

Conclusion:

The thesis discusses the complex interplay of ideas of reformation and radicalism which Gandhi and Ambedkar advocated in their engagement with the question of caste culminating finally in the drafting of special Constitutional measures for Dalits in India. While tracking the question of caste in the context of Dalit writing in Gujarat, one of the preoccupations of this thesis has been to understand why caste continues to remain as an unresolved quantity of our national imagination in spite of all constitutional measures to safeguard the interests of the Dalits in India. The call for “self-purification” as mandated by Gandhi and the demand for “self-respect” as advocated by Ambedkar found their place in the form of foundational Articles that delegitimized the centuries-old practice of untouchability and other related practices as cognizable offences. These Constitutional provisions have no doubt reduced the practice of untouchability to a certain extent, but have not been entirely able to ‘purify’ the caste Hindus. The enforcement of laws may have changed the behavior of the caste Hindus at one level but they have not eradicated the sense of caste hierarchy at other levels. Untouchability and caste hierarchy have not disappeared from society; they often resurface in the form of violence, discrimination and forced labour etc. Gujarati Dalit writing addresses these transformations of caste in modern India.

This thesis has juxtaposed the two major positions regarding the caste system and untouchability taken by Gandhi and Ambedkar. The opening chapter on the caste system has argued that though their ways of dealing with the evils of the caste system were different, their commitment to bringing social equality was beyond doubt. They looked at and understood the caste system from different perspectives. For Gandhi, the unity of Hindus and the cultural defense of the caste system was important so he took a reformative stand. He declared that untouchability

was a blot on Hinduism and that the caste system is an organizing force of Hinduism. Ambedkar, in the beginning, took a reformatory stand but by the late 1930s he sought the annihilation of caste. He came to the conclusion that as long as the caste system exists, the evil of untouchability would not die. This thesis has found that the discussion and debate on the caste system which took place in the pre-independence time have a thematic value to Gujarati Dalit poetry. The debates and discussions which were outlined by Gandhi and Ambedkar still frame the debates and discussions of Gujarati Dalit writing. The thematic of Gujarati Dalit poetry still operates with the frames given by Gandhi and Ambedkar for Dalit emancipation.

Gujarati Dalit poetry juxtaposes 'past' and 'present' to measure the change; and unfortunately in many instances the change is more superficial than profound. The continuity of the atrocities keeps the Dalit poet 'busy', and does not allow him to sit in peace with the ideals of democracy in India. This thesis has argued that Gujarati Dalit poetry in general shows its considerable attentiveness towards the inhumanities that Dalits face. The awareness that it spreads among the Dalits as well as the caste Hindus about issues of social inequality is mainly to stir the moral cords and to force the perpetrators of caste atrocities to rethink their positions vis-a-vis the Dalits. It also spreads awareness among the Dalits about their constitutional rights in contemporary India. This thesis has further identified and analyzed the core reasons behind the continuation of untouchability and social exclusions.

The roots of these reasons lay in religious, social and political conditioning and in the feudal mind-set of the caste Hindus. The sanctions and justification derived from the religious scriptures do not allow caste Hindus to attempt self-reflection on moral grounds. The hierarchical social structure resists all efforts at establishing social equality in India. Democratic politics is reduced to the state of a numerical game. The upper castes who were the beneficiaries of the

caste system in the past have occupied the structures of power in modern India and they have their own interest in maintaining the status quo. This thesis has argued that modernity in India has certainly weakened the adherence to religious scriptures but it has not been able to eradicate caste completely. Modernity and tradition exist simultaneously. Modernity may have loosened the occupational norms of caste but traditional norms related to ‘purity and pollution’ continue to guide the behavior of caste Hindus. The caste Hindus fear that by accepting social equality they would lose their privileged positions and this fear often results in violent resistance. The incidents of ‘Sambarda’ and ‘Jetalpur’ in Gujarat are clear cases of upper caste resistance to constitutional measures to bring social equality among the castes. The violent agitations of the 1980s in Gujarat have explicit political connections with the caste equations. Engaging with all the aspects—religious, social and political, Gujarati Dalit poetry voices the concern that legal provisions alone cannot enforce equality in its real sense.

This thesis has tracked the emergence of Gujarati Dalit poetry as a significant public expression of and intervention in the Dalit movement in Gujarat. Gujarati Dalit poetry reflects the social and political thinking of the marginalized sections of the society. The democratization of education coupled with awareness generated through the anti-Brahmin movements and the freedom struggle has shaped Dalit consciousness and has pushed the Dalits in the direction of ‘self-knowledge’. This self-knowledge has made them realize that it is they themselves who have internalized their subjugated conditions and that they should now protest against the unjust social structure and assert their identity through creative and peaceful means—poetry being one of them.

Gujarati Dalit poetry emerged in the 1970s as an expression of the Dalit disenchantment with the upper castes and the promise they held out for self-purification. Dalits realized that the

Constitutional measures are resisted by the hegemonic forces of caste Hindus. The anti-reservation riots (1981 and 1985) proved to be eye opener events. The violence, forced migration, government bias, rampant segregation and continuation of untouchability made them articulate their concerns through poetry. This thesis has looked at various narratives of these riots in Gujarati Dalit poetry. The poets that this thesis has studied, implicitly and explicitly, convey their discontent towards the present social conditions.

Gujarati Dalit poetry has embodied a culture of resistance. It has formulated new subjectivities. The central point of this thesis has been to understand how the Dalit movement has created a new aesthetic mode in Gujarati Dalit poetry and how it has intervened in the creation of a larger creative domain of resistance. Dalit poets in general articulate their experiences, recognize their moral position, and act as guardians of their community. Their individualities have merged with their collective concern, the emancipation of the marginalized.

Shankar Painter exposes the dire state of Dalit life in rural Gujarat. His poems, with their folk rhythm, attempt to mobilize Dalit masses and activate them to offer resistance to their oppression. The teachings of Ambedkar have made Painter's poetry focused and have made him conscious of his social responsibilities. This thesis has analyzed Painter's active presence in the Dalit movement through his poetry and 'poetic performances'. It also pays specific attention to his exploration of the Dalit spiritual sphere in his attempt to find a natural cord with his Dalit audience. He seems to have brought Dalit spiritual and folk traditions to bear upon his poetic compositions in a very striking way. His is an innovative endeavour, he has cast himself as a folk Dalit artist, quite different from other Dalit poets.

Praveen Gadhvi in his poetry has sought radical change in the social structure. Though he is an OBC poet, his position has been derived from consciously identifying with Dalits. His

authenticity to deal with the Dalit subject is often implicitly questioned. However, his poetry has ample instances to believe that his identification with Dalits is complete. He incessantly criticizes the Brahminic hegemony following the teachings of Ambedkar but he does not discard the relevance of Gandhi's position of "self-purification" altogether. This thesis has identified his position which is neither strictly Gandhian nor Ambedkarite but nearer to Lohia and Nagaraj. He has sought reconciliation of two seemingly contradictory positions of Gandhi and Ambedkar. His poetry rejects the Gandhian stand on the village as the site of harmonized life. Gadhvi appeals to Dalits to embrace urban life, as Ambedkar advised. This thesis has revealed that Gadhvi has criticized Gandhian efforts implicitly but Gandhi has remained a positive force for him in the emancipation of the marginalized.

There was a doubt among many historians and scholars of the Indian culture about the way India would modernize itself. This thesis has discussed that their doubt was partly right. Indian modernity has acquired a space in the life of Indians, largely irrespective of caste. However, empirical data and structures of feeling that have found their ways into Dalit poetry show that modernity alone is not able to remove social disabilities. The general assumption is that the city, as a major site of modernity, offers the space to Dalits to live a life without adhering to the caste occupations and of escaping the everyday humiliations. However, this thesis argues, with the help of Neerav Patel's poetry, that the city has absorbed Dalits who have migrated but they by and large earn their livelihood from lowly occupations such as sweeping, petty jobs in the mills, daily wage work etc. Modernity comes into their life but in its lowliest forms. It offers them a lowly life of the slums and an indifferent treatment by the government machinery and the upper class people.

This thesis has also discussed the theme of ‘self-reflection’ in Dalit poetry. Dalit is not a homogeneous community. The horizontal as well as vertical inequality is pervasive among them. Gujarati Dalit poetry addresses the issue of sub-caste consciousness, but in a limited way. Neerav Patel’s poetry incorporates the theme of sub-caste consciousness as an aspect of self-reflection. Patel deals with multiple voices to show the internal contradictions within the Dalit community. Out of ‘Catholic sympathy’, he also brings forth the hitherto invisible voices of groups such as sex workers to mount a critique on both caste Hindus as well as the entire social structure.

Sahil Parmar’s poetry largely concentrates on the constructive aspect of the Dalit movement. He considers education as an important means to fight inequalities in society. His poetry focuses on the demands for education facilities and urges for equal treatment while imparting education. Parmar’s poetry, while revealing difficulties of social and economic nature that Dalits face in the education system, echoes Phule’s and Ambedkar’s ideas and thoughts. In this thesis, Parmar’s poetry has been discussed in the context of the Dalit plight in the field of education, both in the past as well as in the present.

This thesis has discussed Ambedkar’s efforts in democratizing education. It has argued that the Dalit movement/struggle for education has brought them some positive fruits and it has strengthened the Dalit literary movement also. Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Educate, Agitate and Organize’ has undoubtedly influenced the Dalit masses. While depicting the struggle for education, Gujarati Dalit poetry in general and Parmar’s poetry in particular has dealt with the anti-reservation riots and their communal face.

While working on my research topic, I found that there were many areas, particularly in the Dalit literary movement which needed to be pursued further but which I have left out of the brief of my research. I feel that the Dalit spiritual and folk literature is largely an unexplored

area. The richness of folk literature requires sincere engagement to understand its relationship with the Dalit movement. I also find that the Dalit Christians bear a different perspective on the struggle of Dalits' emancipation. This too is an area for further research and should be explored. One can also study why Buddhist movement is not powerful in Gujarat and undetectable in literature.

The analysis of Gujarat Dalit poetry as presented in this thesis is an attempt to understand the identity questions of Dalits in Gujarat, their aspirations and their struggles. My analysis has found that Dalit poetry successfully addresses issues related to Dalit consciousness and offers a strong resistance to upper caste hegemony. Gujarati Dalit poetry has definitely laid out the social in Gujarat as a fraught and contested terrain. It stirs the moral cords of the oppressors by invoking the universal values such as equality, liberty and fraternity. The influence of Gandhi and Ambedkar is visible in Gujarati Dalit poetry. However, some poets endorse Gandhi's perspective while some discard it altogether and concentrate only on Ambedkar's view points and some suggest a synthesis of the two. Each poet seems to thematize the Dalit predicament in a distinctive way. Though their experiences are by and large similar their literary treatment of this predicament is different. This makes Gujarati Dalit poetry rich in its expressions.