

REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN GUJARATI NOVEL: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

It is said that nothing is permanent except change. Thus, everything in this world is subject to change and society is no exception. It is true that literature is a mirror of society. Literature reflects society and it also marks the changes witnessed by the era in which it is written. The purpose of this paper is to focus on how social changes have been reflected in the Gujarati novels written between 1982 and 1992.

Key-words: *social change, Dalit novels, Feminism, political references*

INTRODUCTION

Over one thousand novels had been written in Gujarati during this decade. But in about 25 of them social changes have been reflected. Here I plan to concentrate on about 7 novels in which such changes have been dealt with. With reference to their subjects these novels can be divided into following categories:

(a) Dalit Novels:

Angaliyat(1986), Badlati Kshitij(1986), Kalo Angrej(1992)

(b) Feminist Novels:

Sat Paglan Akashman(1984), Lavanya(1989)

(c) Novels with Political References:

Gandhini Kavad(1984), Bandh Nagar(1987)

Dalit Novels:

Dalit consciousness is a significant social change of this period. It is believed that it was Mahatma Jotiba Phule who first used the word Dalit in connection with caste. In Marathi, the word Dalit means ground crushed, broken down and reduced to pieces. Some people are of



the opinion that Dr. Ambedkar used the term for the first time for the downtrodden of Maharashtra.

Writing that portrays the sufferings of Dalits is called Dalit Literature. Like Black Literature in America, in India Dalit Literature came into existence. Marathi Dalit literature is the forerunner of all modern Dalit literature. It was essentially against exploitation, and made use of writing as a weapon. Dalit Literature in Gujarati came into existence much after Marathi Dalit literature. Gujarati Dalit literature grew out of the anti-reservation movement of 1981 and 1985. Gujarati Dalit writing began with poetry. In 1981, we get the first anthology of Gujarati Dalit poetry titled “Dalit Kavita”. The first anthology of Gujarati Dalit Short stories – “Asmita” was published in 1984.

It was through Joseph Macwan’s *Angaliyat* that Social consciousness of the Dalits was echoed in Gujarati novel for the first time. Published in 1986, *Angaliyat* is the first Dalit novel to be written in any Indian language.

For the first time in Gujarati Literature, the novelist presents Dalits as the central characters of his novel. In the field of Gujarati novel, the note of the revolt, the ire, and the explosive reactions of the Dalits against untouchability, inequality, injustice, exploitation is heard for the first time in *Angaliyat*. The novel has bagged numerous literary awards including the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. It is translated into many Indian languages. It was translated into English by Rita Kothari. “The Stepchild” is the first English translation of any Gujarati novel to be published by Oxford University Press. *Angaliyat* is a document of caste discrimination in the pre- and post-Independence eras, as seen from the point of view of the Dalits. It is an account of the struggle of a Dalit community against its upper-caste oppressors.

Joseph Macwan likens the Vankars, a weaving Dalit community, to the stepchild, who holds its mother’s finger and enters his stepfather’s house. Thus, the term ‘angaliyat’ is a metaphor for the social position of the Dalit community. The novelist here tells us a pathetic story of some characters from the Vankar community (weavers) living on the outskirts of a village controlled by the land owning Patidar community in the Charotar region of Gujarat. They are subject to oppression from the more powerful upper caste of the Patidars. Teeho is the central character in the novel. Methi, Valji, Kanku, Bhavankaka, Master, Goko, Ranchhod Dehlawala are other important characters of the novel. In the words of the author:

“Angaliyat is a tale of a culture that is extinct and pushed into oblivion! This is not an attempt to re-establish its prestige; the purpose is to acknowledge its potential (strength)”.



Sexual exploitation of Dalit women is not a new thing in the villages of Gujarat. Previously Dalits bore such exploitations silently. But now they have started to face such situations bravely. When an upper-caste man, Nanio Patel aims a stone at Methi's pot and drenches her completely, Teeha springs to her defence and picks up a quarrel with him.

In this novel the novelist deals with the awareness that came in the Dalit community and the effect of the social changes as a result of this awareness. It records the social transformation of the victims of neglect, indifference and appropriation taking place in the post-independence India.

Angaliyat is thus a gripping tale of the struggle of a community wishing social recognition and upliftment in post independence India. It marks the currents and conditions of slowly changing social life. Dhaval Mehta, a well-known sociologist in Gujarat calls *Angaliyat* 'the forth turning point of Gujarati fiction and Joseph Macwan 'a social reformer'.

Published in the same year as *Angaliyat*, *Badlati Kshitij* is a novel written by a non-dalit writer, Jayant Gadit. The writer here gives literary representation to the social awareness in the Dalit community. The novelist creates the character of a teacher named Jivabhai in order to depict the social reality of the Vaghari, a Dalit community. The novelist constantly shows us how the members of this community are humiliated by the upper class people. However educated they may get, Dalits are always ignored and looked down upon by the caste Hindus. Apparently it seems that educated Dalits are given due respect by the upper class people but in reality, they always keep a safe distance from them. In order to present this attitude of the upper class people, the novelist has portrayed the characters of Rashmikant, an engineer, and his educated wife Chandrika. Here politics join hands with the police. The writer shows us the role of police in sustaining the caste-based division of society where the lower class is denied through force their basic rights to equality. The upper caste Hindus do not want Dalits to be their equals in any way. The writer has here presented a realistic picture of the protest of upper castes against the process of social change. The aim of the writer here is to expose the evil of caste system and injustice, exploitation, and oppressions inflicted upon the Dalits by higher caste. He delineates the struggle of a community craving for social change.

Kalo Angrej is the last significant and experimental novel written during the period. The Harijans, a Dalit community is at the centre here. Though they are Hindus, Dalits are not allowed to enter the temple. Dayabhai a follower of the Gandhian ideology encourages them to enter the temple. As a consequence, the breach between the Harijans and Caste Hindus gets widened. It causes bloodshed. The Dalit character of Bhala is the central Dalit character in the novel. In the village the Kshatriya community controls everything. Bhala's daughter Sharadi falls in love with a Kshatriya young man named Indrasinh. Their love affair causes the exploitation of and atrocities on Dalits. By presenting the love story of a caste hero and Dalit heroine, the novelist has exposed the evil of caste discrimination prevailing in the

society. The community opposes strongly to Indrasinh's decision to marry Sharadi. As a result, Indrasinh commits suicide. This makes Indrasinh's father Vajesang infuriated.

The cruel killing of a large number of dalits by Indrasinh's father Vajesang Thakor and his men is a harrowing picture of appalling social realism. The novel covers the period of a decade immediately after the independence, the period during which considerable changes took place in social, political, economic and cultural life of India. Both social and political structures in India were passing through a period of transition. The novel is set in Dholka (a small town situated in Bhal region of Gujarat) and its surrounding area and tells the story of the pathetic conditions of dalits in India after independence. At the end of the novel the writer has given an indication of the social transformation through the character of Sharadi. Her entry in the active politics heralds a new era of Social revolution.

The title of the novel is very apt and suggestive. The novelist suggests that The British left India but unfortunately still there are countless people like Vajesang Thakor who are more inhuman and atrocious than the real British.

Some Other Dalit Novels

Representation of the Dalits in Indian English Literature has been scanty. However, Mulraj Anad's *Untouchable*, S. Menon Maratha's *The Wound of Spring*, Romen Basu's *Outcast* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* are remarkable Indian English novels in terms of exposure of the tyranny and injustice meted out to the untouchables. there are some great Dalit writers in India like Om Prakash Valmiki, Mohan Das Nemishrai, Daya Panwar, Saran Kumar Limbale, etc. However, few among them have written in English. Their works are available in translation.

In Gujarati literature, besides the novels discussed above, some other Dalit novels written during this period and dealing with social revolution are: Joseph Macwan's *Laksmanni Agnipariksha*(1986), and *Mari Parnetar*(1988), Dalpat Chauhan's *Malak*(1991), Mohan Parmar's *Neliyu*(1992), Harish Mangalam's *Tirad*(1992) and *Choki*(1992). These novels mark the social changes and especially the social upliftment of the Dalit community. These novels reflect social change in the sense that the Dalit community portrayed in them rejects the degraded Hindu social set up. These writers relentlessly expose the inhumanities and prejudices of caste society and instill new social and cultural dimensions. Dalits have become aware of their existence. The people who were once so detested are becoming the central focus of literary works. And thus Dalit Literature is not only a literature of protest but an echo of change also. Dalit literary movement is not only a literary movement but also a cultural and social movement.

Feminist Novels

The French critic Simone De Beauvoire in her “The Second Sex” (1949) discusses in detail some significant issues concerning the place of woman in the society. She claims that gender is a social creation, “one is not born but rather, becomes a woman” (Woman: Myth and Reality). Feminism as an international socio-political movement since 1960 is a struggle against oppression and subjugation of women in a dominant patriarchal order which is based on irrational discrimination on the basis of gender/sexuality. Feminist literature advocates equal rights and opportunities for women in their economic activities, personal lives and politics. The basic view is that society is pervasively patriarchal(ruled by the father)- that is it is male-centred and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” deserves a special mention in this connection.

In India, quite a good number of works in the post independence period illustrate, more or less, how women are exploited in various ways. The inhuman treatment that, they receive from the male-dominated society indicates that they lose their freedom first and their lives later for the sake of man.

Sat Pagla Akashman is a novel written by Kundanika Kapadiya. She won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1985 for this novel. She is an aggressive and forceful novelist. *Sat Pagla Akashman* is the novel of protest. The novel offers insightful glances into the rebel of a female mind over a patriarchal system. However, sometimes it seems that there is a direct attack on men. The novelist mistakes all men to be callous and inhuman. The plight of woman has been delineated as a social taboo. She has presented the woman dreaming for the glorious future.

According to some critics Kundanika Kapadiya is an extremist so far as her challenge against patriarchy is concerned. However, her basic approach to woman’s life in her novels is to liberate them from the oppressive measures of patriarchal order. In the process, the female characters in her novel have sustained a lot of physical, emotional and psychological sufferings. Soon after its publication, the novel became so popular with the readers that the novelist received hundreds of letters praising the novel. These letters were published in the book form with the title “Akrosh Ane Anand”. The novel created a great turmoil in the social life in Gujarat.

The preface to the novel has been entitled “Stri ni Yatra: Karagar thi Kailash Sudhi” (Woman’s Journey: From Prison to Kailash). The novel revolves around the life of the protagonist of the novel Vasudha and a few of her friends and relatives. The mount Kailash here symbolizes emancipation. It is also the story of several other women who yearn for fulfillment.

By presenting the story of Vasudha who after thirty-two years of marriage finally dares to challenge her husband's authority and leaves home, the novelist has created a revolutionary tale of woman liberation. Vasudha protests against the male domination and sets off for the Mount Kailash Her feminist consciousness has been suppressed to a great extent by patriarchy, but it has not been murdered. Although she has suffered, she has finally thrived to live like an independent woman. She has undoubtedly succeeded in asserting her womanhood. Here we are reminded of Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai's "Fire on the Mountain" who after a long life of servitude to family, finally finds solitude in her Himalayan home Carignano.

Through the portrayal of Vasudha, Kundanika has been really innovative, in Gujarati literature in presenting us a woman who protests against the male domination and leaves home to fulfill her aspirations. The focus in the novel is on the feminist rage of Vasudha and her consciousness as a new woman.

Raghuvir Chaudhari is a renowned Gujarati writer. He has achieved distinction as a poet, critic, essayist and short story writer. However, it is on his novels that his fame as a writer chiefly rests. His novel "Lavanya" deals with the personal life of the central character, Lavanya who is an educated young girl. There is much confusion in her mind about the issues like marriage, extra-marital relationship etc. Through the portrayal of Lavanya, the novelist presents a realistic picture of the young girls of the age who stand puzzled about certain issues. The novel unfolds the story of the lives, experiences and problems of feminine world. Thus, he discusses individual problems in general context. *Lavanya* becomes a decisive novel in that it records social changes. Lavanya, the protagonist here glorifies the independence of an educated woman by leading the society around us.

Apart from this, the novelist here also presents a picture of the impact of the Emergency, imposed by the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi on the minds of the intellectual people of India. And thus the changes that came in social and political life in India after independence are recorded.

Other Novels

In Indian English novel, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai are some of the outstanding novelists who deal with the theme of the changing status of women in society. During the period between 1982 and 1992, apart from the novels discussed above in Gujarati some other novelists like Ila Arab Mehta in *Shab ne Naam Nathi Hotu*(1991) and *Batris Putlini Vednao*(1982), Dhiruben Patel in *Kadambari*(1988) and *Ek Daal Mithi*(1992) have also raised their voices against the inhuman treatment that women receive from the male-dominated society.

In Gujarati these novels are path-breaking in the sense that they give voices to the hitherto silent sections of society through a presentation of their side of the story by re-writing the history from the vantage point of the sufferer. They record the social transformation of the victims of neglect, indifference and appropriation taking place in the post-independence India.

Novels with Political References

The picture of post-independence India has nicely been reflected in Indian English novel. The themes of partition, communalism and caste discrimination have been dealt with in their works by writers like Manohar Malgonkar, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh etc. In Gujarati, the works like *Akhepatar* (Bindu Bhatt) and *Mulsota Ukhdele* (Kamlaben Patel) are worth mentioning in this respect. The Gujarati novel also unravels the impact of political turmoil on society, human values and human relationships. Even the Corrupt and degenerated politicians and the issues like black marketing have also been dealt with in Gujarati novel.

Gandhini Kavad is a novel written by Harindra Dave. The novelist's social concern has been artistically presented in this novel. The novel clearly reflects how politicians made a quick departure from Gandhian ideals which had been a driving force during freedom struggle. The novelist is deeply concerned with the drastic changes in the outlook of people who have so easily forgotten the dedication of freedom fighters, disregarding the established guiding principles and existing moral set-up.

Karunashankar, the protagonist, is a school teacher. He is committed to Gandhian ideology. He is a man with unquestionable record of sincerity. However, the political parties exploit his son's ambitions for their own advantage. Karunashankar wants his son to get settled in his life and as such he finds himself caught in the trap set by the political parties. He becomes a tool in the hands of other politicians. This shows an aspect of the criminalization of politics as to how innocent people and dedicated politicians like Karunashankar Master are easily victimized by the corrupt politicians. The novel tragically presents the story of how a simple hearted and noble minded teacher has to compromise with his principles. The novel unfolds the evil design of the cunning rulers who play the foul game of politics. The novel is a poignant picture of the changing political values and as such presents a changing social structure. The politicians are for their personal gains and they are least interested in the welfare of the common man. The novelist seems to establish the fact that only moral and human values can save the degenerating political situations.

Bandhnagar is a novel written by Mohammad Mankad. It is a bulky novel spread in about 1355 pages. The characters of the novels can be placed into two sets, as they hold opposite views, values, morals and ideologies. Amubhai, the trustee of the Ashrama, Labhuben, Dr.

Desai, Vishakha, Kamlakar, and Surendra with their higher sense of devotion, dedication and selfless service to the society stand in sharp contrast with Vajubhai, Aruna, Navnit, Dhirubhai and Narandas who can go to any extent, fair or foul, in pursuit of their personal interest. Sandwiched between these two forces is the protagonist of the novel Ashish. He is an orphan and has been brought up in the Ashrama. He is in quest of self identity but fails miserably in his attempts.

The novel presents a realistic picture of India and Gujarat during the last quarter of the twentieth century. References to various socio-political movements, Communal riots, caste discriminations, elections, corruptions, political upheavals, Navnirman Movement, Emergence of Bangladesh, India-Pakistan relationship etc., and references to political leaders like Chimanbhai Patel, Ghanshyambhai Oza and others provide the novel with political atmosphere which increases its documentary value. However, this is not a political novel. The only purpose of the novelist here is to present a realistic picture of the times. He tries to show us how these changes have affected the lives of people.

Thus both these novels reflect the socio-political scenario of the post-independence India and analyse the political systems. After Independence, there was a steep fall in moral values. There was a sudden departure from Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals. These drastic changes were but natural to arrest the attention of the novelists. They present a harrowing picture of existing political scenarios and ideologies that govern the administration.

Some Other Novels

Mention may be made of some other novels which more or less, point to the negative or positive impact of politics on social life. They are: Harindra Dave's *Mota Aparadhi Mahelman*(1992), Dilip Ranpura's *Anubhavo Ujash*(1984), Darshak's *Zer to Pidh Chhe Jani Jani Part-III*(1985), Raghuvir Chaudhari's *Manorath*(1986) and *Shyamsuhagi*(1989).

Conclusion

This paper is a humble effort on my part to analyse some Gujarati novels written between 1982 to 1992 in order to trace the social change that has been reflected in them. The Gujarati novels of this phase incorporate the changes introduced in the political, social and economic spheres. It can be said that it is a decade of social revolution. Out of total twelve Gujarati novels which received the Sahitya Academy Award, four novels – *Sat Pagla Akashma*, *Asuryalok*, *Angaliyat* and *Ansar*- were written during this period. The most notable thing about the novels of this period is that a large number of them deal with the themes of feminine consciousness and Dalit consciousness.

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