. Ambedkar's concern was clear. He wanted to empower the Dalits through education. The formal objectives of the *Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha* make his intentions clear:

- 1) To promote the spread of education among the Depressed Classes by opening hostels or by employing such other means as may seem necessary or desirable.
- 2) To promote the spread of culture among the Depressed Classes by opening libraries, social centers and classes or study circles;
- 3) To advance or to improve the economic condition of the Depressed Classes by starting Industrial and educational schools;
- 4) To represent to grievances of the Depressed Classes. (Jaffrelot 2009: 45-46)

By presenting his case on behalf of the *Bahishkrita Hitkarini Sabha* with great minute details and arguments before the Simon Commission in 1928, he presented a statement and demanded sincere enforcement of the policy to impart education to the students of the depressed classes. He wrote:

Unless the compulsion in the matter of Primary Education is made obligatory and unless the admission to primary schools is strictly enforced, conditions essential for educational progress of the Backward Classes will not come into existence.

Ambedkar urged the British Government to implement a firm and systematic policy to protect the right to education of the Depressed classes. He argued that the Depressed class had not any opportunity in the 'theocracy based' Peshwa regime. But after the fall of the princely state, the Depressed Classes hoped democratic treatment from the British rule. He argues that; "... the Depressed Classes had helped the British to conquer the country and naturally believed that the British would in their turn help them, if not in a special degree, at least equally with the rest." But the British, as Ambedkar argued, "deliberately ruled that education was to be a preserve for the higher classes" (1928).⁸ He exposed and questioned the British policy which often favoured the hegemony of Brahmins. He further argues by indicating the government's views that "the influential class whom the Government are able to avail themselves of in diffusing the seeds of education are the Brahmins and other high castes, *Brahmannis proxim*" (1928). Ambedkar was, as it seems from his arguments to the Simon Commission, desperate in his effort for obtaining education facilities for the Depressed Classes. In his speech in the Round Table Conference in 1930 he exposed the British government and declared:

That the British, who have held so large a sway over us for such a long time, have done some good we cheerfully acknowledge. But there is certainly no fundamental change in our position. Indeed, so far as we were concerned, the British Government has accepted the social arrangements as it found them.... Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away. (Dash 96)

The British Government was not committed to bring substantial changes in the life of the Depressed Classes. The Depressed Classes were to fight against both the British regime and the caste Hindus. Ambedkar's 'State Education' report shows that "education which was a major site

⁸Ambedkar's Statement (B) to Indian Statutory Commission on 29th May 1928:

"Concerning the state of education of the Depressed Classes in the Bombay Presidency." (www.ambedkar.org)

of contestation in the colonial society, eventually promoted the advancement of the “upper classes”” (Dash 99).

In 1928 he established the Depressed Classes Education Society “to organize school education on a sound basis” (Keer 2013:124). In 1945 he founded the People’s Education Society at Bombay. The Society was the driving force behind the establishment of several institutions such as the Siddharth College of Arts and Science, Bombay in 1946; Siddharth Night College (1947); Milind Mahavidyalaya (1950); Siddharth College of Commerce and Economics (1953); Milind Multipurpose High School (1955); and Siddharth College of Law (1956). (Rodrigues: 16) Thus, the Society played a significant role in spreading education among the Dalits. The first educated Dalit generation of Maharashtra was the result of this endeavour. Through various seminars, conferences, lectures and community meetings he encouraged the untouchable youths to acquire education. Reviewing the educational conditions of the Depressed Castes and analyzing the reasons behind it, Ambedkar straightforwardly notes:

The ancient world may be said to have been guilty for failing to take the responsibility for the education for the masses. But never has any society been guilty for closing to the generality of the people the study of the books of its religion. Never has society made any attempt to declare that attempt made by the common man to acquire knowledge shall be punishable as a crime. Manu is the only divine law giver who has denied the common man the right to knowledge. (*BAWS* Vol.3 1987: 43)

He considered education as one of the important tools to acquire upward mobility in the hierarchical social structure. For that throughout his life, he relentlessly attempted to democratize education for his people.

Ambedkar himself also faced acute segregation during his school days. He was not allowed to sit among the upper caste students and compelled to sit on gunny bags in a corner. He was also not allowed to answer questions to protect the upper caste teacher from pollution.

Moreover, he was also not permitted to learn Sanskrit as it was seen as the language of holy Hindu scriptures. Though his family was not associated with a ‘polluted’ traditional occupation, he had to face humiliation on the basis of his *Mahar* caste (Keer: 2013). What Ambedkar experienced during his schooling was the fate of most Dalit children. M. R. Renukumar, a thinker and poet in Kerala, accurately portrays the condition of a Dalit child in his poem, “The Question Paper”:

Why is the first page
of the first lesson missing?
Why is the sky visible
through the corner of the slate?
While sharpening
the pencil to a point
why are my fingers
the only ones to be cut?
Why are the button-less clothes
and the bottom-torn knickers not
cut to my size?
Why did fingers crinkle in shame
When they dipped into the pocket?
Why does mother cry
smoothing
soiled notes?
Wiping sadness off
why does father
smile?
Why does elder sister,
coconut husk in hand,
go to the neighbor

to borrow fire,
stumbling in the dark?
Why does grandma
Extinguish the oil-lamp
when there is moonlight?
Why does mother say
That there will be answers
To all sorts of questions
Once one grows up? (Satyanarayana *et al* 2011: 582-583)

Along with social conditions, economic conditions of the Dalits also did not promote the acquisition formal education. The list of questions raised by Renukumar can be extended, it is endless. The reminiscences of schooling in the early twentieth century by Dalit themselves and some research studies obviously reveals the state of the education system; and exposes the humiliating experiences through which the Dalit students passed. Many of them were forced to sit outside the classroom, compelled to use separate water taps, forced to clean school lavatory and not allowed to answer questions. As Isaac notes; “the lonely little boys who made their way to school in many scattered places in India during the first 30 years of this century to accept the bluntest type of rejection and had to able to persist in the face of it year after year to get through” (Isaac 75).

Thus, acquiring education for the first generation of the untouchable students was a traumatic experience. The social environment of caste discrimination often harms Dalits instead of allowing them upward mobility on a social ladder. However, from these brutal experiences, Ambedkar emerged as an active social thinker who always attempted to bring the untouchable children to school and motivate them to fight against the unjust system. Ambedkar’s case is an

ideal example of how a Dalit child if he is given the opportunity and necessary financial and moral help can prove himself. Ambedkar's school success and his first ever doctorate by an untouchable were publicly applauded. He got moral support from his father and financial assistance from the Maharaja of Baroda and Kolhapur. His slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organize' with its priority indicates the importance of education and emphasizes reform through education. For Ambedkar, education was the main tool to open the doors of better future for the Dalits. He appeals:

The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits, we may forego material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent. That the importance of this question from the point of view of the backward classes who have just realized that without education their existence is not safe. (BAWS Vol.2: 62)

However, the questions of equal opportunity and equal treatment have remained a major concern for Dalits. The reasons behind the poor spread of education among Dalits are largely associated with the caste system and less with the school system. Moreover, poverty, degraded social conditions, home environment and apathetic attitude towards education also play significant role in creating obstacles in spreading education among Dalits. Ambedkar addressed all these issues at various levels throughout his life.

Ambedkar, Education and Gujarati Dalit poetry:

The slogan, 'Educate, Agitate and Organise' is part of Ambedkar's historic speech delivered at the All-India Depressed Classes Conference (18-19, July 1942, Nagpur) Ambedkar concluded his speech with: "My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material

or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is the battle for freedom. It is a battle for reclamation of human personality.”⁹

Gujarati Dalit writers and poets often spread his message through their writings and poetry. The teaching of Dr Ambedkar reached them quite late, specifically after the advent of Dalit Panthers in Gujarat in 1970s. But the proximity with Maharashtra and national outlook of Ambedkar kept them aware about the Dalit movement and its results. Gujarati Dalit poetry in general reflects the teaching of Ambedkar and poses a significant Dalit discourse in Gujarati literature. Poets like Sahil Parmar, Praveen Gadhvi, Dalpat Parmar, Neerav Patel, Shankar Painter, Chandraben Srimali, Magan Rathod often convey Ambedkar’s thought in their poetry.

Sahil Parmar, acknowledging Ambedkar’s endeavors, expresses his gratitude by addressing him as ‘Father’ in a poem, “You Tried a Lot”:

You tried a lot, my father.
Tried a lot—
To save us from the python’s grip.
But they are polymorphous,
They can be a python
And they can be an amoeba.
They can be a tiger,
and they can be a fox.
It is your grace,
That we can look beyond the stars in the sky,
It is your grace
That our frozen blood after continuous saluting
is now boiling.

⁹ See i Dhanjay Keer. *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission*.p351. Some scholars quote this slogan as “Educate. Organise and Agitate” For instance, Sharmila Rege in *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar’s Writing on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2013.p44. Print.

It is your grace,
We that shivered by words,
and killed by words,
Can now sling the words.
It is your grace. (Parmar 2004: 35)

For Sahil Parmar, Ambedkar is the father. Gandhi may be the father of nation, but for Dalits Ambedkar has acquired a specific place. Here Parmar expresses his gratitude towards Ambedkar. He also reveals the nature of fluid and 'polymorphous social conditions.

Dalit children have been facing considerable hardship, including discrimination, discouragement, alienation, segregation, physical and psychological abuse from their teachers and fellow students. Caste discrimination was quite evident in the higher education institutes too. Poverty and illiterate parents have been the major obstacles in the education of Dalit children. Dalit children have to work to help their parents for the economic survival of the family. The untouchables were deprived of educational opportunities and were fated to a low social status. In course of time the privileges of the educated upper class increased and the other classes became more oppressed. Such a social structure breeds inequality in status and denial of equal opportunities in every field. Ambedkar's efforts have brought some results; and even after facing some adverse conditions, a considerable mass of the Dalits have got the opportunity of acquiring knowledge. Parmar is optimistic. He dreams the significant progress of the new generation of Dalit children. He says:

Offended at heart since ages,
Pushed back by intrigues ever,
Remaining silent, suffered apathy and abuses,
But now we've started to shed pains of new generation.

The march of new generation will be on this path, and

Its glory will spread all over the world.

(Parmar 2004: 134)

Parmar points out that Dalits were systematically kept away from access of knowledge. In the history of humanity, it is a rare example that the people of specific groups are denied the access of knowledge. Ambedkar expresses his concerns and notes;

The ancient world may be said to have been guilty for failing to take the responsibility for the education for masses. But never has any society been guilty for closing to the generality of the people the study of the books of its religion. Never has society made any attempt to declare that attempt made by the common man to acquire knowledge shall be punishable as a crime. Manu is the only divine law giver who has denied the common man the right to knowledge. (BAWS Vol. 3: 43)

Ambedkar blames the unjust scriptural norms for not allowing the Dalits for acquiring formal knowledge of any kind. The poem indicates the history of deprivation of Dalits. By various intrigues they were kept away from acquiring knowledge. However, the poet is hopeful about the present that they will shrug off the pain and go forward on a new path to make substantial development.

Gujarati Dalit poetry often addresses the issues of poverty and education simultaneously. Chandraben Shrimali, a Gujarati Dalit poet also, presents a realistic picture of Dalit economic conditions and state of deprivation and emphasizes the severe inequality in the society. Her poem, “Childhood on Sale” reveals:

We sell our childhood to fill our belly.

They live in mansions, practice casteism,

hold *kathas* to accumulate good deeds,

do charity for stone tablets bearing their names,

nothing help to banish hunger, Mother.
Books we cannot read or decipher,
we've never held a pencil in our hand,
we are destined to spend our childhood
doing errands at the road side tea stall. (Mangalam *et al* 2009: 224)

Shrimali, in the above poem, "Childhood on Sale", exposes the predicament of Dalit children in general. They do not have facilities or time to acquire education; most of them have to work to earn their daily bread. They cannot think of education. The question of survival is so vital for them that they cannot afford education.

Among many caste based restrictions, denial of the right to study is a core and most disadvantageous for Dalits. Hindu tradition had a narrow concept of education. Education was only confined to religious texts and it was only limited to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Brahmin alone had the right to teach. Shudras were not allowed to access knowledge. The divine law giver, Manu made it a punishable crime for Shudras. In this way, basic education or skills of reading and writing were denied to Dalits. As a result, lower castes were destined to illiteracy and ignorance.

Sahil Parmar subtly indicates the inequality that prevails in imparting knowledge. In his poem, 'But...' he says;

You might read,
Printed on glossy paper,
Pictorial Ramayana and Mahabarata
And verses of Geeta.
But, I am, since able to read,
Reading the walls of public toilets,

And charcoal paintings and writings

On tattered yellowish walls. (Parmar 2004: 60)

Parmar expresses his concern about the lack facilities for the Dalit children in acquiring education. Dalit children generally don't have books, decent clothes, and educated parent to take care of them. By suggesting stark inequality in obtaining education, he juxtaposes the two conditions, one has glossy picture books and the other has nothing but a charcoal painted wall. The facilities and opportunities that caste Hindu children enjoy are just not available to most Dalit children due to poor social and economic conditions. However, after independence, as a result of Ambedkar's effort, Dalits got a life of dignity through various constitutional measures. The articles of abolition of untouchability, prohibition of forced labour and positive discrimination in employment in government services give significant protection to Dalits but it is not enough to free the Dalits from poverty and untouchability. Though untouchability legally abolished, it still exists. Physical violence and boycott against Dalits is a common phenomenon in rural India.

Praveen Gadhvi also conveys his concern over the prevailing inequality. Inequality hampers the chances of equal opportunity offered by the state. As long as equality does not prevail, the equality of opportunity is meaningless. To exploit opportunity one should have equal social and educational ground. At one level the state attempts to create equality by implementing reservation policy for the depressed castes, and at another level the caste Hindus often react violently to oppose the state policy. Gadhvi sarcastically makes his point regarding this issue in his poem "Farewell to Arms". He says;

Let us abolish reservation laws from the constitution.

Our Magania-Chagnia shall 'Open compete',

But will you admit them to your convent schools?

Let us tear away the pages of the schedule,
But will you let us be Dave, Trivedi or Patel?
Let us say farewell to arms,
Plough the country's rich soil together,
Will you give us our share of harvest? (Burke *et al* 33)

The social discrimination and inequality in economic conditions do not offer a fair chance of competitions. The reservation policy is often blamed as an appeasement to the depressed castes. Gadhvi aptly answers such forces that Dalits are ready for open competition but before that the caste discrimination and economic inequality must be removed. He also draws our attention towards inequality prevailing in imparting education. Dalit children generally do not get quality education, whereas the many caste Hindu children acquire it in convent schools.

Another major issue that is associated with education is employability. Without proper education it is not possible to obtain a respectable job. In spite of the reservation, very few Dalits are found in higher jobs. Their visibility in many modern sectors like science, medical, banking, insurance, computer, communication etc. is negligible. Moreover, many educational disciplines, linked with prestige and exclusiveness, vigorously attempt to guard their exclusive domain. They are reluctant in allowing 'masses' in their domain. They often pit merit against the reservation policy.

The National Sample Survey (NSS) for 1999-2000 mentions that 47% of Dalit men aged between 25 to 45 years worked as casual labourers. Lack of proper education, discrimination and social exclusion constrain Dalits from acquiring suitable livelihood. The reservation policy becomes ineffective when the educational criterion of the Dalits do not meet. Thus, educational base is a major factor that has the capacity to lead Dalits towards upward mobility. Education

creates confidence to deal with the adverse conditions. While suggesting a remedy, Borooch rightly notes:

Admittedly, tackling the problem at its roots will only yield results after a long delay. Nor does the emphasis on effective learning at school carry the glamour associated with being putative graduate of Indian Institute of Technology, the Indian Institute of Management, or the All India Medical Institute. But, before the vast mass educationally and economically deprived children in India (many of whom are dalits) can meaningfully enter the portals of universities and institute of higher education they need to go to good schools.¹⁰

As he was a visionary educationalist, Ambedkar's focus on quality education was conscious and was a result of his personal experiences. While presenting a memorandum of grievances of scheduled castes in 1942, he notes;

Education in Arts and Law cannot to be of much value to the Scheduled Castes either to the graduate themselves or to the people. It has not been of very high value even to Hindus. What will help the Scheduled Caste is education of an advanced type in Science and Technology. But it is obvious that education in Science and Technology is beyond the means of the Scheduled Castes.... Without Government assistance, the field of Advanced Education will never become open to the Scheduled Castes... (in Thorat *et al* 2010: 224-225)

The issue which has been relevant since 1942 has not been addressed properly even after independence. Parmar also raises this issue in his poem, "Same kanthe ...Manaso Nathi" (On that bank...No human beings)

They open kindergartens and convents,
Colleges and science institutes.
They teach their children

¹⁰ See Vani K Borooch. "Social Exclusion and Jobs Reservation in India." *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XLV No 52 , 25 December 2010. Pg.35.

English and commerce.
Stat and microbiology,
Women liberation and Marxist methodology,
Dalit upliftment and latest technology.
And after shutting down mills, these
Specialists teach us
Education-reforms and awareness lessons.
We know all right or wrong lessons.
They have books, but the boys of Patni Street,
Have pockets filled with bidi-stubs,
and girls have sacks on their shoulders to pick rags. (Parmar 2004: 53)

Parmar conveys his concerns towards two things here. On the one hand Dalit children are deprived of basic facilities and they have to work to survive. On the other hand, they are not given quality education. So, he draws our attention towards a new emerging inequality where specific castes only can acquire modern knowledge and Dalits lag far behind.

On one hand, the Indian state implements the scheme of free education for the Dalits up to PhD. On the other the Dalit children are often stigmatized in schools and colleges. Mostly in rural areas, they are still forced to sit on barren floors while the others get proper facilities. They are often not allowed to sit on the front benches. The dropout rate among the children is high due to such reasons.

As mentioned above, education is the only tool to lead Dalits towards progress and their upliftment. But, along with poverty, the caste discrimination is deeply rooted in our society that hampers this noble objective. Education has the capacity to make Dalits escape from this lower rung of the caste system and to move for upward mobility. But even after so many years, Dalit

children fail to be a regular at the educational institutes. The ill treatment discourages them to the point that they feel scared to go to school. As a result, the Dalit children lose interest in study.

As per a survey, in 53% of villages in Gujarat, Dalit children are made to sit separately from non-Dalit children at the Mid-day meal at school, and they are expected to go home to drink water and in 45% of villages, Dalits are expected not to enter shops and are instead served outside (Navsarjan 19). Here, it can be marked how Dalit students face discriminations in schools and when they go to store for books or stationary items.

Navsarjan, after analyzing the data on untouchability practices in some 1,589 villages from 5,462 respondents in Gujarat on the issue of untouchability, gives its one of the conclusion:

Another example is the existence of untouchability in the schools, where Dalit children are *singled-out in various situations*, including being forced to sit separately from non-Dalit children or non-Dalit children refusing to eat mid-day meals prepared by Dalits, causing Dalits not to be hired to prepare these meals. Such severe discrimination against children and related high levels of school desertion represent a violation of Dalit children's right to education. The results indicate that Dalit children sit separately in almost 25% of the villages and no Dalit is hired to prepare the mid-day meal in over 50% of the villages surveyed. Such discrimination occurs within the realm of the state and this practice of untouchability is a violation of the Government of India's obligation to respect. The state, through its agents or institutions, is actively participating in activities that inhibit the enjoyment of Dalits' human rights. (Navsarjan 44, *italic mine*)

Dalpat Chauhan, a leading Gujarati Dalit poet and writer in his poem 'Untouchable', reveals his experience at the school.

The first day in school,
the doom's day.
With trembling hand I did not write

One, two, three...
 I wrote
 On the fireland of burning desert,
 My chest,
 My caste,
 Since then
 'I am untouchable, untouchable, you cannot touch me',
 Echoed in every atom of my existence.
 It was an introduction of pain caused by hundred scorpion
 Bites
 When I crossed the threshold of classroom.
 As one climbs the highest peak of Himalayas.
 Far from others, in that corner
 I got like Shankar
 A lonely place.
 (Misra 41)

The painful experience of childhood in the school discomforts the poet immensely and he still remembers the humiliation he experienced in his childhood. To acquire education, a Dalit child has to go through humiliations many times. Navsarjan has documented some of such experiences as follows:

"Sangita is 14 years old, and she is a manual scavenger in Gujarat. She dropped out of her village school. She was unable to bear the humiliation when her teacher pushed her to the last bench in the back of the classroom, even though she ranked higher in the class. Many other scavenger children in her village had also dropped out. Sangita, with tears rolling down her face, told the camera crew making the documentary *Lesser Humans*, "I had dreams of becoming a doctor, but all my dreams have shattered."

A hardly eight-year-old boy from the scavenger community complained, “Our teachers tell us to sit separately. Are not we human beings?” Another boy broke in, “Our teacher tells us that there’s no reason for us to attend school at all.” (Macwan 2013: 01-02)

Dalpat Chauhan’s experience as revealed in his poem is common for most of the Dalit children. To call them by pejorative caste names, not allowing them to sit on the front benches, not asking them question and denying their involvement in the class activities have been quite common for Dalit children throughout Gujarat. Dalit children have to face both poverty and untouchability. Amidst such discriminations, even to finish primary education is a mammoth task for them, and many have to leave study to save them from daily humiliations. May be at certain place, particularly in urban areas, the Dalit students are allowed to sit near the upper caste students in many schools but mere physical nearness is not able to bring equality. A Dalit respondent tells to a research team:

Niraj: This is an age of education. There is much sitting together and being together but what is in the mind has not been erased. The notion of untouchability is still there in the heart. In the past one could not sit side by side, and if one did, one was shooed away. Today people sit together but the difference in the mind is still there.

Q: How do you feel that notion still exists in their minds? Can you explain?

Niraj: You can make out as soon as you see them. As soon as you sit with them you can make out how much feeling they have for you. (Franco *et al* 42)

However, the aspirations of Dalits are high, even facing adverse conditions they have kept their dreams alive. Education seems to be the only way to liberate themselves. Ambedkar made Dalits aware about the importance of knowledge. His message runs through the verses of many Dalit poets. With pain and hope, Sahil Parmar often mentions the deprived state of Dalits. He rightly

blames the caste Hindus for their backward conditions. In his poem, he passionately indicates that now Dalits have awakened to achieve 'words' means education. He writes:

We became shield and saved you
Although you back stabbed us!
We watered your farms with our sweat-tears
And you reaped harvest and filled your larders.

.....

But now Hercules has turned his back,
Now the North has become the South,
And the South the North
Now our aspiration has become intense
Now our demands has become loud

.....

Now our leather tanning pits
are ripening words,
And our handlooms
Are weaving words
And our brooms are cleaning the dust
making the words clean,
Our furnace is on,
And on. (Parmar 2004: 129-130)

Parmar mentions that since ages Dalits have been landless labourers and they, with their hard labour have made the caste Hindus wealthy. Moreover, he also indicates that by serving in the forces they protected them but they are not duly rewarded. It seems that the mention of the Dalits as a protecting army is related to the Mahar community of Maharashtra who were in armed forces during the British regime. But the caste Hindus have not reciprocated their hard work,

instead they have been subjected to inhuman treatment. The poet compares Dalits with Hercules, a Greek mythological hero who was considered stubborn, pig-headed, absolutely non-intellectual, and often directly challenges the gods but the poet suggests that now Dalits have turned their back and begun to acquire knowledge to counter the hegemonic forces. Interestingly, Parmar mentions 'tanning', 'handloom' and 'broom' which represent three major Dalit castes in Gujarat respectively Chamars, Vankars and Valmikis. He reveals that Dalits have now heard the message of Ambedkar and began to educate themselves along with their traditional occupations, for which they have been stigmatized for ages. He indicates that the time has changed now, and the fate has changed its side and Dalits have got the chance to educate themselves.

Moreover, when the government tries to provide any special assistance or reservation to the Dalits the upper caste Hindus often resist it violently. Gujarat has witnessed multiple anti-reservation riots in 1980s. Prasad expresses the factual conditions:

The Dalits' right of reservation has never been approved by non-Dalits and there have been occasional protests, ever since 1950, in all parts of India, usually non-violent. But the first organised and violent anti-reservation movement occurred in 1981 in Gujarat. Anti-Dalit riots broke out in Ahmedabad, Nadiad and Varodara and soon engulfed all Gujarati society. Several Dalit hamlets were torched and property looted. Rioters killed 12 Dalits and injured hundreds. This was repeated in 1985, continuing for four months and causing over 200 deaths. The communal riots of 1967, 1982 and the present one, too, spread to the villages, resulting in several hundred deaths and the destruction of property. (Prasad 2014: web)

Dalits, women and tribals had got entry into educational institutions as a result of reform drives supported by liberal Englishmen during the nineteenth century. Caste reservations in India in education were introduced by the British Government after the recommendations of the Hunter Commission (1882). Later in 1943, Ambedkar successfully secured 8.3 per cent reservation for untouchables. The reservation policy of the Government of India was to determine place of the

Depressed Castes in educational institutions. It is also seen as the compensation to old-age segregation of these castes. The reservation policy is indeed a successful endeavor in that it has allowed a few of the Depressed Castes to enter the domain of education and employment which was earlier only a prerogative of the upper caste Hindus. However, every now and then, Dalits have to face fierce resistance from the anti-reservationist in the so-called modern era of merit and competence. They often attempt to create obstacles in the implementation of the reservation for education and jobs. In this context, K Satanarayana and Susie Tharu write:

The anti-reservationists raised slogans of 'merit', 'efficiency', and 'national interest'. They depicted those who had made use of reservations as 'inefficient' and, by implication, 'dangerous' doctors and engineers. Anecdotes about SC/ST students with less than minimum marks were given admission into engineering and medical colleges under the reserved quota appeared as headlines in some English newspapers. (2011: 05)

In Gujarat by raising the issue of merit and reservation in the B.J. Medical College, the caste Hindus students started an agitation and which was converted into anti-caste riots. The anti-reservation agitation was not an independent movement but it was a part of number of incidents that occurred before the actual agitation from the Medical College. On 25 December 1980, Shakrabhai, a *chamar*, was brutally beaten by Patidar youth in Jetalpur Village.¹¹ He was dragged into the Panchayat office and was set on fire. He was an active member of the Dalit Panther. The Panthers had attempted to acquire land for cultivation from the Panchayat for a year. The gochar, the wasteland was allotted for a year but before the year it was taken back and it was given to the Forest Department for sapling plantation. The angry Panthers uprooted the saplings. The case was registered but the Panthers were acquitted. All these incidents led to clashes between the Patels and the Dalits. After the death of Shakrabhai, many Patels were

¹¹ I have described this incident in the last chapter.

arrested, and it led to considerable resentment among the upper castes, especially the Patel community. The incident of announcing strike at the B.J. Medical College occurred on 29 December 1980. But well before that some upper caste students from the college filed a case in the Ahmedabad High Court against the reservation norms for the post-graduate and other items but they lost it. The verdict came in February 1980; it was ‘an inescapable conclusion’. Thus, they started agitation and it soon converted into the riots. Many cases of assault, stabbing, police firing, breaking in and wanton destruction were reported all over Gujarat, in rural and urban areas. Ahmedabad was the epicenter of riots. Dalits were at the receiving end. The Committee for the protection of Democratic Rights, presided by Vijay Tendulkar, a noted playwright, after its investigation about the anti-reservation riots presented a report. It concludes:

Various social tensions, the economic and social mobility and rise in consciousness among a section of the Scheduled Castes, the attempt of the dominant Patel community to retain its hold coupled with resentment they felt at being kept out of the Government made a campus *agitation against reservation take a serious turn* and engulf all major towns in Gujarat and arouse caste prejudices and hatred to a frenzied pitch. The result was that for the first time, caste riots broke out in such dimension in a major industrial city of India. (C.P.D.R. Report 33, emphasis mine)

Many Dalit poets and writers expressed their concerns and counter resistance through various forms of literature. The Dalit Panthers’ magazine *Aakrosh* was published to express Dalits’ voice during this time but it was seized and the poets were harassed and arrested. In spite of restrictions and atrocities many poets conveyed their anguish. Alaji Bhagat, articulated his agony in his poem, “Anamat Virodhne name Jati Yuddh” [Caste-war on the name of Anti-reservation]. He writes:

You are cunning, and determined to snatch
The reservation of Baxipanch and Scheduled Castes,

Your hearts have become hardened,
 You have become bloody communal.

 You haven't spared Dalits from the ultimate pain.
 You killed them, raped them, and restrict them
 Tortured them,
 Burned the poor..... (Bhagat 16)

The poet expresses his helplessness against the communal and casteist forces. The reservation was implemented to bring equality in the society but it was resisted teeth and nails. Dalits were helpless with limited political, intellectual and economic resources to counter it. The second anti-reservation agitations occurred in 1985. It was not directly related to the Scheduled caste or Scheduled tribe but it was a result of hike in education and job quotas for the Other Backward Castes, not untouchable castes. The cabinet of Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki declared its intention to raise 18 per cent reservation for OBCs in jobs and education. It was a calculated political move, and brought expected results to the Congress party. It won 149 of 182 seats.

Solanki, by following his policy to appease OBCs gave 14 of 20 major portfolios of his ministry to the OBCs. His KHAM theory brought wrath from the upper castes. The upper castes were angry and waiting for the right moment to remove Madhavsingh Solanki. The upper caste Hindu students of Morbi Engineering College started anti-reservation agitation and the rightist ABVP picked up the issue and made it a statewide campaign. Though the reservation issue was related to the OBCs, the violent agitations were initially directed against the Dalit community. Yagnik *et al* note: "The five month long anti-reservation agitations degenerated into caste and communal riots when Dalit and Muslims localities were attacked in Ahmedabad and Vadodara" (256). Muslims, Dalits and OBCs usually worked together in textile mills. Though they had

cordial relationship, they could not organize themselves against the Savarna unity of Patidar, Vaniya and Brahmins. The upper castes were united against the Dalits and OBCs. The rightist organizations such as VHP, ABVP and BJP took active part in these agitations. Later, they played a double game. Some of their organizations like VHP declared to work for the abolition of untouchability. They also asked the upper caste youth to work for the all-round development of the Dalits and supported reservation for Dalits and Tribal. Later, during the Rath Yatra in 1986 in Ahmedabad, communal riots broke out. During these riots, Dalits were used by the rightist organizations against Muslims. A series of stabbing incidents occurred involving only Muslims and Dalits. After the closure of many textile mills in 1980s and failure of harvest of 1984-85, unemployment increased among Dalits and Muslims and it was successfully exploited by the political and religious organizations with vested interest. Further the upper caste business groups also supported the violent agitations to achieve their political goal. Spodek records the complexity of the agitation:

The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce supported by big business and thousands of small shopkeepers, protested against the breakdown of law and order and announced a five-day shut down of all commerce in the state, commencing on five June. Since every previous bandh had been accompanied by further outbreaks of violence, this call suggested the willingness of the business community, nominally committed to non-violence by their religious beliefs, to risk violence in exchange for Solanki's dismissal. (2010: 141)

Madhavsinh Solanki was removed and Amarsinh Chaudhary was selected. He included the Patels and Baniyas in his ministry and dropped five Kshatriya members. The reservation quota remained the same, but the politics there after changed a lot. The rightist and upper caste became powerful and the Dalits and OBCs were marginalized. (Simpson *et al* 2010; Yagnik *et al* 2005)

What Dalits want is mere respect and equality in every domain of human life. Since ages, the oppressed have been fighting for equal treatment. Bhikhu Vegada, a Dalit poet, conveys his urge for equality. He is ready to throw away reservation but in place he seeks equality and respectful life for his people. He reveals his distress in a poem, “Anamat” [Reservation]:

In the presence sun-moon,
untouchability was written on my forehead,
just to compensate it, the constitution has applied
a tilak of reservation on my head.

.....

.....
Reservation is not a beggar's bread,
It is our fundamental right of equality.

.....

.....
Has thousands of years' inequality vanished in fifty years?

So these clouds of resistance are thundering?

Reservation is the last remedy

To make us a part of mainstream.

A beautiful reservation on paper

is a thorny crown for me.

I want to throw it away.

Because I am human being.

I am Shambuk; give me my head.

I am Eklvya; give me my thumb.

I am Styakam Jabali; give me respect.

I am Kabir; give me love,

I am Raidas; give me honour.

I am human being; don't give me any reservation,

Give me self-respect. (Bikhu Vegda 76)

Recalling mythological and historical Dalit characters, Vegda demands equality in treatment. He demands what Dalits were deprived of since ages. Shambuka, a mythological Dalit boatman was beheaded by Lord Rama for his recitation of holy verse. Vegda demands Shambuka's head to restore his right to study. By demanding, Eklavyas thumb back, he urges for equal treatment in imparting knowledge. Retrieving Satyakam Jabali, Kabir, and Raidas he pleads for respect and love towards the downtrodden.

Social exclusion on the basis of caste and poverty has been a major constraint in getting education for Dalits. Poverty is a casteless phenomenon but social exclusion is the result of caste based humiliations. Most Dalits have to face both in their daily life. A poor student from the upper caste does not have to face discrimination but a Dalit student has to. Such social exclusion, apart from poverty affects the Dalit students of their confidence and affects their capacity to acquire knowledge. Social exclusion of Dalit from gaining proper education in long run constitutes deprivation and causes anxiety. Though reservation and financial assistance by the state has brought significant changes in Dalits' life, it is not able to abolish caste consciousness. Dalit remains a Dalit, and an object of stigmatized identity even though he/ she acquires higher education and refined lifestyle. This situation is not confined only to Gujarat but it is a pan-India phenomenon. S. Joseph's poem, *Identity Card*, gives an account of such incident.

In my student days
a girl came laughing.
Our hands met mixing
her rice and fish curry.
On a bench we became
a Hindu- Christian family.

I whiled away my time
reading Neruda's poetry
and meanwhile I misplaced
my Identity Card.
She said,
returning my card:
'the account of your stipend
Is entered there in red'
These days I never look at
a boy and a girl lost in themselves.
They will depart after a while.
I won't be surprised even if they unite.
Their Identity Cards
will have no markings in red. (Satyanarayana *et al* 2011: 454-455)

This poem reveals several themes and concerns. It is a poem from Kerala, the state most famous for its educational achievements and material development. While analyzing this poem, Sataynarayan and Tharu (2011: 1-4) argue that the protagonist has to face a new form of untouchability while studying and interacting with a classmate. A sign of SC scholarship/stipend in the identity card exposes his caste and soon brings reactions to it. The state offered remedies to uplift the Dalits often humiliate the beneficiary, laugh at his/her aspirations and make him/her the 'other'. The experience that faced by the protagonist is common for every Dalit students. At one level, Dalits, to obtain mobility; exploits the government schemes but at another level the same government benefits become the cause of his/her stigma and segregation. Here, the poem

shifts from “the bright air of the campus to a darker region”. The silence of the boy is very vocal and indicates the complexities of the caste issues.¹²

Referring to mythological character Eklavya and Manu’s law of pouring hot lead in Dalit’s ears if he listens holy scripture, Sikhamani, a Telugu poet, in his poem ‘Steel nibs are Sprouting’ reveals the urge for education among the Dalits.¹³

For the lesson never taught, you demanded our thumbs as gifts.
From the stubs of those thumbs there now sprout nibs of steel
to write history anew.
Those who poured molten lead into our ears,
will need ladder to climb and pluck
the hair from our ear lobes. (Satyanarayana *et al* 2012: 553)

The poet indicates that the stub of thumb has now become the nib of pen. Discrimination that Dalits have been facing is sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures and mythology. However, fighting with unjust social order, educated Dalits have started writing about injustice and atrocities, their pens are now flowing freely to depict their experiences, emotions and arguments. Throughout India Dalit literary and journalistic writing has been increasing and getting recognition. Whatever education they have acquired has created a major impact in fighting for equality and freedom. Thus, Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Educate, Agitate, Organize’ is showing its early positive results but still miles to go for his goal of annihilation of caste.

Sahil Parmar, expressing his hope, and hope of whole downtrodden people, says;

The steps have born newly in a form of ‘word’

¹² For detailed analysis and discussion on this poem, See Satyanarayana and Tharu “Introduction.” Ed. *No Alphabet In Sight*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011. 1-69. Print.

¹³ Sikhamani is the pen name of Karri Sanjeeva Rao. He was born in 1956. He is a Telugu poet. His poem “Steel nibs are Sprouting” was published in English in K Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu. Ed. *Steel Nibs are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012. Print

No one can prevent the marching of the steps
Does not matter if today the climate of objection is thickened
But it will not last long without accepting the steps. (Parmar: 132)

By taking inspiration from a Libyan leader, Omar Mukhtar, a character from the Hollywood film, *Lion of Desert* (1981), Parmar expresses that his struggle may extend to the coming generations. He says:

My daughter
Will pick up
My spectacles
And my pen
And she will declare too,
“To fight against
discrimination is
our right.
We will fight.
We will fight.
Up to next,
Next,
And next generation. (Parmar 2004: 70)

It seems that Parmar feels that the struggle for Dalit's emancipation will last long. It is not possible to remove social inequalities in a limited span of time. So, he expects that the next generation would take the battle forward. He finds similarity between him and Omar Mukhtar. In the film, *Lion of Desert* (1981), the hero, despite poor resources, fights against the colonial power of Italy. In the end, he is hanged publicly. After his death, a young boy of his clan picks up his (Omar's) spectacles suggesting that he will carry on the battle of liberation. Parmar, here,

while saying “My daughter will pick up my spectacles and my pen” expresses the same feeling that the next generation will carry on the movement.

To conclude, it can be said that emphasis on education has brought significant results for Dalits. The educated Dalit middle class has considerably challenged the hegemony of upper caste by uniting Dalit politically. They have also shown their sizable presence in the domain of literary and intellectual activity. The production of magazines, creative literature, critiques on state’s policy as well as organizing various political pressure groups appeared to be the direct results of following Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Educate, Agitate and Organize’. Parmar, advocating Ambedkar’s thoughts on education, paves the way for constructive struggle. Parmar’s trust on education as a weapon of liberation is unshakable. His poetry does not preach violent retaliation but advocates the method that Ambedkar followed. Nowadays, the gradual educational development and caste solidarity have provided a form of power and identity to the Dalits. Yet, there is a lot to be done at the community level to unite Dalits, create employment opportunities and spread the message of education to the last of the lowest. Generally, it is assumed that Dalit poetry related to positive ideas is very limited and most poets mainly criticize the unjust caste system. But Parmar’s poetry disproves that myth and consciously deals with the subject of education.