CHAPTER

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'…since critics condemn me in the name of literature without ever saying what they mean by that, the best answer to give them is to examine the art of writing without prejudice. What is writing? Why does one write? For whom? The fact is, it seems that no body has asked himself these questions."

'Jean Paul Sartre

In foreword to 'what is Literature?'

Dismayed by the vitriolic attack on the idea of 'commitment in literature', Sartre thought it fit to write a whole treatise in defense. Any new genre or movement of literature is thus made to answer and justify its existence, particularly when it aims to disturb the status-quo and challenge the mainstream. Again this is more so for those that come with disturbing 'contents' and 'ideologies' rather than those that come with disturbing 'forms' and 'modes of expressions'. Black Literature in America, Feminist Literature in most parts of the world and Dalit Literature in India are the examples of our lime. The movement of dalit literature that began from Maharashta in the early seventies of the last century and now spread to other parts of India like Gujarat, Karnataka, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala has to still face repetitive questions both from cynical critics
as well as genuinely curious general readers: What is Dalit Literature? What are the historical and contemporary circumstances that gave birth to the movement of Dalit Literature? Why does it claim for a separate and distinct identity? Does it have any literary heritage or tradition of its own? What are its salient features? What are its styles and techniques? What is its ideology? What is its aesthetics? What is its growth and development? What is its impact on literature and society? What are the challenges ahead? What direction it will take in the future?

For Gujarati dalit literature that emerged in the late seventies of the last century, these are some of the valid questions that need to be raised and answered for its own benefit. The questions are same but the answers are varied and it is all due to the fundamental problem of defining 'Dalit Literature'. A lot of confusion prevails on what the qualifying term 'dalit' would or should or could mean in the context of its socio-political and literary use.

Originally a Sanskrit word, etymologically meaning 'ground' as in phrases like 'ground to dust', 'ground to ashes', 'ground to pieces', 'ground to flour' and by connotation meaning 'depressed', 'downtrodden', 'broken', 'crushed'; is adopted by all Indian languages in the same meaning.

But journey of the word 'dalit' takes interesting turn when Britishers in the Government of India Act 1935 used its English translation as 'Depressed classes' to mean downtrodden people of India who were hitherto referred as 'Harijan' by the grace of Mahatma Gandhi. Sensing the loaded nuances Ambedkar takes up the word to construct a new, respectful identity for the
untouchables of India in preference to the patronizing term 'Harijan' literally meaning children of God. Some found Gandhi's euphemism derogatory too, as they traced a far-fetched connotation to Devdasi system when dalit girls were used as prostitutes by the Brahmin priests in the temples and their illegitimate off-spring were called 'children of God' that is Harijan! It is sad to indict Gandhi however, as the word is used in many bhajans of the medieval Bhakti poets including Meera and Narsinh Mehta with the meaning of 'virtuous man', 'righteous man', 'God fearing man' as against its antonym 'Durijan'. Gandhi indeed borrowed the 'term' from one of the bhajans of Gujarati saint poet Narsinh Mehta. But the journey of the word 'dalit' doesn't end there. In the post-Ambedkar era of political activism, and new-found awareness the term 'dalit' is stretched to its extremes to include all those downtrodden and depressed people who are historically victims of both caste and class exploitation. Armed with this interpretation, the proponents plead for the inclusion of Adivasis (tribals) as they are the 'depressed' people who were defeated, dispossessed and driven out into jungles and hills by the invading Aryans, present-day Brahmins. The servile class of Shudra now known as OBCs (Other Backward Classes) was also exploited by upper-castes and reduced to its present lowly social status in Hindu Caste hierarchy. Religious minorities think they were compelled to convert themselves to egalitarian religious like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism to escape caste oppression and to seek equality and dignity in their new religions. And hence they are also part of 'depressed classes' i.e. dalit. Women are also exploited and oppressed by the paternal hegemony prevalent in all religions and societies and therefore they are the real 'depressed class'. Last but not the least, all 'have-nots' believe they are exploited by the capitalist class and are 'actual' depressed class! This
amounts to about 85% of Indian population, leaving only the rich dwija (twice-born) castes from its ambit, that would, should and could quality as 'dalit'.

There are a number of definitions based on this political construct. It will be interesting to quote several such definitions compiled by Ashok Chavda while taking personal interviews of dalit writers and activists:

Rameshchandra Parmar, President of Gujarat Dalit Panther and editor of *panther* and *akrosh* magazines defines dalit poetry as "that which provides a platform for the formation of casteless and classless society is dalit poetry. It is also necessary that it should also give expression to the exploitation and injustice of the world"

Valjibhai Patel, editor of *Dalit Mitra* magazine and director-activist of Council for Social Justice has the broadest definition: that which portrays reality of human life and its sufferings is dalit poetry

Neerav Patel, a pioneering dalit poet says: any poem that expresses protest against and desires abolition of the injustice, exploitation, oppression generated out of the caste/varna system is dalit poetry.

Praveen Gadhvi, another major dalit poet defines that: "That which artistically expresses the joys and emotions and rights and dignity of the dalits is dalit poetry."
Bhi Na Vankar defines the idea of dalit poetry as: that which expresses dalit sensitivity and dalit consciousness is dalit poetry.

Raju Solanki, a young dalit poet with left-leaning ideology says: that which expresses dalit sentiments, dalit consciousness, dalit sensitivity and has in its centre the dalit but that which also encompasses the poor and depressed classes of the world is dalit poetry.

Indukumar Jani, Editor of *Naya Marg*, the progressive magazine that has played bigger role in publishing Gujarati dalit poetry has this to offer as definition of dalit poetry: That which expresses anguish against the present social system, that which aims for change in the unjust social system, that which protest against the slavish traditions, that which voices the sufferings of the depressed classes is dalit poetry.

Chandu Maheriya, editor of *Dalit Adhikar* and activist-journalist says: Dalit does not merely mean Scheduled Castes. But dalit is an effort that believes in the equality of all human beings, treats everybody at par, that struggles against inequality. that what is written for human dignity, human rights, human identity is dalit poetry.

A very senior dalit poet, Dalpat Chauhan voices his opinion as thus: That which expresses sufferings of dalits, that which guides their aspirations, and that which has negation of god, revolt, unity and equality of man, new awareness is dalit poetry.
Manishi Jani³, one of the editors of the, first anthology of Gujarati Dalit Poetry, Dalit Kavita published in 1980 declares: For us, Dalit Kavita has a very large scope. We do not see Dalit Kavita with any narrow, castiest perspective, but we believe that Dalit Kavita is one that gives voice to the people, who are oppressed culturally and socially and economically, that which strives to establish their identity.

Quoted in 'The Silver Lining', an anthology of Gujarati dalit poetry translated in English, Gangadhar Pantavane⁴ says : To me, dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. Harish Manglam⁵, a poet, novelist and editor, says in an interview published in 'Eklavya with Thumb', another anthology of Gujarati dalit poetry translations:' Literature written about dalits is dalit literature. But only literature written by writers that come from dalit communities has the authority of experience and the ring of truth. Deepak Mehta⁶ in the preface to yet another Gujarati dalit poetry anthology 'Visfot' writes : ' we should not interpret Dalit Literature as the one that is written about dalits or written by the dalits. Dalit Literature doesn't belong to any particular caste / varna or class. It is the Literature that joins the oppressed and exploited of the world, wherever they are, emotionally and rationally.'

And to top it all, the Dalit Panther Manifesto⁷ published in Bombay in 1973 defines 'dalit' in these words :

'Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.'
The confusion is confounded: there are sincere concerns for defining dalit poetry through other parameters like content, ideology and commitment. Whether creating only dalit milieu in, say a poem or novel, is sufficient to qualify as 'dalit literature' or expression of protest against the unjust social order, demand for social justice and human rights, assertion of human identity with dignity are the essential pre-requisites? Can African Literature, Caribbean Literature and Black Literature pass as synonyms just because they are written by 'blacks'? They are distinguishable on the basis of their contents and concepts. The radical ideas of 'Negritude', 'black power', 'black is beautiful' may not be there in all these literatures except the Black Literature. Content and concepts therefore may be the deciding factors in defining dalit literature.

Whether ideology is necessary for the dalit literature, and if yes, what is that? There are all shades of practitioners – Ambedkarite, Gandhian, Marxist and even RSS brand 'samrastawadi' Hinduism! Is it possible to write dalit literature with Gandhian ideology that believes 'untouchability is the curse of Hinduism' but also believes that "Varnashram system is the soul of Hinduism' and Division of labour is good for society and therefore hereditary profession of sweeping and scavenging is not inglorious for the Bhangis'. Is it possible to write dalit literature with the Hindu Ideology which sanctions discrimination and segregation on the basis of caste and varna? Which has scriptures and codes like Manusmriti that prescribe bondage for the Shudras? Whether full and genuine commitment to the dalit cause is essential or any amateurish, careerist, professional's wordplay / verbal construct can pass as 'Dalit Literature'?
And finally who can qualify as 'dalit writer: the one who is born 'dalit', as one of the scheduled castes erstwhile known as untouchable castes, with or without commitment, with or without ideology? Or anybody who is committed to the cause the dalits – a decaste Brahmin or a black American or a South African white woman who condemns discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste, who believes in equality and fraternity of all human beings? Since Gujarati dalit poetry came in the precedence to prose, it should be worthwhile to study it to know what answers it can offer: these dissertation therefore is titled as 'Gujarati Dalit Poetry (1978-2003) – A Study' covering the period of first Quarter century of its existence, its struggle to define itself.

'Akrosh' a Gujarat Dalit Partner's poetry journal launched on 14 April 1978 (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's birth anniversary) which marks the beginning of the movement of dalit literature in Gujarat had an unusually brief but telling editorial:

' Leaving aside our traditional tools of looms and brooms and flaying knives, we have to pick up pens and become verse-makers. We are the first generation to know ABC of language and literature. We know, to master any art or craft, we need to master its intricacies – as we know full well how to clean spick-and-span your stinking toilets, how to weave dreams in the 'savarna' bride's sari, how to tan the hard hides so that your rosy soles do not get the pinch. We have urgency to express ourselves – our miseries, humiliations, injustices, oppressions, prejudices, poverty, hunger,
exploitation, persecutions. We are yearning for human dignity, human identity.

But we take solace in the wisdom of Victor Hugo: "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness."

The joy for the mother is boundless: thank God, the child is not dumb. Doesn't matter the first word it uttered was a word of abuse!

One can notice, this poetic introduction carries immense sense of wrongs committed on dalits. The frank admission of their ill-preparedness, the inadequacy of the tools of expression at their disposal, and yet the urgency to express, the sense of apprehension of 'hurting' someone and the solace that they are not guilty for the 'offending' expressions but those who have created the darkness for them, the yearning for identity with human dignity…

Voiceless as they were for centuries, now they have found the 'word' god, the word that liberates – sa vaacha ya vimuktaye. The mother is worried for the child as it didn't know how to speak a word for all these years. Now she is happy and overjoyed that the child uttered the first word, and gave a sign that it is not dumb, it can speak. It is not at all worrying that the first word it spoke happens to be the word abuse!

With this frank, fearless and naïve beginning of dalit poetry, the movement of Gujarati dalit literature announced its arrival. The angry outburst of these
pioneering poets was quite shocking to the mainstream Gujarati Literature. Its diction was unfamiliar, its tone was rude and provocative, its construction was crude, its idiom was offending, and its theme was eye-opening. As if taken by surprise, everybody including dalits themselves started asking those all-important questions, started seeking for answers.

Yes, dalit poetry has reasons to take birth like the incarnation of that Hindu God who announced *yada yada hi*… To kill the darkness caused by the oppressors of mankind and restore dignity and equality and liberty and fraternity for all human beings that inhabit the earth. One must know how dark is that darkness, that darkness that turns man into slave, man into beast.

Dalit poets tried to answer in their own ways. *Burning from both ends*\(^9\) a slim volume of dalit poetry published in 1980 had a little longer preface than the one cited above:

"o where are you, my midas;
those people refuse to touch me!
they do not allow me to forget for a moment that i am neerav patel, alias harijan. i wonder why and how i am a harijan! because i don't dress like 'them', speak like 'them', behave like 'them'? because my father his father were harijans? no, i know this silly sequence ends somewhere in the past, for everybody is born as adam and eve – naked, free and equal. i would rather like to die than dwell upon the plea that nobody can select one's parents.
yes, it is because of 'them' that i am a harijan. i wish i could call myself in algebraic sign, like \( n^0 \): no clue to clan, colour or creed! i know little of english and less of poetry. having been born in a harijan ghetto, nursery school or k.g. are still fascinating dreams of deprived childhood. no girl in jeans is my companion. i overhear the yankee accent and mannerism at the elite campus of st.xavier's, read every piece of paper written in english that comes my way – be it a folio a bank ledger or an ad of cosmetics and eavesdropping eklavya!

prof. bhambhi consoles that i am a poet potentially, though ill-equipped. but i don't wait for miracles. for i can't afford this. i am burning from both ends. i am afraid, before i get perfection in medium or art, i might get killed or commit suicide. let my successor weed out the slips. meanwhile you may take it as a poet's privilege.

i wish i could attack and appeal at the same time! the urban intelligentsia is insensitively unaware of the harijan experience and the problem.

they have tourtured me for too long. i have deliberately decided not to give a glossary of our desi diction. at least to tease 'them' to annoy 'them'. yes, a childish revenge! i shall be a glad if you are not one of 'them'. oh, i forget my father's advice – when one is modest by birth, one is expected to be modest. here are then a few originals and several translations from Gujarati. my anguish and my agony. bear with me –'

Selected from the first phase of Gujarati dalit poetry, these two excerpts try in their own ways to provide answers to what's and why's of dalit literature.
It is the same sense of deprivation, the ill-equipped poet's sense of urgency for expression, his anguish and agony. Being the first generation to acquaint with ABC of the language and literature, one can understand the struggle to express oneself and that too in a literary form!

But the scholars and critics are rarely satisfied by the sentiments and therefore one has to borrow the language of a critic. While welcoming the nascent movement of Gujarati dalit literature, K.Satchidanandan\textsuperscript{10} penned down his reflections in Sahitya Akadami journal, 'Indian Literature' in 1992 in these words:

'There are many who argue that it is improper to divide literature on the basis of caste, class or gender. They do have a point as all literature, ultimately is a verbal construct which is at the same time a human document. However, literary history has also been a history of those vital explosions of creative energy we call 'movements' whose impact is seldom confined to literature alone: it encompasses the entire society and transforms its ways of comprehending reality …

He further elaborates:

'It is as if the paradigms and the epistems undergo a sudden shift; a social group emerges from darkness into light and discovers a new idiom to lend voice to its long-silenced experience: the wordless grow tongues as has happened with the Blacks, with women or with Dalits in our time. Each of such authentic movements enlarges the scope of literature and redraws its nap by discovering and exploring a whole new continent of experience as
also by revitalizing language with new tempers, tones, timbers, styles and even words and phrases so far kept out of literacy use…

And finally he sums up:

'They serve a purpose by helping literature to overcome stagnation through a process of cleansing and renewal similar to the thaw after the winter and the spring that follows. It also disturbs the sterile complacency into which societies tend to fall from time to time by challenging their set mores and fixed modes of looking at reality, their whole stale habits of ordering knowledge, beauty and power, and their established literary canons bringing to focus neglected, suppressed or marginalized aspects of experience, vision, language and reality forcing the community to refashion its tools and observe itself, perhaps, critically, from a fresh and different angle.'

Having listened to the language of both poets and critic in above citations, now it is time to turn prosaic and look at the stark realities, both historical and contemporary, that created the dalit problem as also dalit literature.

Social discrimination and consequent exploitation of the dalit is well known throughout the ancient medieval and modern times. The commandments were too cruel: thy will not have knowledge, thy will not have properties, thy will not have arms to protect yourself, thy will not have human dignity. If a Shudra listens to a recitation of Vedas, his ears shall be filled in with molten lend or lac. If he recites Vedic richas, his tongue shall be cut off. He who teaches law of living to a Shudra and he who teaches him religious observance, he indeed together with that Shudra sinks into the darkness of
hell. Declared untouchable, he would live in the crematorium, clothe himself with the shroud of the corpses, and feed himself of the left-overs. To avoid further pollution, he will carry a spittoon around his neck and tie behind his back a broom to sweep away marks of his own footprints.

The miseries of the hero of *Les Miserable* or the sufferings of Uncle Toms in black literature are a poor match to the agony of the untouchable of India.

How barbaric and dehumanizing were the social sanctions against the dalits! Centuries old excesses like these robbed them of their human rights and civil liberties, reducing them to mute herds of animals. They had lost their glorious civilization and culture and were turned into beast of burden and bonded labour. Life was all tears and toiling. The penalties and punishments for any violations were brutally inhuman: an Eklavya lost his most efficient thumb and a Shambuka lost his most erudite head! It is not for nothing that V. S. Naipaul, a writer of Indian origin titles his books on India as: 'Area of Darkness', 'India: A wounded civilization', 'India: A million mutinies Now'. Mulk Raj Anand's modern classic is titled 'Untouchable' and Gandhi's journal was also titled 'Harijan'! Even Arundhti Roy's 'The God of Small Things' has a tragic dalit hero. They all speak of the magnitude of the problem called the dalit problem.

A long saga of suffering is buried in the mounds of *Mohen – jo – dero, Harappa, Lothal* and *Dhola Veera* and many more sites yet to the discovered. Forget about the history or the distant past, atrocities and exploitation and discrimination of dalits in our own times are all too evident in our day-to-day life. A tiny part of it gets documented in the reports of
Indian newspapers as well as in the reports of international human rights organizations like UNO, Amnesty International, Human Rights watch et cetera. The atrocities go on uninterruptedly, incidents of rape and killing and burning their busties and looting their belongings, forcible migrations, social boycotts and marginalization… It is a sheer fun to gun down 33 dalits in Jehanabad of Bihar, just as they burst 33 balloons for fun! It's bravado for them to wipe off a whole dalit family in Khairlanji of Maharashtra!

With the official census figure of 16% of Indian population as Dalit, it can be said that every 7th Indian is a Dalit, 'the ex-untouchable' so to say as Indian constitution has abolished untouchability from its pages but the society continues to practice. With the population of about 8 million dalits, the story of Gujarat is no different. Story has it that Mayo was the first dalit martyr, who was killed by King Siddharaj (12th Century), in the name of human sacrifice. Atrocities suffered by dalits in the name of human sacrifice are poignantly featured in Ketan Mehta's classic Gujarati Film 'Bhav Ni Bhavai'. Skipping a large part of history and coming back to modern times from the medieval, one finds caste violence at its peak in Gujarat in 1981 and 1985 – the gruesome mass murders and burning of dalit localities in anti-reservation riots and communal riots.

With such social scenario, one can hardly expect better climate in the literary world too. However, there were happy exceptions in Bhakti Age and Gandhi Age of Gujarati literature. Saint poet Narsimha Mehta was the one who suffered social boycott by his Nagar Brahmin caste for going to harijan bastis and singing devotional songs. He preached equality of all human beings before God, and discarded discrimination and untouchability.
Under the influence of Gandhi and limitation of Gandhian Ideology, Zaverchand Meghani, Umashankar Joshi, Sundaram, Karasandas Manek and Shridharani wrote poems of progressive nature – sympathetic occasionally on dalits too. But the modern age, particularly the post independence period lost all sensibility for the common man. In blind imitation of western isms, the Gujarati poet plunged in to individualism experimenting on forms and techniques. But even with the new modes and diction of expression, he remained tied with the age old theme of Krishna bhakti to the extent that one wonders whether this is a modern or Post-modern Age or Bhakti Age of medieval times! Despite the new isms, their content never changed. It was bhakti, beauty of nature, love and romance, personal problems. The society, the community never entered in their psyche. They could never think why sections of people are not allowed to live as human beings, why large sections of people are unable to earn their daily bread, even after the drudgery. Why they are not able exercise their right to live, and right to live happily as fallow human beings. Why people are discriminated against and exploited. Why the society is structured on caste line and class line. The poet was just a singer of bhajans and sonnets and gazals for entertainment and escapism. The lofty ideal of a poet as a rebel and reformer was nowhere to be seen. It seems they were bound by their orthodox traditions and they played their role as defenders of the status-quo. Maybe it was their caste interest, their class interest to preserve the Hindu society as it is. Modern Gujarati poetry couldn't produce its Meghani or Narsimha.

But the forces of history where at play eternally, the forces of change were at play, slowly but surely.
It is not that the dalits never gave expressions to their agonies and hopes and dreams. Even in the darkness of ignorance, they must have cried and cried in wilderness. Maybe before birds, rivers, hills and Mother Nature. If not 'richas', they must have sung their own 'gathas', as are found in Therigathas of Buddhist nuns! These first voices of dalit literature have been lost for ever, thanks to the suppressive culture of Brahminism. There were a number of Harijan saint poets like Dasi Jivan in the medieval times who sang bhajans to spread the message of human equality and harmonious living.

But the medieval poets like Raidas, Kabir, Nanak, Dasi Jivan did sing bhajans that advocated equality before God. Raidas gave a golden verse to the dalits: *apno paras aap!* Be thy own parasmani – the mythical stone that turns anything that comes into its contact gold. Dalits, you need not yearn for the magical touch of your oppressors – as did the boatman in Ramayana. Don't think you are untouchables. You have all the potential of a human being. You touch yourself, you will turn into gold.

Kabir ruthlessly attacked caste and creed that were sanctioning discrimination and exploitation:

*Tu turak agar turakdi jaaya,*  
*Bhitar khtana kyoon na karaya ?*  
*Tu baman bami ni jaaya,*  
*aar na marag kyoon na aaya ?*
You call yourself a son of Muslim. Then why weren't you born circumcised? You call yourself as son of a Brahmin woman. They why you didn't come through a more holy route?

Western ideologies that supplied several isms to experiment on form and technique also provided ideals of high humanity and ideologies to combat exploitation. But the post-independence main stream writers remain aloof. Gandhian influence produced some literature sympathetic to the dalits but it did not take roots and withered away for the reasons best known to caste Hindu practitioners. Their priorities were different: they were busy writing poems on leaves, flowers, beautiful girls, eatable delicacies. Even the latest poem written with the help of latest diction of Dot.com, the Gujarati poet doesn't find any other theme than Krishna, and Radha and their romance!

But the dalit poet is absorbing the influences both of heritage and tradition as well western ideologies and revolutions. He is sufficiently inspired by the all-around circumstances. Together with the general neglect in society and literature, the cumulative effects of winds of change blowing through catalytic agents like post-independence opportunities in the fields of education, employment, politics, industrialization and accompanying migrations from villages to cities, teachings of Ambedkar—all these brought tremendous awareness of the injustices in the first generations of the educated dalits who were equipped with the angry word.

As it is referred in the preface, the first word of the Gujarati dalit poet takes a form of indignation:
'while studying science,\textsuperscript{11} 
the falling of apple of Newton 
had first led me to think of eating it.

the glass-houses of Harijan Ashram Road 
had first led me to think to throw a pebble upon them.

while suppressing the thirst in the school, 
the public water pots 
had first led me to think 
of pissing into them'.

The deprivation of the dalit is too acute. The dalit boy denied water from the public water pot will certainly think to do just that – piss into them! The hungry dalit boy can only think of eating the apple on the first opportunity itself – let the discovery of 'Law of Gravitation' be enjoyed by the well-fed Newtons.!

With the launching of the first ever magazine of dalit literature, 'Akrosh' in 1978, Dalit Panther, the militant organization of the dalits provide the long-desired opportunity of such expression. Although there were isolated poems occasionally published on dalit theme, even elegies composed by the illiterate and semi-educated mill-workers way back in 1956 to mourn the death of Dr.Ambedkar, their Messiah hadn't take the form the dalit literature nor the distinct identity.
And it turned out to be a great beginning of movement of dalit literature.

To focus on the cold-blooded murder of a dalit youth in Jetalpur, a village not very far from Ahmedabad, Akrosh brought out a special issue in 1981 which coincided with bloodshed and arson of the now infamous anti-reservation riots also called first caste war after independence by Dalit Voice editor. In a way, power of dalit poetry was first felt by the State for the first time. The special number of ‘Akrosh’ was confiscated and its poets were arrested and put behind bars. As if the floodgates were opened, and the word suffocating for centuries was let loose to condemn, to indict, to protest, to attack, to appeal, to argue, to persuade, to expose, to explain, to destroy and to reconstruct – without fear or shame. The saga of suffering began to be written verse by verse.

The initial negation of new genre of dalit poetry on the basis of its nomenclature, its distinct tools of expression like use of coarse and at times vulgar language, its militant and offending tone, its iconoclastic attitude, its radical ideologies and agenda, its challenge to mainstream literary fads like modernism and post-modernism, its focus on social reality as against magical of psychological realism and surrealism, community and society as against the individual – turned into reluctant acceptance by the mainstream gujarati literature. It provided occasional space to dalit poetry in its prestigious literary magazines. But the dalit poet was happy publishing his poetry in little dalit journals – Samajmitra, Dalit Mitra, Panther, Akrosh, Kalo Sooraj, Sarvanam, Vacha, Hayati, Aahavan, Halchal etc. as well as in some progressive magazines – Naya Marg, Nirikshak.
With recognition, also came into play the processes of co-option of dalit literature by the mainstream. Some works were awarded prizes and awards, some were prescribed as textbooks. Professional publishers, who were hitherto turning their nose at the stink of dalit literature, were now made to publish dalit literature. It no doubt gave boost to the growth of dalit literature but it also work as diluting agent. The militant tone of the writer was found mellowing on the influence of the mainstream criticism. Movement of dalit literature got split into several camps, with its own affiliation of ideology and patron from the mainstream.

Mohan Parmar, a born dalit and a successful fiction writer in the mainstream Gujarati literature has divided dalit writers in four groups:

1. Those who are committed to give voice to the fundamental problems of the dalits. They believe in bringing social revolution through their writings to resolve the dalit issue. They insist on vivid description of oppression, exploitation, sufferings and all types of social injustices in their literature. They engage in documentation and least care about the mainstream measures of appreciation. They aim to create their own aesthetics. Joseph Macwan, Neerav Patel, Chandu Maheria, Shankar Painter, Babaldas Chavda, Yashvant Vaghela, Jivan Thakor, Sahil Parmar, Shankarbhai Bu Patel, Kantilal Makwana Katil, Nilesh Kathad are the main proponents of this group.

2. Some writers are committed to the dalit consciousness in their creations but are also careful of the art in the literature. Literature is literature in the last analysis, they argue, and therefore it shouldn't be inferior in artistic
value. Main among this group are Dalpat Chauhan, Harish Mngalam, Raju Solanki, B Kesharshivam, Arvind Vegda, Bhi Na Vankar, Purushottam Jadav et al.

3. Some writers write only with 'literature' in their mind and exhibit artistic approach in their works. Like art for art's sake. They sometimes use dalit milieu and diction and characters and also at times try to depict dalit problem consciously or unconsciously in their creations. In the effort to create an artistic piece, they fail to merit for dalit literature. Mangal Rathod, Dan Vaghela, Pathik Parmar, Kisan Sosa, Raman Vaghela, Shyam Sadhu, Madhukant Kalpit, Mavji Maheshwari, Dashrath Parmar, Dharmabhai Shrimali, Manish Parmar, Mohan Parmar are such writers.

4. Those born as non-dalits but write out of sympathy for the dalits belong to the fourth group. They are Raghuvir Chaudhari, Chinu Modi, Jayant Gudit, Praveen Gadhvi, Pinakin Dave, My Dear Jew, Ramchandra Patel, Rajnikumar Pandya, Keshubhai Desai, Kishorsinh Solanki, Baldev Patel, Yogesh Joshi, Ramesh Ra Dave, Harshad Trivedi, Anil Vyas, Sumant Raval, Dhiraj Brahmabhatta, Nazir Mansoori etc.

This classification and the lists of its proponents appear arbitrary and overlapping and made to belittle some and glorify others. In Gujarati dalit poetry there are but only two camps of dalit poets, one committed to the cause of dalits and seriously engaged in creating powerful dalit poetry as they believe it is a means of social change and the others engaged to make a career and earn fame out of the genre that is in fashion.
A vast number of poets have emerged, both with 'panther' spirit and from outside its influence. A number of poetry volumes of individual poets, anthologies in English translation have appeared in this first phase of Gujarati Dalit Poetry. Even after this ill-effects of co-option, difficulties of defining it, the dalit poet has come to a broad consensus – that despite their all-inclusive or narrow definitions, the issue of the 'untouchables' remains as the foremost focus while creating dalit literature.

works cited:

10. Satchidanandanand K, *Indian Literature-159*, Sahitya Academy, Delhi,1994, p.5-6
CHAPTER 2

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT