CHAPTER : 2

Growth and Development

They were just 4 poets, namely Neerav Patel, Dalpat Chauhan, Pravin Gadhvi and Yogesh Dave with which Gujarati Dalit Panther launched its first dalit poetry journal ‘Akrosh’ in 1978 to usher in, so to say, the movement of Gujarati Dalit Literature. They joined the venture as a group not just because they were friends studying in the same college and residing in the same dalit labour locality, but also because they shared the ‘concern’ for the dalits and the left leaning ideology coupled with Ambedkar’s vision of casteless society. The social composition of the group, on hindsight, seems quite interesting to take note of: one of them belonged to Brahmin caste, one to ‘Other Backward Caste’ known as OBC in political parlance, the rest two came from the Scheduled Castes known as Pariahs, untouchables, harijans at various times. It is again worthwhile to note that one of them belonged to vankar caste, the highest in the dalit hierarchy and the other belonged to chamar caste, second in the dalit hierarchy. This happened quite accidentally, coincidentally and certainly not by any plan or strategy. But this mostly social composition of the first batch of dalit poets does provide evidence that from the very outset, Gujarati dalit literature was to develop on a broader outlook and perspective.

But its growth over all these years is also quite impressive and encouraging. Taking 1978 as a take-off point, Chandu Maheriya, a discerning dalit journalist and activist enlists in ‘Dalit Shakti’¹ (Nov – Dec, 2005) magazine
more than 200 titles classified as Gujarati dalit literature. In the similar exercise earlier, he has listed in a mainstream literary magazine ‘Shabdsrushti’ (Nov. 2003) some 39 books – both anthologies containing different poets and collections of individual poets – categorized as Gujarati dalit poetry. In yet another stock-taking exercise, Yashwant Vaghela counts some 108 collections of dalit poetry in ‘Adhit’ (2005) including therein all that is written by dalit poets, but not necessary with ‘dalit’ concern or theme. Taking into account the poets published in different dalit magazines and included in several dalit poetry anthologies, there are more than 100 dalit poets – some seriously and consistently and others casually – are engaged with the genre of Gujarati dalit poetry. There are dozens of literary and social magazines both defunct and still running like Akrosh, Panther, Kalo Suraj, Sarvanam, Swaman, Naya Marg, Dalit Mitra, Samaj Mitra, Hayati, Disha, Mass Movement, Dalit Brotherhood, Vacha, Dalit Shakti, Surajmukhi, Aartanad, Garud, Ajampo, Abhyndaya, Avsar, Dalit Chetna, Dalit Bandhu, Rohind Bandhu et cetera that published dalit poetry regularly or occasionally. There are organizations, both defunct and still active – like Dalit Panther, Mass Movement, Sangharsh Sahitya Sangh, Dalit Sahitya Sangh, Swaman Foundation for Dalit Literature. Dalit Sahitya Academy – that provided platform for the promotion of Gujarati dalit poetry.

One can compare all these statistics with the initial ones and vouch for himself the significant growth of Gujarati dalit literature and poetry as well. But the growth can not be ganged by numbers alone; it should also speak about its spread and reach. Although the poets come from all parts of Gujarat like Saurashtra, South Gujarat, Kachchh, North Gujarat, Central Gujarat and even from the dalit diaspora settled in Bombay, the region
specific dalit problems remain yet to be explored by the Gujarati dalit poetry. The region – specific diction, idiom, folklore too is absent in the Gujarati dalit poetry. In the same way, not all dalit castes have found their voice. Except for the dominant castes of dalits like Vankar, Chamar and Garoda, the more backward and lowest in the rung of dalit social hierarchy like Bhangis, (now called Valmikis), Senmas, Nadias, Turis are yet to articulate their woes and protest in the poetic voice. They are victims of double discrimination – both from caste Hindus as well as their dalit brethren!

As the ‘growth’ is suggestive of quantity’, the term ‘development’ is suggestive of 'quality'. And for dalit literature including dalit poetry, it must rightly be so. As can be seen, the movement of dalit literature has spread unevenly. And so is with its reach. It is expected that its appeal and influence reach both the target readers – the dalit ‘victims’ as well as the caste Hindu ‘oppressors’. Then only the barriers can be broken, a bridge can be built. Then only the mission of dalit literature can accomplish its goal – the goal of human dignity, equality and fraternity for all. Development can also mean the quality of expression vis-à-vis techniques, content, ideology etc. The best way to understand the growth and development of Gujarati dalit poetry therefore is to get introduced to at least some of the important works published in magazines, individual collections of poetry, and anthologies during the period of our study – that is the first quarter of Gujarati dalit poetry beginning from 1978 to 2003. It is apt to begin from the beginning, ‘Akrosh’ itself.
‘Akrosh’ (published in 1978) may be translated as anguish, indignation, generated of agony. Thus appropriately titled to convey the sense of wrong and grievance that they have been suffering for long and now they are angry and preparing to spit fire. They are howling and growling like the panther that is trapped and tortured. It was an act of daring, rather first of its kind to openly and fearlessly take on oppressor with the help of the weapon of word – word of poetry. Till date dalits used to sing folksongs, lullabies, lyrical love-songs, bhajans, prabhatiya – but not dalit poetry. People had heard of ‘Applied Arts’, ‘Applied Mechanics’, ‘Applied Science’ but never ‘Applied Literature’ – i.e. poetry as a means to achieve an end!

But these voices of resistance and protest were too provocative for the state, the Establishment: ‘Akrosh’ brought out a special number, all poems focusing on an incident of murder of a dalit youth. It had a cover page illustration showing cops helpless with their guns down and helmets downcast towards the arson and murder being committed by the caste Hindus. Sensing trouble, the government promptly bans the ‘Akrosh’ special issue, confiscated remaining copies, and arrested its poets on various charges ranging from disturbing law and order, disturbing communal harmony, challenging state, belittling judiciary, police and religion.

It is believed religion preaches non-violence and fellow-feeling. But the murder of the dalit youth took place at the holy village of Jetalpur which is famous for the influence of Swaminarayan sect. The angry poet indicts the
priest who remained deaf and dumb and blind to the atrocity. This breach of
duty, his complacency to violence is condemned in the following verse:

‘All the directions have turned red
with Shakra’s screams,
but the dent saint of Swaminarayan
is snoring in deep sleep
putting the blinds of ‘shikshapatri’
- the sacred book on his eyes.
Trees are echoing the screams
but the holy village of Jetalpur doesn’t awake’.

The protest against the ban of ‘Akrosh’ and arrests of the dalit poets, one
woman sympathizer Roopa Mehta snatched away the mike from the hand of
Chief Minister who was addressing a literary function at Premabhai Hall in
Ahmedabad and shouted slogans of condemnation and for dalits’ right to
expression! The incident was splashed in the newspapers and ‘Akrosh’
became a symbol of resistance and protest. The Government’s move got
boomeranged, dalit poetry became more popular. It proved its efficacy and
gave impetus to many more dalit poetry magazines to launch themselves and
contribute to the movement of dalit literature.

**Burning from Both Ends**

Ramehshchandra Parmar, the President of Gujarat Dalit Panther and
published of this tiny book of poems translated from Guajrati into English
writes in his foreword to this anthology published in 1980:
‘Dalit Panther’ is an organization of the downtrodden masses. It represents the disillusioned generation – conscious of its pitiable plight, sufferings, aspiration, struggle. Because they are young and oppressed, they become bitter at the latent and blatant exploitation of capitalist system. Naturally their reaction is militant. They assert themselves more vehemently, to be treated at par with the rest of the human race. Dalit Panther’s cultural wing does it in its own way. The Dalit theatre and Dalit literature are the two major activities they are presently engaged with... on this auspicious day of 14th April 1980, birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, we present with pride and pleasure our young panther poet, Neerav Patel...

Publication of this small volume of poetry proved to be a second landmark towards the growth and development of Gujarati Dalit poetry. Quite surprisingly, it attracted the attention of the RSS mouthorgan ‘The Organizer’ which published its first full-length review in consecutive two issues. It was all praise for the dalit poetry and agreed on the justified anguish of the dalit poet. It acknowledged, so to say, that the dalits are an aggrieved community, and they have a right to protest against the unjust Hindu Social Order. Whether it was a sincere gesture or a strategic measure, one can hardly know – because all RSS cadres are hardcore Hindus believing in Varnashram based social system.

The book also became instrumental in sensitizing the western reader in its own little way. An international human rights organization called ‘The Minority Rights Group’ based in London commissioned a book titled 'Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement’ and its editor...
Barbara Joshi quoted in full several poems and preface of the poet in two chapters. This acted in favour of the movement of dalit literature and growing awareness about the dalit problem in the Western World.

**Dalit Kavita**

This was the first major attempt in compiling a collection of dalit poetry. Edited by Ganpat Parmar, a dalit professor of English and Manishi Jani, a de-caste Brahmin, ‘Dalit Kavita’ (1981) is unique in many respects: it has poets from all walks of life, poets from rural as well as urban areas, poets from North Gujarat to South Gujarat, from Saurashtra to Central Gujarat to Bombay’s dalit diaspora, poets belonging to all communities – from tribals to dalits to Muslims to Christians to caste Hindus, poets – highly educated to semi-literate, poets with different ideology influences even without their knowing them – Buddha, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Marx. Poets as young collegians to poets as elderly mill – workers. Alas, there wasn’t any woman poet! They were yet to emerge.

The journey that started with just 4 poets in 1978 had reached to 63 in just a couple of years, and that speaks of the tremendous growth! This growth was indeed phenomenon, but it can be explained as the new-found awareness generated by two terrible incidents of violence: one is cold – blooded murder of a dalit youth of Jetalpur and second is the anti-reservation riots that wrought havoc in the lives of dalits.
At the outset, one of its editors Parmar explains why art and literature are necessary in addition to the social sciences to understand any social issue. Sociological studies based on the data and analyses leave out space where art and literature can play their role to complete the understanding of the problem. The consciousness of man in the centre of such social problems is complex and art and literature delve deep to bring out what he feels and thinks. Dalit poetry also has a role to play in solution of the dalit issue.

He further advocates that dalit poetry is a part of dalit movement. And hence it cannot be judged on the basis of traditional tools of literary criticism. It will be an injustice to dalit poetry. It is primarily poetry of content and not of form. Creation of a truthful and realistic nature is enough for them. To expect from them the knowledge of poetics and aesthetics is to disregard the history of cultural deprivation of the dalits.

But the dalit poetry need not be so defensive, who says there is no aesthetics in dalit poetry? To make a point, Yashwant Vaghela, the poet of this anthology has this to offer as an example of dalit aesthetics:

**IDENTITY**

*Here*

*They know*

*Who I am*

*Yet feigning ignorance*

*They asked me:*

*Who are you?*

*I tell them:*
This head is Shambooka’s,
These hands are Eklavya’s,
This heart, Kabir’s.
I am Jabali Satyakam.
But these feet are untouchable.

Today
I am a man
Isn’t that good enough?
Well, who are you?

‘Dalit Kavita’ has many a gems of poetry. But the epilogue written by the editor Manishi Jani is also an excellent piece of understanding. He emphasizes that dalit poetry is a movement; an ever-growing, ever-developing movement. It can not be confined to a narrow, casteist perspective. Dalit Kavita, he tries to define, is the poetry that gives voice to the masses that are depressed culturally and socio-economically. It is the poetry that joins in their struggles, it is the poetry that strives to regain them their identity.

He tries in a nutshell to explain how elite classes, dominant classes preserve and perpetuate the exploitative socio-economic order through Vernashram and castle-system in our country. He goes who is engaged in mental labour is considered superior to the one who is doing physical labour and then menial labour like sweeping and scavenging. He cursorily refers to the processes of change: renaissance, the French Revolution, Abolition of slavery of the Negros, Russian Revolution and here in our country right from Bhakti Movement to Gandhian and Progressive Movements of
Literature followed by modern individualistic isms and now the age of dalit literature. One can see two parallel movements of literature of the dalits and literature of the elites, one emancipatory and the other exploitative.

This particular anthology has thus contributed a great deal to the growth and development of dalit literature in general and dalit poetry in particular. It has broadened the horizons of understanding, formed a broad dalit perspective for the bigger and final struggle to free the world of all types of exploitation.

But it is also because of this anthology, some argue, that the concept of ‘dalit’ is diluted. In the hope to accommodate all, a very liberal selection was brought together. And this acts as a precedent in the anthologies of dalit poetry even today. Those who are not at all committed to the cause, those who have no ‘concern’ but have the necessary skill to compose a dalit poem find place in such selections. The development of dalit poetry could be affected by this seemingly innocent, accommodative trend.

**TO PACHHI,**

**KYAN CHHE SURAJ**

One of the earliest pillars of Gujarati dalit poetry, Dalpat Chauhan in these two collections (published in 1983 and 2000 respectively) bring out in the focus all those miseries suffered by dalit ancestors. He believes that the sufferings should be documented, histories concealed in the folktales and folksongs should be reconstructed for the present generation.
He reminisces in 'The Homecoming' the painful nostalgia:

_Mother,_

_Don't search for me among shelves._

_That was the connection of the last birth._

_Mother I know:_

_Your longings for my bride,_

_of buying bracelets, ankles, jackets,_

_Welcome songs, palm impressions of kumkum on the door._

_But oh,_

_Palm impressions with my blood,_

_Carved on the altar-walls._

_With smothered breaths,_

_Stench of burning skin,_

_Snapped was the umbilical cord._

_Your henna-hedge withered away,_

_Your precinct-path forlorn._

_Where will you look for the footprints?_  

_Neither sun nor moon will light your sky._

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**VYATHA PACHISI**

There is Namdev Dhasal in Marathi Dalit poetry, and Gujarati dalit poetry has Sahil Parmar. His poetry (published as a slim volume in 1984) is so
evocating embellished with rhythm and desi idiom, that it comes alive on the tongues of the listeners. He is blamed for his vulgar language sometimes, but there can not be any other language in the face most cruel oppression. His famous poem 'Tanva Mate Nai Avavana' created a scene once, even among the assembly of the dalit doctors – the neo-brahmins emerged from dalit community itself. It's tone is set like this: you drink milk and eat ghee from your cattle. when it is sucked full and dies, you call us to drag away its dead body. you fuckers, go we are not going to come to drag that carcass!

Credit must go to the poetry of Sahil, for it developed the different aesthetics of dalit poetry. Even obscenity can embellish dalit poetry; make it more powerful and more appealing. This is the contribution towards the development of dalit poetry.

**VISFOT**

It is embarrassing to find just 14 poets in this anthology (published in 1984), as against 63 of ‘Dalit Kavita’. Does it signify any decline or does it indicates splitting the movement into groups of their own – based on any narrow considerations? The anthology was initially planned with the title “dha” – an abbreviation of the derogatory term ‘Dhed’, but now it is titled ‘Visfot’, an explosion literally. It’s editorial begins with the reputation: dalit kavita is neither born in the 8th decade nor is it born as a reaction to anti-reservation riots. The reference clearly is to the earlier publications wherein the ‘birthday’ of Gujarati dalit poetry is marked as 14, April 1978, the date of publication of ‘Akrosh’. The splinter group wouldn’t like to give credit to the Dalit Panther, who launched the first-ever magazine with the distinct
nomenclature with the intention to begin the Movement of Dalit Literature in Gujarat. The political rivalry, the caste-rivalry within dalits are the source of splits and controversies that kill the movements. This is the first example to explain why and how the development of dalit literature is hampered. Just because he was branded as a ‘Panther Poet’, Neerav Patel was barred. But its editors, Chandu Maheriya and Balkrishna Anand brought back the ‘dalit’ theme to its rightful place for which the movement of Dalit Literature had been launched. Unlike ‘Dalit Kavita’, here one can find the theme of dalit exploitation on the basis of Hindu Social order as the predominant theme.

Pravin Gadhvi⁹ the poet exhorts dalits not to enter the temple:

‘Don’t enter the temple, friends,  
Stop.  
The bleeding body of our son is lying  
on the steps of that temple.  
Our denuded and half-dead daughter  
is lying besides.  
Her beauty is ransacked.  
Our burnt crops are stinking in the tombs of that temple.  

Those butchers have made talismans from the sacred words  
gifted to our ancestors,  
on the banks of sindhu river.  
They sacrifice words in the Yajnas.
They have covered the bloodstained walls
with sheets of gold.
They have made the golden peaks of the temple
touch the sky.
The corpses of our ancestors are buried
under the pillars of that temple,
they groan,
Stop.
Don’t step into that slaughterhouse.’

Asmita

‘Naya Marg’, a magazine committed to the cause of all the oppressed and
exploited has published 93 poems of 46 poets during August 81 to January
83. Out of them, 71 poems of 35 poets have been anthologized in this book
published in 1984 and edited by Chandu Maheriya and published by
Indukumar Jani. Zinabhai Darji, stop congress leader and staunch fighter
for social justice in his welcome note writes:

‘My eyes are opened up by anti-reservation agitation. The majority
community has wrought terror on the harijans. I am shaken by the police's
partisan attitude. In the land of Gandhi's Gujarat, and that too after three and
half decades of independence, harijans are killed so cruelly, their houses are
burnt, they are burnt alive… They are made helpless by the social –
economic boycotts! They are compelled to migrate, leaving their homes and ancestral village!

Now that Harijan has got himself educated. His soul is awakened. He even rebels. His anguish turns into a poem…

One can see these are the poems written in the aftermath of anti-reservation riots. And again this is a counter – evidence to the earlier refutation. Leaving the politics of poetry aside, let us concentrate on the contents of this anthology. As mentioned in the beginning, 'Naya Marg' being the voice for all the have-nots, we find poets giving expression to varied forms of exploitation, social, economic, cultural and political. But there are poems, nakedly narrating the deprivation and exploitation on the basis of caste:

'My Shamalryo honoured my hundi’ –
how else could we have arranged
the bridal gavan
for our Gagali's send-off?
The vow to goddess Chavanda bore fruit.
The garasiya's wife departed suddenly
in full bloom…
her bier was shrouded in a red gavan!
The pyre flamed crimson
and the red gavan flew off and fluttered
on the akda bush!

Gagli's mother... oh! That silly woman...
how she chuckled in delight
Soon as the back of the mourners turns
I'll rush to the cremation ground, she reckoned.
The Lord is the saviour!
of us untouchables too!'

BAYONET,
PADCHHAYO,
TOONIR

These are the three collections of dalit poetry by Pravin Gadhvi (published in 1985, 1986 and 2000 respectively). Not belonging to scheduled caste, he is the one who has proved with his commitment how even a non-dalit can become a successful 'dalit poet'. With his special sense of history and Marxism, he has enriched dalit poetry and thereby helped develop it to its present heights. He announces 'I Am the History of This Nation' in one of his poems:

Do not try to dig from graves bones of the history
of five thousand years, my friend.
You will not find any bone of Dadhichi.
Like dew, history mingles every minute
In the warm and sweet soil of the earth.
Why do you want to trace my original race?
I was an atom in the sun million years ago.

...
When I came as a man from the dark woods of central Africa,
Jumping from the branches of trees
You told me that I am untouchable.
No friends, I am not untouchable.
I have been flowing like the beautiful waters of the Ganges
And the Sindhu on the sacred plains of this nation.
There are imprints of my steps on every stream of this nation.
There is a fossil of mine under every rock of this nation.
The indecipherable script of Mohen-jo-dero throbs in my blood.
I am the history of this nation made of my flesh and blood.
You cannot bury me as an untouchable.

Atyacharo Thava Do

Published in 1984, this is one of the first collections of Gujarati dalit poets. The elderly poet Babaldas Chavda who is in his 80s is the real angry old man of Gujarati dalit poetry and the title translated as 'let there be atrocities' speaks as the testimony. The collection has 82 poems, most of them published in dalit magazines like Abhyuday, Kalo Suraj, Dalit Bandhu, Bahujan Ekta, Mayavanshi, Ajampo, Taras, Manthan etc. Jitendra Dave writes in his preface to the collection : 'In the Gandhiyug poetry, we find only sympathetic approach towards the downtrodden class and talk of abolition of untouchability. However, in these new-age poets there is anguish and indignation as also the empathy and harmony. The poet has taken to task the leaders, the officials of the government with striking satires
in poems like atyachar thava do, naga bhukhya nahi rahe, fifty- fifty, subsidy tari vato nyari, nasbandhi nashabandhi etc.' An example,

DH without any vowel\textsuperscript{13} 

.....

DH has changed into suit and safari now.
He is changed to H now,
The consonant dear to Gandhi.
This also stands on his own, without any vowel.
Anybody can dress him as per his whims,
But the tide of time has changed.
DH has awakened now from the deep slumber!
He saw and startled:
Atrocities everywhere,
Freedom is nowhere.

.....

Beware,
Stop these atrocities or be ready for the rebellion.
Don't torment the DH any longer,
The wounded DH is desperate now.
The cobra is ready with the fang,
And ready to spit poison.'
This is a very very small anthology published in 1986, a booklet indeed. But it has paid an important role in the growth and development of Gujarati dalit poetry. It is published by Raju Solanki, a young poet and activist and also convener of an organization called 'Jati Nirmulan Sankalan Samiti'. He declares in the preface: Without abolition of caste, abolition of inequality is impossible. Caste must go. And the simple and easy way to break casteism is to break Brahminism, predominance of the high castles and abolition of 'Mahajan' culture. Casteism can not be abolished simply by erasing caste names from the school leaving certificates or changing surnames.

Those who love caste-system say 'we do not want to fight on class line… leave aside the labour problem… talk about dalits… 90% of the dalits are workers… Those who abuse the leftist alleging them that they are not giving priority to the abolition of caste do not know that they are opposing sine dalit who is selling his labour to the capitalist class. Social dominance of the high caste and economic dominance are in collusion and the 'textbook class – conflict' won't succeed here. Therefore unity both of working class as well dalits and tribals and other Backward Classes (OBCs) are inevitable.'

With these ideological strategies in mind, Raju brings out this anthology. It has the Gujarati version of the famous dalit Naxalite singer and poet Gaddar done by Kardam Bhatt, a naxalite himself:

'This village is ours, this street is ours
This busti is ours, everything is ours
we are for the soil, we are for the palace
we are for the slave, we are for the salute
we are for the sowing, we are for the harvesting
Plough is ours, Hammers is ours, Axe is ours...
Then who is this oppressor,
And where does he come from?'

The song goes on to elaborate that the broom is ours, the hides are ours, the loom is ours, the blood is ours, and the perspiration is ours. Then who is this oppressor, what is his intention?

Poetry in songs like these appeals a lot and become instrumental to mobilize people into a united force for struggle. Taking exposures from such radial ideologies, dalit poetry develops into a more militant tone. 'Shramik Kavita' published by Ramesh Chandra Parmar is another anthology that represents only dalit mill-worker poets. Alji Bhagat, Vishram Devji, Kasturbhai Shah and Pagal Baba are the mill-worker dalit poets who sang their woes both against the caste discrimination practiced in the mills and class exploitation by the mill-owners. These early poets, preceding the real beginning of the Movement of Dalit Literature are given their due recognition by this anthology.
Anjalee,
Bhim Kavya Saurabh,
Messiah

There will hardly be any dalit poet who has not written a poem or Dr.Ambedkar. Way back in 1956, even illiterate and semi-literate mill workers composed elegies (mercias) to mourn his untimely death remembering him as the messiah, saviour, emancipator and God with the feeling that his death had rendered them orphans. The 'mercias' were published at that time on leaflets / handbills with the millworkers' contribution of anna – two anna. Ramesh Chandra Parmar collected some 166 such elegies after a laborious research of three years and published them into an anthology titled 'Anjalee' in 1987. This was a unique way of paying homage to one's leader, although those poets didn't get recognition and respect of being called 'dalit poet' as in those days the term was not coined, their work now forms a respectable part of 'dalit poetry'. The expression was simple but spontaneous and sincere. Much of it was repetitive, but the tune and rhythm were different. They were composed on the tunes of popular folksongs, devotional songs and so they were so appealing that both their singers and listeners had tears in their eyes. They were effective enough to convey the tremendous sense of loss and bereavement.

The trend of paying tribute to Dr.Ambedkar is in vogue in modern Gujarati dalit poetry too. This may sound as hero – worship to the critics of dalit poetry, but for dalit poets Dr.Ambedkar is the greatest source of inspiration for carrying on the struggle for emancipation of the dalits.
A couple of poets have even published their individual collections of dalit poems devoted exclusively to the theme of Dr.Ambedkar's life and work. 'Bhim Kavya Saurabh' by Madhuvir Solanki 'Amitmitra' in 2001 and 'Massiah' by A.K.Dodiya in 2003 are such tributes to the great man.

The poems composed in the modern metres and forms like lyrics, sonnets, gazals; in Mandakranta, in Shikharini in free verse as well as in old tunes like Ramapir's 'helo'.

The poems at times criticize the opportunist followers who simply chant the 'Bhimdhun', celebrate the anniversaries garlanding the statues of Dr.Ambedkar just as a ritual. They expose the sham and hypocrite dalit politicians who have joined political parties that work against the interest of dalits, much against the ideology of Dr.Ambedkar. The poems exhaust the dalit masses to return to the real path of Dr.Ambedkar – the path spelt out in his new mantra: educate, agitate, and organize. They also remind the dalits of his advice to eschew Hinduism and convert to Buddhism for Hinduism stand for inequality and exploitation through its Varnashram and caste-system whereas Buddhism stand for equality, compassion, brotherhood, non-violence, rationalism.

In yet another effort, 'Samajmitra', an important dalit magazine now defunct, had brought out a whole issue in 2001 collecting there in best poems on Dr.Ambedkar written by modern by dalit poets. It's guest editor, Chandu Mahreriya did a painstaking job of including therein Ambedkar's own appealing prose that could be called 'dalit poetry'! In all these poems,
modern outlook of the reflective and introspective poets can be seen quite obviously. And the sense of resistance and protest is always there.

A poem by Mangal Rathod\textsuperscript{15} commemorates the 'Mahad Satyagrah' of Dr. Ambedkar thus:

'A 20th March, 1927.
As you drank deeply
from your cupped hands
the water of Avdar lake,
we learned
that united
we can win back our human rights.
If the earth belongs to us,
how can the lake not ours?
...
A lake open to dogs, cats, cattle
even to swine
is forbidden to human beings.'

Dalit poetry written about Ambedkar not only makes dalits aware and conscious of his immense contribution for the dalit deliverance, it also develops the dalit poet's conviction and commitment for furthering the cause of the dalits.

As is the attraction of Ambedkar is evident in the dalit poets, so is the dislike towards Gandhi. But there is an exceptional ambivalence too. Pravin Gadhvi
for example, has a whole section called 'The Revival of Gandhi' in his collection 'The Voice of the Last' in appreciation. A couple of stanzas from a poem titled

'Never Be Mistaken, Mahatma'\textsuperscript{16}

Never be mistaken to be born in this country, Mahatma.
They don't have regard for you.
They mock your sayings seated under the very shadow of your statue.
They bathe you with liquor.
They burn the pages of the Indian Constitution before your eyes.
They mark on your forehead with the boiling blood of our young dalit sons.
They pull your loincloth as if you are a lunatic roaming
On Ashram Road.

....

Mahatma, this ancient country of hymns and Unishads
Has become the country of wolves.'

The reason being, it seems the poet not belonging to dalit community and hence not internalizing the derogatory intonation of the term 'Harijan' as well as his controversial ideas about Varnashram and also not aware of Ambedkar's book 'What Gandhi and Congress have done for the Untouchables'
The reason being his not belonging to dalit community and hence not internalizing the derogatory intonation of the term 'Harijan' as well as his contradictory ideas about Varnashram and not aware of Ambedkar's book 'What Gandhi and Congress have done for the Untouchables'.

**Eklavyano Angootho**

As is mentioned earlier, the movement of dalit literature is spread unevenly and hence its growth is limited to some pockets and its development is devoid of regional diversity. Nilesh Kathad, the editor of this anthology published in 1987 belongs to Saurashtra, the more backward part of Gujarat, quite feudal in socio-economic relations. Quite naturally the oppression and exploitation of dalits is severer there. He complains in the editorial that Ahmedabad is the centre of Gujarati dalit literature and no dalit in Saurashtra know even 'd' of dalit literature. And so that the message of dalit literature can spread there, this anthology is compiled.

He has another complaint: some dalit writes do not know anything about 'communism' and without knowing this ideology for the 'have-nots' they are blindly criticizing it under the influence of capitalist conditioning. He also complains or occasionally writes dalit literature. Again he points out to the one-up-manship prevailing in the movement of dalit literature.

These comments by the editor serve important purpose for the growth and development of dalit literature. But to the reader's surprise, he himself fails to abide by the purpose. Shyam Sadhu, Dan Vaghela, Pathik Parmar, Sanju
Vala do belong to Saurashtra; but they are more considered as the poets of the mainstream which is called 'dalit literature'. Manish Parma, Mangal Rathod, Madhukant Kalpit, although do not belongs to Saurashtra, are also considered poets of the mainstream. Only occasionally they stray into the greener pastures' of dalit literature.

But in any case, the anthology does contain good dalit poetry. Let us robed from Nilesh Kathad\(^1\) himself:

>'Standing in the rationing queue'
>my breaths get shoved from behind
>by the words.
>In the scuffle,
>the fallen wind
>runs away with my empty bag.
>Someone asked to the 'misery'
>that was going with a handful of grains :
>what happened to your love – affair
>with that rich 'inflation' ?
>In reply
>she showed the empty bag.'
**Jwalamukhi**

Shamat Parmar is an angry young man fully committed to dalit poetry and dalit art and dalit activism. As the title of the collection (published in 1999) suggests, he is a live volcano erupting fire through his poetic outbursts. Even the romantic form of gazal gets the angry tone in his poetry. Perhaps that is why the dalit critic Prof Yashvant Vaghela finds him at times very loud, vocal and verbose. Dalit poetry is sometimes accused of such unpoetic expressions and haughty treatment to important dalit themes. There is yet another example of equally committed poet, Tikesh Makwana who writes 4, 6 or even 8 poems in a day and comes out with an instant collection *jyoti bane jwala*. Such an easy approach churns out poetry of verbiage and loudness and doesn't much appeal to the reader.

**Bhunsata Manasne Ghoontun Chhun,**
**Ughad jevo Ughadto Manas**

Bipin Gohil is a very sensitive Gujarati dalit poet living in Bombay, and these are his two poetry collections published in 1993 and 2000 respectively. His preface to the *bhunsata* collection is a very poignant piece of self–revelation: his life-story is literally a lily born of the mud, for his grandfather had migrated from Saurashtra to Hyderabad to escape from the famine and later to Mumbai and was dragging a municipal shit-cart. His poems are so evocative and tragic:

*From Bombay to Mumbai*

*And from Victoria Terminus*
to Chhatrapati Shivaji…

How rejoicing!

That dalit ghetto is waiting
Not for the name change
But for radical change
Of kachra patti into kanchan patti
Hunger into content
And from pavement-dweller to householder.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Ame Andhare Ugela Padchhaya}

Yashvant Vaghela is a dalit poet, professor of Gujarati literature and a staunch believer of Phoole-Ambedkar-Kashiram's Bahujan Samaj ideology. His poetry reflects his vision and the example is the song that is very apt for the title of this poetry collection (published in 1991):

\textit{The Song of History}\textsuperscript{20}

\texttt{We are the shadows born of darkness
We are pierced by the sun-rays.
We are the stars born on the no-moon night
We are extinguished on the full-moon night.
We are crushed to pieces
We are sucked by tears
We are royal caravans robbed
We are bodies burning hot
We are screams buried alive}
We are the shadows born of darkness.
We are pierced by the sun-rays.
We are dreaming of sun
But in dreams come sun-flower.
Our eyes are leaden
Our ears are leaden
We are a story of vanquished king
Harappa is a name of a dream,
We are crushed under the horse's hoofs
We are the shadows of darkness
We are pierced by the sun-rays.

Heerno Hinchko

This is again a distinct contribution to the growth and development of dalit poetry. This book is a compilation of songs sung by dalit women. After listening more than one thousand songs, some one hundred and sixty songs are selected for this anthology (published in 2001) by the compilers Jyotsna Macwan and Shobhana Parmar. The compilers work with an NGO called Behavioural Science Centre. They specifically work with Vankars and Valmikis in 42 villages of Kambhata's Bhalbara region, Vankar and Koli Patels in 36 villages of Dhandhuka region, tribals in 22 villages of Danta region. One wonders why the anthology includes women poets only from Vankar community and not from more backward and lowest of the low Valmiki caste women, as also leave out the tribal women and Koli women!
When the intention, as professed in the book, is to study how songs of dalit women expose the exploitative nature of patriarchy as well as caste oppression, the selective attitude of the compilers is difficult to understand.

But the analytical write-up by Saroop Dhruv accompanying the songs is a worth reading piece. And it adds to understanding of the people that the women's songs taken priority as entertainment are indeed the voices of complaints, protest and demand for equality of the sexes and abolition of discrimination on the basis of caste.

Dudunbhi

This is the latest and the last anthology published in 2001. Dundubhi is a big drum to make people aware of the danger and prepare them to fight back against the danger. In this sense, the title of the anthology is very symbolic. Its cover page illustration is done by a mentally – challenged dalit boy, Jyotir. It is hailed by a Marxist critic, Mahavirsinh Chauhan as 'the poetry of the beauty of struggle.' There are 85 poems of 59 poets; almost all committed important dalit poets are included together with some poets of mainstream also occasionally writing dalit poetry.

In his introductory note, Mahavirsinh clears an illusion in these words: 'Dalit communities do not accept that 'our' culture is very advanced, full of humanitarian elements, dynamic and best-intentioned. Varna-system has
eroded its living-power. Flexibility is there in its roots, it defends itself by keeping eyes shut as does the ostrich to any challenge of danger. Dalit poet doesn't identify it as Indian Culture but as Brahminic culture. Brahmin culture means the culture that preserves and perpetuates Varna-system. Dalit poetry rejects this Brahminic culture.

In a poem titled 'Brainwash', Pravin Gadhvi writes stanzas like this:

'Please give me little water from the gangas,
and add waters of six sacred rivers.
I want to wash thoroughly
the brain hanging from the broken skull
of this Chitparan...
Please give me a cake of detergent.
I want to wash each cell of his brain.
I want to remove thoroughly
the rust from his consciousness
deposited since centuries.
...
Dear Bhudeva,
Even if curd remains unattended for a long time,
It rots, it stinks.

Your brain is as it is since Vedic times.
See, it has rotted. It is dirty. It is foul-odoured.
Please bring more water from the Gangas
and water of six rivers.
Popularity of Gujarati dalit poetry reached far beyond the language of its own, to other languages like Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, English. Its growth can be seen in whole collections of poems translated. 'Eklavyas with Thumbs' by K.M.Sheriff, 'The Silver Lining' by Roopalee Burke and Darshna Trivedi, 'Gujarati Sahityamen Dalit Kalam' by Ramnika Gupta, 'Voices of the Last' by Pravin Gadhvi, 'What did I do to be so black and blue' by Neerav Patel, special issue of 'Indian Literature' (1992) published by Sahitya Akademi, 'Neerob Poteler Kobita' in Bengali by A K Biswas – all these publications point to the growth and development of dalit poetry.

Even the modern medium of interest is also attracted by Gujarati dalit poetry. An E-magazine 'Muse India' also has put internet its special number of Gujarati dalit poetry.

It will be an injustice to all those talented and fully committed poets who have published their own collections of Gujarati dalit poetry, if even a cursory glance is not cast on them. They are the ones who have contributed their mite to the growth and development of Gujarati dalit poetry.

collections by dalit poets have contributed to the growth and development of Gujarati Dalit Poetry.

Dalit poetry now has at least a couple of woman poets: Chandraben Shrimali and Priyanka Kalpit. Both have published their collections. 'Hansiyaman Hun' by Priyanka is full of haikus and free-verse poems. Her dalit sensibility however is not that much prominent in the volume. She seems influenced by her father, who is a well-established mainstream poet occasionally writing 'dalit' too. Chandraben is very loud and vocal in narrating dalit and feminist themes. Usha Makwana has written a handful of poems and now has ceased writing. The reader can feel the stinging tone in the following poem and vouch that the poetess did have great potential:

**BLESS ED HARIJAN**

*Incarnated often as son of queens*

*Be born as the son of woman once.*

*Wielded many chakras, bows, arrows*

*Walk down the road with a broom once.*

*Easier to be entitled as Hari,*

*Just be a blessed Harijan once.*
There are yet very promising poets that have either not published their collections or have published after 2003 – the period beyond the present study. They have been contributing for a number of years. For example, Neerav Patel, in fact one of the pioneers of the movement of Gujarati Dalit Literature published his collection 'Bahishkrit Phoolo' only in 2005. Although it is published quite belatedly in a book form, almost all the poems have earlier appeared in different magazines right from 1978 to 2003, the period of our study. Many of them are his celebrated poems and some of them have been translated in English under the title of 'what did I do to be so black and blue.' It has earned him both bouquets and brickbats – his stinging but tragic satire got for him the prestigious Gujarati Sahitya Parishad prize, nomination for Sant Kabir Award of Gujarat Government as well as accolades from leading critics as also the State's wrath in the form of confiscation of his poems and his imprisonment and hate campaigns of his own dalit brethren. His strong dislike for the politics of exclusion and his condemnation of internal casteism among dalits are all too evident in his poetry and that makes him extremely unpopular among the status-quoists but equally popular among liberal, progressive and secular circles. His poems - Phoolwado, Patel Ladu, Main Jihadi Ban Jaunga, Ma Main Bhala Ke Mera Bhai, Mara Bhagno Varsad, Maro Shamaliyo, Kalchakra and many others are remarkable pieces of poetry.

Same way, Purshottam Jadav, Balkrishna Anand, Chandu Maheriya, Bhikhu Vegda, Harjivan Dafda are the other poets who are yet to collect their poems for a book.
Having got the first-hand introduction to some of the poets and their works, the growth and development of dalit poetry in Gujarati can be assessed through various parameters in the following chapters.
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