



## **DALIT SPIRIT IN THE FOLK LITERATURE OF SAURASHTRA**

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Men are classified in four classes according to the three 'Gunas' (modes) of nature- 'Gunakarmavibhagayoh' 1- people with 'satva' (goodness) are Brahmins, people with 'Rajoguna' (passion) are Kshatriyas, people with 'Rajo' and 'Tamo' (passion and ignorance) are Vaishyas and people with 'Tamo' (ignorance) are Shudras, and lower than that are Chandal (dog-eaters). In the above cited verse Lord Krishna himself states that there are no differences of classes in devotional service. The people with material involvement may have such wrong notions as high class and low class but for people absorbed in spiritual world every man deserves supreme destination and transcendental bliss. Further the Lord specifies:

BrahmanakshatriyavishamShudranam cha Parantapa

KarmaniPravibhaktanisvabhavprabhavirgunaih<sup>1</sup>

[O chastiser of enemies (Arjuna), Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are distinguished by their qualities of work, in accordance with the modes of nature.]

Thus, the divisions took place according to man's attachment to work and not his birth. But latter people, especially connected with church, the priests made their own interpretation and began to suppress or even depress the lower classes on religious pretext, using their power, and it was the politics of religion rather than that of authority that worsened the condition. And these

people suffered for centuries under the wrongly interpreted religious principle. It reached so far that they were considered to be untouchables. With this suppression or oppression the term 'Dalit' comes into existence. 'Dalit' means suppressed or oppressed or even depressed. It also means exploited and down trodden. To this light, not only people belonging to the lower strata of society but women in India were also exploited. The aforesaid verse of 'Gita' indicates women also. The slaves of America may also be regarded 'Dalits' and we can see its spirit in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. The same spirit is there in the

stream of Black Literature. The striking example of the plight of Dalits and women are found in the great epic the *Ramayan*, too. In ‘Sunderkand’ of the *Ramayan* there is a chopai (couplet):

*Dhol, ganvar, shudra, pashu, nari, Ye sab tadankeadhikari.*<sup>2</sup>

[The drum, a stupid (uncultured, rustic), a person of low birth, quadruped (beast) and women, all these deserve severe beating] It is expressed by the great learned pandit ‘Tulsidas’, than what of a lay man?

There are two different notions about Dalit literature among scholars: i) It is the literature written only by Dalits. ii) It is the literature that involves Dalit spirit. There are some excellent examples of Dalit spirit in the folklore of Kathiyawad (Saurashtra). Folklore, being the lore of the yore, being full of human touch, can be more instrumental in awakening the people in general, literate or illiterate, cultured or uncultured, than any other literature.

A versatile poetic genius of Gujarat ‘Padmashree’ DulaKaag (1803-1977) is famous for his lofty tone, rhythm, rhyme and sweetness of his voice. He has depicted real, alive, and heart touching pictures of Dalit suffering and exploitation by other people especially in the poems on Gandhi. Such poems can awaken the masses. He has written beautiful padas and bhajans (hymns, verses) about the plight of Dalits and Gandhi’s concern for it. The Bhajan ‘BhayankarVratBhangavo’ about the fasts of Gandhi for protecting Dalits, ‘Mano Svabhav’ dealing with the scolding to people against Gandhi’s service to Dalits are noteworthy. The poems ‘Mohan-ne Trajave’ and ‘Mohan DoobaloKem’ show tremendous Dalit spirit.

In the first three padas (verses) of ‘Mohan DoobaloKem’ the poet expresses the feelings that Gandhi’s weakness and pain are due to the sufferings of Dalits:

“LaagieneHarijanbandhudaneelaya.”<sup>3</sup>

In the following padas, he depicts the alive picture of Dalits and scolds the people of higher classes:

*Vigatun e samajo koi HindatanaVediya re...ji,*

*Kyo tame deethoevado dosh;*

*Vadakarineenechhevadanvasaviyan re...ji,*

*Rudiyano hajeeyegayonahirosh. Mohan.....*

[Try to understand the details, o warms of scriptures of Hind, What such a great fault (blot) have you seen; Making fences forced them (Dalits) to dwell at the end And still the wrath (repulsion) of your heart not gone (calmed)]

And then the poet says,

Are you polluted by their shadows

Even if you don't touch them?

You see them with eyes full of poison

And yet they stoop calling you mother and father.....

And there is no human mercy in your mind.

Then the poet describes the services rendered by Dalits. What a heart-rending picture, when he says, -

*Vagarmajooreeyenevethyun-nan vremandpadyan re....ji,*

*Antarmanlakhatanaganubharaya;*

*Petaman peed enemathemelyamotala re....ji,*

*Pachheenekedeveeyajanthaya. Mohan...*

[The Sky-like (mammoth) load of drudgery on them

(Dalit women) without any wages,

Fire gets overflown in the heart while writing

The pain in stomach and huge weight (of bundles) on head

And then, she delivers a child on the way!]

The real situation of the time is depicted vividly. The officers used to catch the 'Vethiyans' (labourers without wages) from Harijanvas (dwelling place of Dalits) – may it be a man, a child or a woman, even a pregnant woman. And the plight, the limit of exploitation reaches its climax when the women who is forced to lift the unbearable weight delivers her child on the way!

In the last verses the poet depicts their religious side convincingly –Like all Hindus, they have the temples of Rama, plants of 'Tulsi' (holy basil) every home and they belong to us. The symbol of 'Tambura-Ektara', a musical instrument for singing Bhajans suggests the spiritual harmony. They becoming very unhappy, seeing the pain of others is the symbol of true 'Vaishnav' (devotee of lord Vishnu) and that is why the great devotee and poet Narshi Mehta (a high caste) was attracted to enter their homes. Then what is wrong with the lay man?

The same excellent example of Dalit spirit is there in the prolific genius, JhaverchandMeghani's poem "Chhellee Salam". Here, it is significant in the sense that the poem was composed on the incident of Gandhiji's fasts against the decisions of British Government to make separate voter groups for untouchables (the same dirty politics as that of old times). The purpose of Gandhi's fasts was to awaken the conscience of upper class Hindus. The poet also depicts the tyrannies exercised on untouchables by upper classes and Gandhiji's immense

suffering thereon. Though the poem is historic, there is no reference of its historicity, nor of Gandhi, his fasts and their reasons. The poem begins with the depiction of Gandhi's dying moments because of the fasts for Dalits. The way Gandhi bids farewell is really heart-touching. His first salutation is definitely to those for whom he stacked his life- the Dalits:

*So so re salamuanmaranbandhudaneke'jo re*

*Jhajherajuharjaganedejo ho.....ji!<sup>4</sup>*

[Convey hundreds of salutations to my brothers and a lot of juhar to the world....]

After Gandhi's love for all, the intense feeling of self sacrifice is striking-

*Teepeteepeshonitmarantoleetoleeapuntoye,*

*Pooranjenanprachhatkadiyeadashenaji*

*Eva pap davanalmanjalechhejanetamari*

*Dildanadungarsalagya-tharashenaji!*

[Though I weigh up and sacrifice every drop of my blood,

The repentance will never be fulfilled.

My motherland burns in such volcanic fire of sin

Ablazing volcano of heart won't extinguish!]

To be ready to weigh the blood is intense sacrifice in itself but the use of "TeepeTeepetoleetolee" the feeling of sacrifice becomes deeply intense- here is the readiness not to be given for the atonement of the sin which can never be fully atoned as the suffering caused to Dalits were really immense. The 'weighing' also resembles mythological reference of the king 'Shibi'.

The two mythological examples of the sin committed by our ancestors in the form of tyrannies on Dalits- Arjuna burning the Nagas of Khandav van and injustice of Lord Rama to the

Shudra, Shambook are really convincing. Saying “Mara Purvaj” (my ancestor) Gandhi willingly accepts to be the heir of the sin. The incidents of such tyranny and injustice are narrated directly without any touch of imagination and though the verses get carved into our hearts! Rama’s sin, motivated by Rishis, is depicted skillfully as Gandhi, being a devotee of Ram, should not hurt the dignity and honour of his lord:

Ragupati Ram mararudanovisamo-ene  
Rushionevachanekhadelkhotyun ho—ji.

After these illustrations, the depiction of the entire situation of Dalits by Meghani is absolutely heart-rending:

“Chheddhyan, Garadkidhanpruthvinanpetaman”- (We’ve cut them, burnt to ashes and buried alive into the earth!)

The use of various verbs proves the destruction as massacre. The following couplet describes the dirty politics in which the religious background (form) is given to the tyranny. Then Gandhi says, “Now is the limit and beware of the crash of the chariot of the religion, o gurus and priests”. He advises them to look within and serve for the true religion. Then Gandhi becomes ready again to establish the new religion befitting to this new age. Meghani shows the height to which a sacred soul can reach by the depiction of Gandhi’s feelings. The poem is concluded again with the reference of Gandhi’s sacrifice. But he prevents the people to shed tears for his farewell from this world and considers the incident as the ceremonial sacrifice for the liberation of Dalits. “Hasatanmukhadaniamanevidayundiyo re, valan.”  
(Bid me farewell with smiling faces, o dear ones!)

Thus the poem, depicting the Dalit spirit by the means of Gandhi’s dignified saintly character, with the exquisiteness and beauty of Bhajanvani stands really at the top! Apart from the poems, Meghani has written some folktales showing Dalit spirit. The story ‘Chamarajvalo’ is striking for the heroism of ChamarajVala for saving the life of the cobbler of his state and the sacrifice of JogadaDholi (The Dali). The king himself saves the Dalit lady by lifting her to his horseback not caring for untouchability in ‘DhedhkanyaniDuva’ and sets example of social reform ‘KaniyoJanpado’, ‘Chamarne Bole’, etc. are also remarkable stories in ‘Saurashtra-niRasdhar’ of Meghani.

Apart from these examples, in the saint traditions of Saurashtra, there were some Dalit saints, who created some popular and remarkable spiritual poetry in the form of padas (verses). Among them, Trikam, Hothi, Ravi or Rohidas, and Jivan are well known spiritual figures. The tradition of Dalit saints begins with Trikam, known as 'Vadina Sadhu'. Despite of the fierce opposition by Brahmins against the 'diksha' (ceremony for declaration as the saint) of the antyaj (dalit) saint Trikam, he proved himself as the true spiritual person. His padas also proves that – "All Brahma (godliness) is covered in the body of man, the soul without any form or shape is the true Krishna, and his ras dance is being played within." The very lucid and simple of Trikama's pada-constructions is his most popular one, depicting true form of devotion and vairagya (renunciation):

*Gharogharalakhjagana mere la!*

*Lal! Mara dilamansantolagivairagee....*

[O my dear, we are to alight every home with devotional consciousness. The true colour of renunciation is carved in my heart o saints....]

And his suggestion, not to see outward appearance only is really convincing-

*Kapada bee dhoyaabadhoot! Anchala bee dhoya e...ji*

*Jab lag manavonadhoya mere la! Lal mere....*

[What use (worth) is there if only the clothes and outer things are cleaned and the malice and spite of mind and heart are not removed!]

As far as quantity, universality and popularity are concerned, the first among all these saints is DasiJivan. There is not even a single hut which is free from the Vani (hymns) of DasiJivan. The people living in temples, ashramas, the bhajan singers and people connected with cattle business in the whole of Saurashtra sing and hear the sweet bhajans of DasiJivan. There are some illusions about him, but he was born as a son of a Chamar (tanner, Dalit) at Ghoghavadar village near Gondal. His surname was Dafada. Due to his affectionate appeals as Radha (Gopi-beloved) to Krishna in his padas, he was regarded as the incarnation of Radha and was called Dasi (the female servant of God):

*Jivanjagamanjagiya, narmathithiyanar,*

*Das namdarsaviya, e Radha avatar.*

[Jivan got awakened in the world, and became feminine, indicated the name Dasi, as he was the incarnation of Radha.]

See his farsighted and modernistic approach where he neglects dull outer austerities and rituals by using the metaphor of 'Piya-Piyu' (dear and darling)-

*Marannathijinannainanuparenhun to ghadiyegholiJaun*

*Shidkarunekadashee, shidtriye tank khaun,*

*Nathajinannainannirakhi, bhavtanbhojanpaun. Mara.....*

*Angane Ganga Gomati,hunshidRevajeeJaun*

*Adsathtirathangane, hun to nityatriveneenaun. Mara.....*

[I die on the eyes of my lord every moment.

Why should I do ekadashi, and fast two times,

Beholding the eyes of Nathaji (lord), I get the food of feelings

Why should I go to Revaji (to purify with holy bath) as the Ganga and Gomti are at my yard.

All the places of pilgrimage are at my home, I always bath in Triveni. (The meeting place of three rivers)]

Many saints have sung the padas or verses depicting the vanity of the world, but as T.S.Eliot says the ten percent of the spiritual poetry stands above all. DasiJivan falls in this category. The inner fragrance of the life of DasiJivan, even belonging to the age when untouchability was prevailing in the society, can be seen in the incident when a high caste woman, who was fascinated by his personality, followed him on the way and disclosed her intention, as he sings:

*Evan shun caravan such parakanbai*

*Karamemandel hoy tejthayji,*

*Rup dekhinavracheyenbai!*

*Pat potani jay....*

*DasiJivankedilmanvicharo,*

*Ramnebhajocho such thay. Evan.....*

[What use of the happiness of others, o respected woman!

One shouldn't get attracted to the outward appearance

Otherwise the reputation and dignity are lost

Think by your heart,

And worship god to get happiness, says Jivan]

Finally one can see the spontaneity of DasiJivan in his following pada which was composed on an incident when a woman said about him that he seemed to be care free and gay horse- rider:

*Men mastanamastikhelun, main deevanadarshanka,  
Khamiyakhadaghatlaikhelun, Jeettanaabdaundanka. Me.....*

[I am care free and gay,

Playing with delight

And I am insane (mad) for God's sight.

Playing with the weapon (sword) of forgiveness in hands

I ring the bells of victory.]

And then the lines of resembling Kabir's "PibatRamraslagiKhumari":

*Ramnamkaamalpilavun, rasananamratavunga.*

..... *Men sipahihunmemarka.*

[I am a gay soldier but of God (not of other) and serve the elixir of 'Ramnam' (God's devotion and consciousness).]

To sum up, if the standard of the above cited poetry is considered and conscious endeavor towards the higher perfectional attainment for the quality of literature and development of human and universal values are made constantly, we hope, Dalit poetry may prosper and acquire the peak of success.

## References

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