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DIRECTIONS IN HINDI LITERATURE IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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Abstract

The modern period of Hindi Literature commences with the achievement of India's independence. Whilst Indian, and especially Hindi literature, has been inextricably bound to the ancient literary traditions and values, there have been *distinct* trends in different periods of Indian History. Kabir and Tulasidasa in the Bhakti period and Prasada and Premchand during the freedom struggle, made memorable contributions to Hindi literature as well as national life. Independence facilitated the focus of attention on hitherto marginalized and neglected sectors of society - the "Little Man", women's issues, questions of sexual morality, corruption in national life etc. All Hindi Literary modes imbibed new ideas and infused new life into Hindi literature. The first three decades of independence witnessed tremendous growth of Hindi literature. This paper will attempt to analyse the directions in which Hindi literature progressed over the past fifty years. The challenges of globalization, the social, political and economic implications of national and regional power conflicts and the role of writers therein are all crucial to this discourse.

It is traditionally held that the modern period of Hindi literature commenced in 1857; however, scholars apply the term 'contemporary' to signify the same period. Many new ideas and directions in Hindi literature emerged after the attainment of India's independence, leading to the view that the

term 'contemporary' is more appropriate for describing the post-independence period, which followed the century-long struggle for freedom from British rule.

Contemporary Hindi poetry, drama and novels were infused with fresh energy by the new avenues for literary creativity heralded by the declaration of one united, sovereign, democratic India after a millennium of subjugation by different powers. Whilst the 'old' was not categorically rejected, but rather used in new contexts, the 'struggle' was over. Free India presented opportunities for writers and the masses to look at themselves as people, analyze their problems and criticize their shortcomings. Writers have succeeded in presenting the varied and changing faces of Indian society through their art, in a manner which was no less vigorous than literature which constituted part of the freedom struggle. Nationhood, multifaceted advancement and onset of the global-village-phenomenon, added to the economic, social, political and moral dialectics, enabled Hindi literature to flourish in a profusion of memorable works particularly in the first three decades following independence.

Handa (1978:474) feels that "Hindi's development since 1947 has not been proportionate to the many advantages that the forces released by political freedom and governmental primacy gave it" and laments that the writers did not continue to present the pulse of the nation as Premchand had. This was partially due to the continued ascendancy of the English language in Swatantra Bharat where "speaking English is a matter of pride, whereas speaking Hindi is an indication of inferiority. As long as this colonial mentality prevails it is futile to talk of the progress of Hindi" (Ramdarash Mishra, 1998:12).

The foregoing views reflect the neglect of Hindi and fears of loyalists about the future of the national language. The Hindi literary writers have persisted in their vocation, enriching the fabric of national life with little recompense for themselves. To this extent the Hindi language is assured of its due place in the life of the country.

Despite the portrayal of foreign philosophies and political trends in works before and after independence, for example, Marxism, these foreign influences could not acquire a dominant and enduring position in Hindi

literature, in a society where “Gandhism has been an active philosophy of life,” and especially because there was “enough misery in India, and the Indian poets did not have to learn to be miserable, cynical or independent, from outside (Gokak, 1979:192).

Hindi poetry has been in the forefront of literary creativity and the national aspiration, be it in the form of Brajbhasha or Khari Boli. Hindi remains the symbol of India’s identity, together with the other Indian languages (Ramdarash Mishra, 1998:12). The past twenty to thirty years have seen the emergence and flourishing of Hindi poetry with the masses as its object of focus. Experimental poetry (Prayogavada) and New Poetry (Nai Kavita) altered poets’ perspectives and instilled greater self-control, following the brief but ignominious period of Akavita (non-poetry). Whilst Handa (1978:472) says that Akavita “stripped poetry of all pretension”, Dr Ramdarash Mishra (1998:10) characterizes this class of poetry as the “morbid limb of post-independence Hindi literature - it rejects values, espouses artificial or false rebellion, and its central theme has no correlation with our society, fundamental conflicts and thought processes.”

Kailash Bhushan Jindal (1993:344), probably despairing the lowering of standards of poetry as manifested in the proliferation of magazines on Hindi literature, and the populism encouraged by Poetic gatherings (Kavi Sannam) opined that “poetry as a mode of literary expression has ceased to exist.”

The above opposing views with regard to poetry and its manifestation as Akavita reinforce the assessment that valuable new directions in Hindi poetry evolved within the ethos of a free(d) society. The Experimental Poets/New Poets voiced the greater concerns of literature, society and culture. As the representatives of the Anguished Poetry (Vikshubdha) they also sought to harmonize the Progressive (Pragativadi) and the Experimental poetry. Post Independence poets “not merely questioned but established the oppressed as the hero” (Handa, 1978:442). Rameshvar Shukla Anchal condemned capitalistic exploitation as well as economic disparities in society. The voice of Balkrishna Sharma Navin, not heard since the “Juthe Patte” at the turn of the century, reverberated through the words of poets of this period.

Handa (1978:458) confirms that the new poet “is more enthusiastic in dwelling on the ugly and obscure in life.” This statement is not only symptomatic of the prevalent human tendency to glorify only the sensory appealing, but engages one in the question “What is beautiful? What is important in life? The progressive poets also dwelt on the obscure and poor, but espoused the cause of people long neglected and exploited by the wealthy. The New Poets as well as the writers of the Tar Saptak (1943: Agyeya, Girija Kumar Mathur, Nalini Vilochan Sharma, Dharmavir Bharati, Naresh Kumar Mehta, Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, Laxmikant Verma, Jagadish Chandra Gupta) disparaged the Progressives’ quest for self-fulfilment and self-development. The New Poets stood for the best in man and his personality.

Dr Nagendra expressed the view that it is not possible to evaluate the achievements of New Poetry at this stage (1996:13). This signifies the far-reaching effects of this movement in poetry-writing in Hindi, beginning after the publication of the Second Saptak in 1951. Dr Devraj Pathik (1996:41) whilst pronouncing that no Nai Kavita attained the status of an immortal work, acknowledges that New Poetry tried to portray the ironies and inconsistencies of the times, and post-Independence India has been represented here. Dr Pathik also believes that the New Poets fostered the feeling of Universal Brotherhood by espousing the cause of downtrodden people everywhere.

While poets of the earlier generation such as Nagarjuna, Agyeya, Kedarnath Agraval, Sarvesvar Dayal Saxena and Ramdarash Mishra continued to write, young poets came to the forefront. Devi Prasad Mishra, Nanda Bharadwaj, Keshavsharan, Kumar Ambuja are some of these. Some notable works of the Nai Kavita Period are Akal men Saras (Kedarnath Singh), Julius Jahan Ja Raha Hai (Ramdarash Mishra) Behatar Duniya Ke Liye (Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari) and Dhup Dikhaye Arsi (Ravindra Bhramar).

In the Nai Kavita genre oppressed and exploited women are portrayed in terms of stark reality. Harinarayan Vyas (Dusra Saptak, p.78) resorts to the Mahabharata to highlight the tragedy of women everywhere, in the form of Draupadi:

Draupadi Si Chikhti Hain Nariyan Nirvastra

*Jinke Chir Dusshasan Kahin Par
Phenk Aya Khinch Kar
(Women ignominiously disrobed by men like Dusshasan are
screaming like
Draupadi for help)*

These lines show not only the arrogance and brutality of men against women, but also their contempt towards their victims.

The classics have been the source of many modern literary themes and poets have used the figure of sinful and penitent Ahalya to portray women's predicament, e.g. Ahalya by Prabha Khetan, Atmadan by Baldev Vanshi, Abhishapta Shila by Chandrikaprasad Dixit, and O Ahalya by Ramkumar Verma.

Similarly ancient tales and legends lent themselves to poignant poetry, some depicting war, e.g. Dharmavir Bharati's Kanupriya and Andhayuga, Bhavani Prasad Mishra's Kaljayi, Naresh Mehta's Pravada, Parva and Sanshaya Ki Rat, Dushyanta Kumar's Eka Kantha Vishapayi and Srikant Verma's Garuda Kisne Dekha Hai and Magadha.

Contemporary poets have also written against terrorism and assassination, racial discrimination (Arun Kamal's Afrika Ki Yatra, Rama Singhs' Kale Desh Ki Awaz and Ramdarash Mishras' Kali Andhiyan).

The foregoing has outlined the directions adopted by poetry in the Hindi language in Independent India. Whilst not attaining the status of *magnum opus*, these works have demonstrated their validity and relevance on the basis of their deep concern for humanity. They also approached the sublime heights of the classics by applying and examining features of the ancient works with regard to present-day society.

The post-independence period has not abandoned aspects of literature, which sustained Indian culture for many millennia. The appearance of Sohan Lal Ramrangs' *Uttar Saket*, first published in 1981 allays the misgivings inherent in comments such as the following:

“After independence it had begun to seem that writing poetry etc. on Rama and Krishna was an anachronistic and seditious activity. Any discussion on Rama and Krishna was limited to carping and caviling. It therefore gives great satisfaction to find such a major work (Uttar Saket) replete with devotion: (*Dasharath Ojha in Uttar Saket, Pt. II, Jai Sao Samiti, Delhi, 1991*).

Contemporary Hindi drama is different from Shakuntala and Prasad’s plays - its theatrical aspects may not resemble the offerings of the Parsi stage, yet dramatic works of this period are not lacking in the pathos and satire of the old, the inspiration of the Prasadian plays or the biting humour or satire of the popular stage. These elements combined help to reflect the human condition which the plays place before us. True to the dictum that drama is the most appealing mode of poetic expression, plays have been produced in sublime verse; those that are in prose provide the audience or reader with the joys of delectable diction. Contemporary Hindi dramas therefore are able to entertain or give joy, and also edify with subtle precepts. This is true of conventional longer plays as well as the Ekankis. In the modern period beginning with the struggle for national freedom and identity, Hindi dramatic works attempted to counter the growing influence of western culture and instill national pride. “No other form of literature could combine instruction with entertainment so well” (Handa, 1978:369).

After the 1940’s the new drama assumed an intellectual/psychological dimension, exploring ordinary life situations amongst the middle and lower classes. Whilst Udaishankar Bhatt displayed sympathy for the oppressed woman of society, who besides being the handmaiden of husband and family was also the prey of unscrupulous and unprincipled males of the higher society (e.g. Matsyagandha). Prithvinath Sharma’s plays propounded the view that women should find happiness and fulfilment in the home. This approach was challenged in all the literary modes during the post-independence period when the notions of equality and rights was extended to the relationships between the sexes. Political corruption and popular disgruntlement with the country’s governance, and the multifarious woes of the common people found a prominent place in Hindi plays.

Upendranath Ashk explored the complex marital relations in *Swarga Ki Jhalak*, *Adi*, and *Bhanwar*. Whilst portraying the problem of sexual

frustration in the Indian context, he also pointed out the withering effect of the lack of human love. Jagadish Chandra Mathur (Konark, Sharadiya, Pahala Raja) tried to reconcile the old values with the present needs and desires of society. With the radio and institutions such as the National School of Drama and Sangeet Nataka Akademi encouraging dramatic productions, Dharmavir Bharati (Andha Yuga) J. Mathur, (above) Mohan Rakesh (Ashadh Ka Ek Din, Laharon Ka Rajhans, Adhe Adhure), Laxminarayan Lal (Andha Kunwa, Darpan, Mada Cactus), amongst others, created dramatic works of lasting interest and impact. Laxminarayan Lal as well as Rakesh (Andhere Band Kamre) boldly explored various aspects including demands and conflicts constituting the sexual basis of man-woman relations. For Indian society, which preached sublimation of sex and relegated man-woman relationships to the private domain, these plays represent a new direction and outlook that presage the sexual revolution in India.

Other dramatists to portray social transformation were Ramesh Bakshi (Devayani Ka Kahana Hai, Vamachar) Mridula Garga (Ek Aur Ajnabi) and Mannu Bhandari (Bina Divaron Ka Ghar). "Absurd" plays were meant to "breakdown traditional values thus underlining human values and the paradoxes of life (Ramjanma Tiwari, 1996:66). Some noteworthy works in this category are Laxmikant Verma's Roshni Ek Nadi Hai, Mani Madhukar's Rasa Gandharva, Kashinath Singh's Dhoas and Mudrarakshasa's Tilchatta, Marjiwa, Yours Faithfully and Tendua.

Dramatists followed the poets in employment of ancient myths and symbols in the modern context to highlight the dilemmas, contradictions and injustices accompanying human existence. Ramjanma Tiwari (1996:66) claims that the "mythical dramas which "emerged in the 1970's provide no sentiment of untruth/truth." One can assume that the dramatists suspended judgement, and left to the reader/spectator the task of value judgement. Notable works in this group are Surendra Verma's Surya Ki Anthim Kiren Se Pahali Kiren Tak, Draupadi, Giriraj Kishore's Praja Hi Rahane Do, Bhisma Sahani's Madhavi and Shanker Shesha's Ek Aur Dronacharya, Komal Gandhar and Mayavi Sarovar.

Hindi drama has attained parity with poetry and prose fiction "in attempting to deal with political, social and psychic upheavals of the times" (Jindal,

1993:268). Gyanadeva Agnihotri's *Shuturmurg* satirizes the ostrich-like conduct of politicians. Sarvesvar Dayal Saksena's *Bakri* is an exposé of hypocrisy in present day politics. Hamidullah's *Darinde*, Vishnu Prabhakar's *Tutte Parivesh*, Narendra Kohli's *Shambuk Ki Hatya*, Daya Prakash Sinha's *Katha Ek Kans Ki*, Sudarshan Majithiya's *Chauraha and Desh Ke Liye* are some of the contemporary plays invested with socio-political awareness, and consciousness of the hollowness and despair of ordinary peoples' lives. The skilful use of the satirical style and language enhances the popular appeal of these plays.

Hindi drama has remained popular because of its realism and its close links with the stage. Radio, television and the stage offer tremendous potential for the development of Hindi play-writing, provided the dramatists continue to reflect the realities of the life of the common people and project the national and cultural consciousness which "binds the people to the soil (Kathuriya, 1996:197).

In keeping with the change(s) in national concerns after independence, the Hindi novel experienced the freedom of exploring the various human, social, economic and political facets of life. Dr Ramdarash Mishra (1996:183) affirms that the contemporary novel gave the long overdue attention to the neglected members of society. In his own writings, he took inspiration from Renu's *Maila Anchal* and wrote *Pani Ka Prachir* and tried "to express all my lived experiences of the rural environment" (Speil 10:2:10). In this way the post-independence Hindi novels gave expression to the concerns, joys and sorrows of the weak and the meek. These concerns are founded on the failure of freedom from British rule translating into hope and improvement for the masses. Jindal (1993:230) believes that the Congress's failure to usher the country into the millennium (Ramarajya) as it had held out, caused people to be

"greatly disillusioned and disenchanted. There is corruption and moral turpitude in all walks of life, economic disparities have widened, exploitation of the poor continues, the individual rebels against the social order and sex inhibition."

Thus according to Jindal novels such as *Maila Anchal* and *Parti Parikatha*, written as a challenge to the aforementioned ills of society, remove the veil

of opportunism from the Congress. If Premchand's Hori died a victim of his milieu (of British supported oppressive Zamindari) other characters of Hindi novels in free India are shown to be raising their voices against exploitation (e.g. Balachanma) and "proclaim that the landless farmer is now awake and is not going to take things lying low" (Jindal, 1993:229).

It emerges that post-independence novels made the complete expression of "lived truth" possible, as well as the drawing in of the neglected regions (Anchals) into the mainstream of Indian life and literature. In order to give expression to lived truths, psychological novels were written. Agyeya's earlier *Shekhar Ek Jivani* was joined later by Nadi Ke Dvipa. Renu's *Maila Anchal* shows the breakdown of values and relationships in the far-flung corners of the country, where so many of India's people live. In the same vein Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon*, Srilal Shukla's *Rag Darbari*, Shivprasad Singh's *Alag Alag Vaitarani* and Ramdarash Mishra's *Jal Tutta Hua*, Viveki Rai's *Sona Mati*, *Himanshu* and Joshi's *Kagar Ki Ag*, bring vividly and vibrantly the people, the earth and the emotions of the common people to the reader.

Hindi novelists did not completely avert their eyes from urban life. Yashpal's *Jhutha Sach* describe the traumas of division. Amrit Lal Nagar's *Bund Aur Samudra* tells of the fracturing relations between individual and society. Naresh Mehta's *Yaha Patha Bandhu Tha* portrays the normal, sensitive, caring middle class. Bharati's short novel *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghora* records the hope and trust between people before these break down. Rakesh's *Andhere Band Kamre* portrays the lives of the Delhi elite. Jagadamba Prasad Dixit's *Murdaghar* is a horrifying, yet compelling short novel on Bombay's prostitutes. In this novel, the image of the prostitutes' quarters, indeed the whole city, being a mortuary speaks volumes about the breakdown of values, lack of compassion and the effects of the rat-race on humanity.

Notable women writers in this period wrote dispassionately about women and their lives, not glorifying women as some male writers tended to do. Usha Priyamvada's *Rukogi Nahin Radhika* and *Pachpan Khambhe Lal Divare* show educated, ultra modern women. These women find themselves "shackled by an inexplicable helplessness and social constraint" (Ramdarash Mishra, 1996:185).

Krishna Sobti touches on the energy and courage released by the frustration of women. Sexual liberation becomes an important theme - e.g. *Mamta Kalia's Beghar*. Other women writers of note are Manjul Bhagat, Shashi Prabha, Raji Seth, Kamal Kunwar, Mridula Garga, Chitra Mudgal, Mehrunnisa Parvez.

Recent Hindi novels continue exploring human relations in all their complexity, particularly between man and woman. Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Nar-Nari* showcases the Male Chauvinist Pig with a mother-fixation. It is "an authentic documentary of changing women's and unchanging men's mutual sexual conflict - of a man who flees from every action, "illegitimate and immoral" of the woman, to his mother's lap. The only basis of his relationship with woman is suspicion and doubt, and the pain and retribution inflicted on her (Hans, January 1997:94).

The ordinary man or Laghumanava who was being accorded the dominant role in the contemporary Hindi novels, no more remained the little or insignificant spectator that he used to be: once recognized he became the great man (Mahamanava) who decided the fate of his country and society (Sitaram 1977:9). Free Indians questioned the traditional institutions and values of society. Technological progress and urbanisation exerted their pressures on society and the family, which underwent change. Capital became the value to be sought (Paneri 1974:23). Prakash Chandra Gupta (1966:88) had correctly gauged that the post-Premchand novelists pointed the novel in new directions because the old values were no more relevant. The capitalists became the new nobility. This trend resulted in the production of outstanding Hindi novels, depicting the ordinary man's struggle against exploitation by capital.

Around the time of Independence Hindi novels entered a new phase, when hypocrisy and double standards were boldly exposed. In this period, at home people were "steadfastly religious, traditional, moral and conventional, and outside they projected themselves as progressive and supporters of women's rights, plus equality of all humans regardless of caste (Suresh Sinha, 1972:125).

The change of literary focus after the end of the freedom struggle enabled writers to place under the microscope the real lives of the real people that inhabited India: the masses - the majority of them poor, residing in the rural areas and hitherto denied rights as persons. Women were the victims of all the corruption, selfishness and brutality of that enormous mass of humanity that is India. Rajendra Yadav in his *Shaha Aur Mat* (p. 243) described the lot of Indian woman thus:

“Women’s position is the same everywhere, be she a princess or a handmaiden; she has to act according to men’s whims and desires and her status in society depends on these whims.”

With women constituting the larger portion of Indian society, it is not unusual to find writers turning their attention to the plight of women who have been eulogized and divinized for their conformity to norms of virtue and conduct, but remain forever men’s subordinates, and whose tale of woe was so aptly summarized by Maithilisharan Gupta: “Woeful woman’s life, this is the story of your entire existence, with your bosom full of life-giving milk and eyes a deluge of tears.” Thus the novels dealing with the rise of the marginalized sectors of society in the contemporary era provided opportunities for the promotion of women’s rights as well.

For thousands of years the silent or dumb server and observer of other peoples’ lives, the little man (and little woman) at last became part of the greater human society. Overwhelmed by this exposure to things beyond his might and ken, one would have expected the little man to be intimidated out of his wits, “but for some reason, inspite of the feeling of reverting to one’s littleness in the presence of the great, one does not feel little any more” (Naresh Mehta: *Nadi Yashasvi Hai*, p. 149). Such is the effect of empowerment of the downtrodden! The way to elevate all humanity to the same level was shown to writers by renowned thinker Dharmavir Bharati (in his *Manava Mulya Aur Sahitya*, p.106): One had to accord “the smallest member of society the same dignity as that given to the greatest, so that no distinction is made between little and big, where the recognition of one is not based on the obliteration of the other.”

Premchand has been the most influential literary personality of modern India. Within the constraints of his time and the parameters of the freedom

struggle he cast his gaze on Indian society and castigated it for its wickedness, follies and foibles. He chose as his major leading character the humble Surdas who had none of these qualities; only a disarming honesty and altruism. In spite of the fact that Premchand's rebellious character Gobar voices his dissatisfaction with the socio-economic relationships of his society, he unfortunately does not liberate himself from the surrounding circumstances. Yet "Premchand was the first novelist to be seen sitting in the hovels of the poor, talking to them by their fireside, as much as he is seen in the tall palaces of the great, disparaging the lives of the lowly (Tribhuwan Singh, 1965:180). In Premchand and his novels, especially *Godan*, one sees "a reflection of the present age and the labour pangs of the coming era (Tribhuwan Singh 1965:211).

The affirmation through literature of the humble and hapless masses of humanity constitutes the most significant contribution of contemporary Hindi literature. Notions of equality and brotherhood are basic to the Indian ethos; however, these ideals were not promoted or practised by society at large. It was left to the contemporary writers, encouraged by progressive forces at work abroad, to reinstate these values to give meaning to freedom and the rights under the Constitution of sovereign India. This may also explain the use of symbols of the past to question and contextualize the schisms and crises of the present.

The achievement of social and economic justice in a society long accustomed to exploitation and oppression was not feasible without struggle. Balachanama predicts (p. 102) that "one day the lowest strata of society will have to fight the upper class Indians in the same way that all Indians are fighting the British now (i.e. in 1937) Mangarua of *Lohe Ke Pankh* is an authentic little man, born a Chamar, who frees himself from the bondage of a labourer and makes himself independent as a rickshaw puller. His poverty and lowly station do not prevent him from being humane and compassionate. He cannot be a silent spectator of corruption and injustice. His consciousness develops as he tries to improve his economic and educational position. He joins the socialist party and the labour movement! Mangarua's qualities and character grow beyond that of Balachanama, who was a citizen of British India. Mangarua's wings are of steel (*Lohe Ke Pankh*) but they can one day fly as his rickshaw flies on wings of steel, giving Mangarua dignity and financial freedom!

The upliftment of the little man of the old order of Indian society was a multi-faceted process, involving social, economic, political, moral and sexual questions that contributed to the subjugation of the individual. We also see that in this era, whilst the welfare of society as a whole is not abandoned, the rights of the individual as a member constituting that society are accorded primacy.

Personal freedom found expression in relations between man and woman - in *Andhere Band Kamare, Gunahon Ka Devata* and *Simae Tutti Hain*. In *Sara Akash* Rajendra Yadav depicts the stifling impact of the joint family. This outburst in *Sara Akash* (p. 228) expresses the feelings of Indian youth:

I will no longer live in the past, like a ghost. My mind is now cleansed of all the trash that was put into it. Which great era will come to herald which we little wheels will move in unison?

The obvious answer is - the little man, shedding off his littleness, will be the harbinger of that era - that heaven of freedom!

Rights enshrined in the constitution were also to be fought for. Political activity was no more the preserve of the rich and powerful. Lutto of *Parti Parikatha* becomes a leader; the bureaucrats had to be reminded of this right to be a leader: "The officer must realize that Lutto has some position too. Lutto is a leader of the people (*Parti Parikatha*, p. 35). Present day leaders and the wealthy who have garnered power from the period of British rule are depicted as the corrupt, oppressive *new* little man, (generally Congresswallas).

New social values amongst the ordinary people were founded on new political, economic, moral and sexual thinking. The exercise of rights as workers was vigorously promoted by labour unions which emerged as the workers' champions. Yashpal in *Manushya Ke Rupa* (p. 46) wrote that if a hundred workers unite they can topple the mountain. The Company (employer) prospers on the toil of the workers. This shows worker power.

The political developments of this period can be summed up with this line from Chatursen Shastri's *Bagula Ke Pankh* (p. 98): "This phenomenon is

unique in the political history of India - that the highest office is reserved for asses, whilst qualified workers take instructions from them, do all the work and the asses only have to append their signature.” Srilal Shukla in his *Rag Darbari* (pp.35-36) satirizes the use of puppets for political purposes when Mangaldas, hitherto a lackey called Sanichur (inauspicious), is nominated by Vaidyaji for the post of village chief! The poor man’s transformation from Sanichur to Mangal, and elevation from bhang-making lackey to village headman does not necessarily signify Sanichur’s elevation from little to great man, but it certainly shows that Vaidyaji, manipulator *par-excellence*, is the **new little man** of Hindi literature.

Revolt against the establishment is directed at caste, economic exploitation, human rights, democratic political rights and corruption. Balachanama rejects the status quo. The slogan “the workers shall eat” is raised in *Maila Anchal* (p. 126). The desire to rise above traditional family occupations and adapt to modern times in keeping with one’s abilities and potential becomes popular. Ratna in *Sagar, Laharen Aur Manushya* (p. 106) queries whether she has acquired education merely to catch and sell fish, just as her mother does?

The shrinking of the world into a global village presents threats as well as opportunities for the little man and his values. The vast land of India is already seen shrinking into a village - in *Rag Darbari* - where Shivpalganj seems to be absorbing the whole country in an agglutination of the hideousness and chicanery prevalent in the country. The attractions of western culture and values pose greater threats because globalisation is re-colonizing the Indian mind. “The transient smartness of English” has a strong hold on people” (Raji Seth in *Vagarth* May/June 1995, p. 23). “Faceless faces” is becoming the norm in the global world. Identity and culture would become the early victims of this phenomenon if writers fail to address the issues: the global village signals the “End of the struggle for national self-identity” (Shambhunath in *Vagarth* May/June 1995, p. 103).

The post independence novelists had provided the recipe for the preservation of the national identity and integrity by selecting the neglected sectors of society and the far-flung regions of the country as subjects of their novels. In order to ensure cultural continuity while promoting modern scientific analysis of things that matter to people’s lives, writers have employed

characters, episodes and views from ancient literary sources in their modern works. Thus readers become aware of the past while understanding the present. While works of this nature, e.g. *Ek Aur Dronacharya, Shambuk ki Hatya*, question the actions of revered characters of Indian culture, others extol in new idioms and perspectives those which are already established in the pantheon of the Hindus of India. There is hope for Hindi literature and the masses of India in the face of globalisation: works such as Sohan Lal Ramrung's *Uttar Saket* (1981) so well received by writers and scholars will help to anchor the Indian psyche on the Indian soil.

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TULASIDASA'S VISION OF SOCIETY IN THE RAMACARITAMANASA

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Abstract

The Ramacaritamanasa of Tulasidasa deserves to be studied holistically. Goswami Tulasidasa devoted profound attention to his society before putting his thoughts into words. If Valmiki was moved to write his Ramayana by the grief of the "crane" bird, Tulasidasa was moved by the outcry of the masses for love, peace, justice, tolerance and protection. It would thus be expected that he would respond with the total Rama ethos imbibed by him for many decades in a constructive, positive manner. Tulasidasa wrote that "Of glory, poetry and affluence that alone is blessed which, like the celestial river Ganga, is conducive to the good of all" (Balakanda 13,5). His Ramacaritamanasa evinces this philosophy and attribute throughout. A detailed discussion of this concept, and analysis of the text of Tulasidasa in episodes involving the poor, humble, downtrodden and despised representatives of humanity will form the body of this paper. It will be demonstrated that Tulasidasa attempted to elevate humanity through social transformation; and that he employed the all-pervasive figure of Rama to effect the changes.

The "Ramayana" as an epic work of Valmiki, and an integral part of Indian/Hindu culture, profoundly influenced India and South and South East Asia since ancient times. It was able to achieve this effect on account of its

dedication to the upliftment of society, and its philosophy of unity of life in all forms--human, animal and vegetable. While reinforcing the Hindu ethico-philosophical values of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, the Ramayana and the Rama ethos sought to locate these values within the context of human society. Thus the Ramayana responded to circumstances of its time while also providing guidelines for posterity.

History brings about change in human societies; hence the Ramayana, containing the quintessence of Hindu religion, philosophy, ethics and morals, underwent various adaptations to meet the challenges faced by society. Valmiki's Ramayana thus portrays Aryan culture at its peak whereas Tulasidasa had to extricate Hindu society from despair generated by foreign domination, social disintegration and religious conflicts.

The Valmiki Ramayana is intended to confer blessings and spiritual grace on all humanity. Valmiki conveys this through the boon pronounced by Brahma:

*Yavad sthasyanti girayaha saritascha mahitale /
Tavad Ramayana katha lokesu pracharisyati /*

As long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow, so long shall the Ramayana be cherished among men and save them from sin (Valmiki Ramayana I; 36-37).

Valmiki's vision was focused on elevating human society, which was at the peak of material prosperity, to a noble, benign level-- approaching the ideal envisaged by the sages and seers as the upholder of the virtues encompassed by the term "Dharma". In attempting to articulate this vision of a man who would surpass even the gods in virtues and attributes, Valmiki opens his Srimad Ramayana with the questions:

Who can possibly be full of virtues in this world at present?
Nay, who is possessed of prowess and knows what is right?
Who is conscious of services done, truthful of speech and firm of resolve? Who is possessed of right conduct and who is friendly to all living beings? Who is a man of knowledge?
Nay, who is powerful and who has a singularly lovable

appearance? Who has subdued his self? Who has conquered anger? Who is possessed of splendor and who is above fault-finding, and whom do the very gods dread when his wrath has been (apparently) provoked in battle? (Valmiki Ramayana 1; 2-4).

The answer is Sri Rama, who is the perfect hero of the Ramayana. Sri Rama has inherent good qualities, values, inner strength and physical beauty. He advocates adherence to truth and devotion to Dharma. Affection, compassion and discretion are part of his magnificent character. Rama's conduct and way of life have made him the ideal role model for all human beings.

As a supposed bandit turned sage, Valmiki recognized the pitfalls of the path of pleasure and profit through unjust and immoral methods. In order to counterbalance the destabilization of society through the ascendancy of such retrograde tendencies, Valmiki wove the story of Sri Rama into a tapestry of epic poetry, philosophy, mythology and loving spiritual counsel.

Social changes brought about by historical and political developments necessitated, first of all, the rendering of the Ramayana in languages other than Sanskrit. The rise of caste and class and concomitant conflicts dictated the need for changes within the Ramayana tradition. Religious/interdenominational conflicts also engaged the minds of authors of the Ramayana variations. Whilst Goswami Tulasidasa was able to respond to the foregoing in his Avadhi (Hindi) Ramayana called the Ramacaritamanasa, not all scholars concur on his contribution to social development.

In Tulasidasa's time Hindus were powerless in their own country under theocratic Muslim rule, and were excluded from any form of benefits from the state. The atrocities that the Hindus were subjected to were enormous. The Hindu masses were left in total political and social devastation through constant persecution and degradation. With regard to religion, the theocratic, proselytizing Muslim regime ensured that "there could be only one faith, one people and one all over-riding authority. There could be no place for non-believers or infidels" (Luniya 1978:98-99).

Tulasidasa lived in a period of social, political and religious upheaval in India. Recognizing the potential of the Ramayana and Rama as its central figure for transforming Indian society, he appropriated Vaishnava Bhakti which was further defined into Rama Bhakti, and crafted the Ramacaritamanasa as a blueprint of social, political and religious reconstruction and reconciliation. He perceived the possibility of a noble, just society under God; and his inner self found expression in creating the ideal of Rama and Ramrajya for the deliverance of his countrymen.

Tulasidasa did not write a new Ramayana story or create a new God. He began where Valmiki stopped--where Rama is equated to Vishnu or Narayana; identifying Rama with Vishnu through the Gita's concept of the avatara

*yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati bharata
abhyuthanamadharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham
paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskrutam
dharma sansthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge-yuge*

Whenever righteousness is on the decline and unrighteousness is on the uprise, then I manifest Myself. For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evildoers, and for establishing dharma on a firm footing, I am born from age to age (Bhagavadgita 4 : 7 & 8).

Tulasidasa proclaimed:

*jaba jaba hoi dharam kai hani, badhahi asur adham-abhimani
karahi aniti jai nahi barani, sidahi bipra dhenu sura dharani
taba taba prabhu dhari bibidh sarira, harahi krpanidhi
sajjan pira*

Whenever virtue declines and the vile and haughty demons multiply and work iniquity that cannot be told, and whenever Brahmans, cows, gods, and earth itself are in trouble, the gracious Lord assumes various (transcendent) forms and relieves the distress of the virtuous (Balakanda 120, 3/4).

The lapse of dharma in Tulasidasa's time was visible all round. The Gita's projection of divine intervention becomes in Tulasidasa an expression of rampant evil and turmoil. His second line (above) - *badhahi asur adham-abhimani*, followed by - *karahi aniti jai nahi barani* - enlarges this feeling of impending violent destruction of the moral order, resulting in harm to *bipra*, *dhenu*, *sura*, *dharani* - the *vipras* or learned persons, the cow (representing the most beneficial part of the animal kingdom), the gods (as worshipped in the devout communities) and the earth as an ecological entity. The moral laws that maintain *Rta* (the natural order) would collapse and society, as the structure which supports and empowers individuals towards transcendence to Brahman (immortality) would no longer be able to provide its members support and guidance.

Flowing from the great concern for the continuation of society as a haven for mankind's happiness and ultimate deliverance, Tulasidasa developed a model or vision for society that transcended the stereotyped structures of caste duties (*varna*), of stages of spiritual evolution (*ashramas*) and located his ideal human being in the righteous, just, compassionate, discriminating and benign "Santa" or God-loving person. His "Santa" is not a cave dwelling sage or royal-hermit (like Janaka) but the ordinary person whose actions, thoughts and aspirations are firmly embedded in the attributes of a Santa, or Sadhu. The Santa is described by Tulasidasa as the man of total discrimination, capable of separating the good from the bad; which are found in creation. He says

*Jada cetana guna dosamaya biswa kinha kartar
Santa hamsa guna gahahi paya parihari bari bikar*

God has created the universe consisting of things animate and inanimate and endowed it with virtues and defects; the saint, like a swan, extracts the milk of goodness and rejects the worthless water. (Balakanda 6).

He further elevates the company of saints and sages to the level of Prayaga--the ultimate sacred place when he says

Muda mangalmaya sant samaju, jo jaga jangama tiratharaju

The assemblage of Saints, which is all joy and felicity, is like a moving Prayaga, king of all holy places (Balakanda 1, 4).

Tulasidasa had a total view of creation, with human society occupying a definite place and role in it, but not to the exclusion of other parts. He does qualify the Santas as being the higher echelon of this society, otherwise humanity is part of the whole creation as seen in:

*Akar cari lakh caurasi, jati jiva jala thala nabha basi
Siya Ramamaya saba jaga jani, karau pranam jori juga pani*

Eight million four hundred thousand species of living beings, classified under four broad divisions, inhabit land, water, and the air. Realizing the whole world to be pervaded by Sita and Rama, I make obeisance with folded hands (Balakanda -7-1).

This includes all forms of life, viviparous, oviparous, etc. He could not and did not qualify the Santa, or categorize him according to caste since the Santa is above all such categories. Hence, although he may have acknowledged the classical division of Varnashrama dharma he did not demand conformity to it. Indeed, he portrayed characters of varied origins and attributes interacting harmoniously in their devotion to Rama.

Tulasidasa had sufficient knowledge of and regard for the harmonious development of society, and therefore placed a heavy burden of responsibility on the ruler who could create the ideal society or Ramrajya as is evident in the following:

*Mukhiya mukha so cahiye khan pan kahu eka
Palai posai sakala anga Tulasi sahita bibeka*

A chief, says Tulasidasa, should be like the mouth, which alone does all the eating and drinking, yet maintains and nourishes all the other limbs with discretion (Ayodhyakanda - 315).

The sole requirement is distribution with Viveka - the judicious, rational apportionment of resources to all sectors of governance and social needs.

Tulasidasa does describe his *Ramrajya* (*Uttarkanda*) as one in which all the persons in the State observed *varnashrama dharma*, but it is submitted that this concept is in keeping with the ideal of *svadharma* (one's own duty) as a means to social harmony. *Svadharma* as an ideal of life can best be practised in *Ramrajya*. Thus the superstructure of the state, based on the loftiest ideals of people-centered governance, is conducive to; or even prerequisite for a harmonious social development in the world.

Ramchandra Shukla (1958 : 134) refers approvingly to Tulasidasa's visions of society. Some critics reject this appraisal of the *Ramacaritamanasa* by Shukla, as the support of Hindu orthodoxy by an orthodox 20th century scholar. Instead, this group of critics focuses on some specific lines of the text, disregarding the context, and flagellate Tulasidasa for being anti-female, caste ridden and antisocial.

Bhardwaj (1976 : 19-21), Luniya (1978 : 97-104) and Shukla (1958 : 56) provide ample evidence of the social and political suffering as well as the religious degradation of the Hindus in medieval India. Bereft of social, political and religious empowerment the morale of the 16th century Hindus was at an all time low. Tulasidasa's vision was that of a new social order in which each individual is empowered; he envisioned a society in which each person is a Santa. And what better example of a Santa that Tulasidasa could have put before the dejected masses than Sri Rama Himself? Yes, Sri Rama is Brahman to him, Sri Rama as the Lord incarnate is also imbued with divinity but Sri Rama operates on a human level. This depiction of Sri Rama is perhaps the key to Tulasidasa's success. The masses could identify with the suffering of the people as described in the *Ramacaritamanasa* as well as with the pain of Sri Rama, Sita and others. Thus, Valmiki's quest for the ideal man embodying all virtues was fulfilled in Tulasidasa's Rama as the Supreme Santa.

The efforts of the Bhakti Saints like Ramayana, Ramananda and Kabir in attempting to change the plight of the "lower" castes had failed. The deeply entrenched pernicious caste system defied correction and Tulasidasa found that social disorder still obtained in the 16th century despite the laudable efforts of the Bhakti Saints. The "radical" Kabir and the "conservative" Tulasidasa both envisioned an oppression-free, happy and harmonious society; one was vociferous, the latter was subtle. Shukla (1993 : 91) says

that "Tulasidasa perhaps desisted from advocating radical reform since the caste hierarchy held the key to Hindu empowerment in the form of knowledge, wealth and expertise; which could be harnessed for the welfare of all". One may rightly assert that Tulasidasa was a great social activist, trying to defeudalize and decolonize the Indian mind through the concept of Bhakti, thus subverting the caste system and other social evils.

Furthermore, there is no fundamental difference or contradiction between Kabir and Tulasidasa with regard to social stratification or the caste system; nor is there any difference in their approach to God. Kabir says

*jati na pucho sadhu ki, pucha lijiye gyan
mol karo talwar ki, pada rahan do myan*

Do not determine the caste of a person, instead enquire about his knowledge just as one would enquire about the quality of the sword and not its sheath.

Kabir considers all *Sadhus* (like Tulasidasa's *Santa*) ie. people who abide by moral laws and spiritual values as one level or echelon of humanity. Kabir does say

*Jo tu baman bamani jaya, to aan bat hai kyo nahi aaya
Jo tu turak turakani jaya, to bhitar khatna kyo na karaya*

If you were born of brahmin parents, (as a superior origin) why were you not born differently from others? If you were born of Muslim parents (a different religious origin) why were you not circumcised within the womb?

His term *Sadhu* is equivalent to Tulasidasa's *Santa*. Thus both great devotees were at one in this respect, creating a new social order of moral, devout and just human beings devoid of hierarchy or privilege.

Tulasidasa was perspicacious; he understood the society he lived in, and was aware that the social engineering strategies employed by his predecessors were not as effective as envisaged. He therefore neither interfered with the caste system nor openly condemned it. Tulasidasa was too discerning to use

methods that had already been tested. His subtle stance was intended to impact on the individual rather than on a prevailing system. He wished that individuals would access their own strengths, their sense of self-worth, dignity and confidence as well as the feeling of equality; elements that hitherto held no meaning for them due to long term oppression. The plight of the masses was hopeless; their spirit crushed; and at every turn the only reality they knew was hardship. The key to the door of change was education which took the form of the didactic Ramacaritamanasa.

The masses were denied education and it was Tulasidasa who attempted the almost impossible task of educating millions through Rama Bhakti which is the theme of the Ramacaritamanasa. Much to the chagrin of the Brahmins he wrote the Ramacaritamanasa in the language of the people, the majority of whom belonged to the "lower" castes. This must be seen as Tulasidasa's first attempt at defying the strictures of the caste system, incurring the wrath of those who arrogantly believed that knowledge of God and the path to Godhead was their exclusive preserve. Non-entry into temples cannot deny one access to God, Who is omnipresent; this is the unwritten message of Tulasidasa to the masses, for he says

Siya Ramamaya saba jaga jani

The entire universe is Rama and Sita

This means that the entire world is a temple, which suggests to the discerning mind that those brahmins who obstruct or deny entry into temples for worship to *sudras*, the "lower" castes, are undoubtedly fools. This also implies a challenge to brahmins to perform their duties properly.

A further examination of the Ramacaritamanasa text involving Sri Rama's conduct towards *Guha*, *Kevat* and *Sabari* leaves the reader with no doubt about Tulasidasa's view on caste. Tulasidasa has often been accused by critics of upholding and even supporting the caste system when he refers to the brahmins as "gods on earth" (*bhusura*) and the sudra as contemptible; they therefore reject Ramchandra Shukla's views on Tulasidasa. However, those who are pro-Tulasidasa believe that he simply portrayed the prevailing situation, or labelled certain attributes on the ascending and descending scales of the *Santa* barometer. Tulasidasa wanted every person to truly

believe that he or she is not inferior to the next person. The message that is often overlooked is that which logically follows - that no person is superior to the next person, either through caste or gender. The *Santa* is beyond these complexes. This is abundantly clear in the Sabari episode which not only throws light on Tulasidasa's views on caste but also on his views on the status of women. Sabari was a simple forest dweller who served her guru loyally, and devoutly awaited the advent of Sri Rama. In her simple heart she could find no better way of expressing her love, adoration and even awe, than humbling herself through expressions of her lowly station. Sabari says to Sri Rama

*Kehi bidhi astuti karau tumhari, adham jati mai jadamati
bhari
Adham se adham adham ati nari, tinha maha mai matimand
aghari*

How can I extol you, lowest in descent and the dullest of wit as I am? A woman is the lowest of those who rank as the lowest of the low. Of women again I am the most dull-headed, O Destroyer of sins (Aranyakanda 34, 1-2).

Sri Rama then comfortingly tells Sabari

*Kaha Raghupati sunu bhamini bata, manau ek bhagati kara
nata
Jati pati kul dharma badai, dhan bala pariyan guna caturai
Bhagati hina nara sohayi kaisa, binu jala barida dekhiya
jaisa*

Listen, O Good Lady, to my words, I recognize no other kinship except that of devotion. Despite caste, kinship, lineage, piety, reputation, wealth, physical strength, numerical strength of his family, accomplishments and ability, a man lacking in devotion is of no more worth than a cloud without water (Aranyakanda 34, 2-3).

This declaration of Sri Rama to Sabari, who considers herself "low" by caste and "low" because she is a woman, puts paid to notions of superiority of human beings through race, caste, class or gender.

The attribute of devotion, or attainment of the status of a Santa, is all that is required to become one in and through God. This is *Bhakti* which also means love and devotion to Sri Rama who is the embodiment of everything in the universe. It can by no means be claimed that Tulasidasa put words of self-denigration in Sabari's mouth, thus alienating millions of Rama Bhaktas of both sexes. He was unifying these millions by transcending the caste system through bhakti, and the gender divide through equality. Sri Rama's words are Tulasidasa's words: Sabari's words are those of the ignorant; be they "brahmin" or "sudra".

Having addressed the fundamental questions of caste and gender through Sabari, Tulasidasa need not have said any more on the subject. However, he decided to include inert nature also within his broad vision, and the episode of the ocean king, Sagar, which was meant to point out the folly of the *Jada*, the intellectually stultified, lent itself to the greatest controversy surrounding Tulasidasa. Tulasidasa has been vehemently accused of denigrating women (as well as so-called *sudras* and rustics), when he says through the words of Sagar

Dhol gawar sudra pasu nari, sakal tadana ke adhikari

A drum, a rustic, a beast and a woman, all these deserve beating
(Sundarakanda 58,3).

There are critics who defend Tulasidasa saying that the meaning of *tadna* is not only "to beat" but also "to understand". However, it should be remembered that these are the words of Sagar who presents the views of 16th century Indian society on the status of women and oppressed groups. By Tulasidasa's time the exalted position of Indian women had deteriorated to such an extent that women themselves, like Sabari, believed that they were "low" in status. The Sabari episode clearly demonstrates Tulasidasa's views on the status of women and gender equality. Sagar merely explains his tardiness, pleading for understanding (*tadna*), not beating.

In the entire Ramacaritamanasa Tulasidasa's views on any matter must be judged in the light of Sri Rama's conduct, behaviour and comments in that situation. Just as Sri Rama did not spare the lives of Ravana or Bali, He did not spare the life of Tadaka merely because she was a woman; with this very same sense of equality He awarded Moksha to deserving and devout men and women, irrespective of caste and gender. Wherever Sri Rama conquered evil, be it in Kishkindha or Lanka, He re-established a dharmik or "Santa-like" society and restored it to its "Santa-like" custodians. It is abundantly clear that Sri Rama is both "Santa" and "God"; this is one's true nature, says Tulasidasa, as each one of us is a spark of the Divine, and this must manifest in society. Thus Tulasidasa's vision of society is one of just and devout people living in harmony.

Needless to emphasize, it was through the elevated character of Rama that such ideals could be promoted. A hero or leader who could transcend all the natural and social barriers of development and conduct would act the way Rama did, treating all with justice, compassion and equivision (Samadarsi). Tulasidasa could not have hoped to succeed in preaching social equality through a lesser personality than Rama, or on a plane different from the metaphysical; material physical conditions may be difficult to change, but the mind can be easily moulded. If Tulasidasa and his society were prejudiced how can they adore Rama? His affirmation of life and society are also noteworthy. The first word of the Ramacaritamanasa, that is *Varnanama*, refers to the gift of speech or language which is indispensable for social development. Tulasidasa's last word in the Ramacaritamanasa is *manava*, putting man or humanity on centre stage of his vision of society, with bhakti or devotion as the salve for the scorching effects of *samsara* - the cycle of birth and death.

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WOMEN IN HINDUISM : ISSUES IN UNDERSTANDING HINDUISM

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Abstract

In the present essay, I shall discuss issues related to women within the context of broader Hindu religion. First, I shall provide a brief definition of Hinduism. Second, I shall distinguish Hindu theologies into three basic types (patriarchal, matriarchal and androgynous). Third, I shall discuss women within the context of marriage and family. Finally, I shall delineate some broader issues of women.

Defining Hinduism

Defining Hinduism is probably the most difficult exercise facing both scholars and adherents alike. What exactly is Hinduism and what does it encompass? Answers to these questions cannot easily result in any unanimous understanding among scholars. However, there has to be some way in which one could fruitfully use the term Hinduism to convey certain general meanings. The term 'Hindu' itself comes from a relatively recent history of India and hence the uncertainty among scholars as to whether or not it really captures the essence of the range of beliefs and practices of the people in the sub-continent. While scholars have begun to question its usefulness in understanding the religious vista of the vast region that we know as India, more traditional pundits began to proffer the use of a native term 'Sanatana Dharma'. But this also has presented problems in the sense that the people from the south of India, especially the Tamil-speaking

communities, could not identify with such a term as it was seen to be too north Indian or Sanskritic and does not represent the south and the millions of tribal and other peripheral communities. While the debate about a common term that can capture the vast range of religious and cultural heritage of India, most people, both scholars as well as lay people, continue to use it for practical purposes of general identification.

The term has been first used by the Persians and later the Greeks to identify a people in the region of the Indus (Sindhu) river situated in the north-west of India. The native word, Sindhu was corrupted to become Hindu in the course of its long history. The Moghuls are probably the first ones who used it to refer to the religious beliefs of the majority of the natives and to distinguish it from Islam. Subsequently, the British colonial usage of the term fixed its meaning as the religion of the majority of the natives. Thus came the term 'Hinduism' in its more reified sense as a closed system of beliefs. Scholars, such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, have questioned the use of such reified terms to refer to the continuously growing and changing traditions of people. In that sense, what we now call Hinduism is something that has grown through several centuries and perhaps many millennia and includes a vast range of beliefs, customs and practices that have been part of the sub-continent.

The known history of India dates back to the Indus valley civilization (c 3000-2500 BCE). This civilization which had witnessed a fairly urbanized conditions of life suddenly disappeared after lasting approximately a thousand years. Very little is known about its religion although a few figurines have been found and in the absence of our knowledge of their script, most of what is found on these figurines remains to be a contested interpretation. It may be worth noting, though, that some scholars have identified this culture as being the proto-Dravidian. The present form of Shiva worship is, according to this line of interpretation, supposed to have had its origins in the Indus culture. It was succeeded by a major cultural force that became known as the Aryan culture. The origins of this culture is a contested one between most Western scholars proffering the theory of Aryan immigration from the European continent (the region around Black Sea, Lithuania and so on) and some Indian scholars arguing in favour of the theory that locates Aryans within the sub-continent. Whatever the origins might be, the Aryan culture with its mythology, ritual and philosophy has

contributed to Hinduism enormously. Sanskrit as its main language became the main medium of spreading this culture. In the course of its spread, initially from the Ganges plain to most of the present Indian sub-continent, it had assimilated many diverse forms of beliefs, customs and practices from the tribal communities and the other peripheral communities known today as the Scheduled Castes. One of the greatest achievements of this culture is its social stratification vis-a-vis the institution of caste.

Although the Aryan culture became the dominant force in shaping the present Hindu religion, the so called peripheral communities which were held at the bottom of the caste ladder, contributed no less to the enrichment of the present day Hinduism. The goddess worship is certainly one such phenomenon which is, perhaps, more prominent in Hinduism than in most other religions. While the Sanskrit based Aryan form of Hinduism perpetuated mainly a patriarchal form of religious system, the popular and folk beliefs, rituals and practices have certainly balanced it with their propensity toward female form of the divine. Thus, the present-day Hinduism is able to integrate, both in its philosophy as well as in its rituals and myths, a whole range of feminist ideas of the divine.

Hindu Theologies

There are fundamentally three types of theologies that have become integrated into the Hindu worldview. These can be identified as 1) patriarchal, 2) matriarchal and 3) androgynous theologies. The patriarchal theologies are represented by a male dominant deity, such as Vishnu or Shiva and is associated with his divine consort as a subordinate deity. In the case of Vishnu it is Lakshmi and in the case of Shiva it is Parvati. The matriarchal theologies are represented by a female goddess as the dominant deity with the male deities, such as Vishnu Shiva and Brahma in a subordinate role. Mythological texts, such as *Devimahatmyam* depict the goddess as the most supreme power from whom all creation, including that of the gods, emanates. In her capacity as the Mother goddess or the most sovereign power always stands alone and does not have a male partner, as in the case of the male dominant gods. The androgynous theologies are represented by mostly the god Shiva in his dual form of man-woman or half man and half woman (*arthanarisvara*). There are instances when Vishnu also played the role of male and female simultaneously. When the gods and

the demons fought for the nectar that was churned out of the ocean, Vishnu made the gods and the demons line up and distributed the real nectar to the gods and the fake nectar to the demons by appearing to them (demons) as the enchantress.

While the patriarchal and the androgynous theologies are primarily documented in the classical Sanskrit texts, the matriarchal theology is quite pervasive both within the Sanskrit materials as well as in the popular/folk traditions of the village Hinduism. These theological representations depict, at a deeper level, the social reality of the Hindus. Although Hindu society is by and large patriarchal through its caste-based stratification, there are, nonetheless, matriarchal societies present in some tribal societies and also in the mainstream Hindu society. For instance in Kerala (a south Indian state) matriarchal rule was common in the pre-colonial era. Even the androgynous representation of the society is quite easily accommodated within the Hindu society. The presence of eunuchs in the Hindu royal courts and their specific role in certain Hindu festivals (e.g., Shivaratri) even to this day enables the Hindu society to integrate not only the diverse theological outlook but also a highly variegated social reality. These social realities are deeply entrenched in the Hindu ritual. There are temples which depict these different representations: there are temples solely dedicated to either Vishnu or Shiva as male dominant deities; there are temples, such as the Meenakshi temple in Madurai, the Kamakshi temple in Kanchi and the Goddess temple in Kanyakumari all in Tamilnadu, a southern state of India. In some Shiva temples, he is often depicted in his half-man and half-woman form.

Women, Marriage and Family in Hinduism

The Hindu institution of marriage begins with the divine marriage. Both in the Vaishnava tradition and the Shaiva tradition, the marriage of the divine couple is an essential part of the myth and the ritual. Year after year in the Srirangam temple the marriage of Lord Ranganatha and his divine consort Sri-Lakshmi is celebrated. In a similar vein, the Madurai Minakshi temple celebrates the wedding of Shiva and his consort, Parvati. Thus, the Hindu society has come to believe that the institution of marriage is something that has divine origin and therefore sacred. In both Vaishnava and Shaiva mythologies, Vishnu and Shiva are depicted as being restless until they have been married to their respective consorts. Periodically they come down to

the earth to claim their consorts. Thus While Shiva is depicted as coming down to the sacred space of Madurai to be married to his consort, Vishnu is depicted as camping down on the seven hills of Venkatakala in Tirupati. Although the idea of incarnation has not been developed within the Shaiva tradition, in local mythologies Shiva is also depicted as incarnating as the reigning deity of the shrine. Of course, Vishnu is usually seen as the deity who incarnates to restore dharma in the human world. Thus the theme of incarnation is integral to the scheme of salvation of human beings. And the mytho-poetic literature of the Hindus gives a significant place to the divine marriage within the context of the salvation of human beings.

The divine marriage within the human world is also preceded by a period of separation between the deity and his consort. Thus Vishnu purposefully leaves his consort Lakshmi to incarnate himself within the human world as a part of the scheme of salvation. But Lakshmi also incarnates herself within the human world and the two are united in marriage not in the realm of transcendence but in the human world. As such, in the mythological accounts, the divine marriage is a recurring event of separation and union of the divine couple.

This theme of separation and union is nowhere else brought home powerfully than in the epic literature, especially the Ramayana. The story of Rama and Sita is a constant recurrence of union and separation of the hero and his heroine. At one level these mythological and epic accounts sublimate the union and separation of the divine for soteriological purposes, at another level they do reflect the very mundane reality of the human society. The human condition has always been a constant recurrence of union and separation. Neither the mythic paradigm nor the epic paradigm suggests that union is for ever. Nor do they suggest that separation occurs only at death. This story of union and separation is perhaps the story of humankind.

Historically speaking we do not know how old the institution of marriage is in human society. But we do recognize the fact that men and women have been united to give rise to families. And somewhere down the road the Hindu society, like most religious communities, sanctified the institution of marriage and made the union between a man and a woman a life-long relationship. Within the context of the Vedic ritual and also latter on in the context of the temple worship, the Hindu society has always seen it as

auspicious for a man and a woman to be jointly patrons of the ritual, except those rituals which are specific to a man or a woman. In that sense, the man who patronises a ritual is normally accompanied by his wife.

Thus the Hindu society, like many other traditional societies, has accepted only the union as part of the bargain but not the separation. Separation between a man and a woman is seen as deplorable and not conducive to family welfare. In traditional Hindu weddings in India, the priest takes the newly married couple into the open yard to show them the sage Vasishtha and his wife Arundati who are located in the constellation of the seven stars known as Sapta Rishis in the Indian astronomy (Big Bear). This is to show to the newly married couple the ideal of marriage without separation. This ideal of inseparable union is reinforced in most religions by making the couple take the vows that they would live together till death separates them. This is a rule in the Hindu wedding as well. This is the ideal and the norm of the Hindu society. The rule always refers to the ideal or the universal.

Within the Hindu tradition, the Mimamsa philosophers, who claimed the custodianship of the interpretation of the rules of Vedic ritual, tell us that the rule of the ritual always refers to the universal or the ideal type and not to the particular case. The particular case has to be interpreted in light of the ideal spelled out in the rule. If this is the case, how do we take into account the reality of marriage in its actual practice? While the Hindu ideal speaks of the rule of inseparable union, it is our common knowledge that there have always been cases when women and men have been separated for various reasons. Both the mythological tradition and the epic tradition of the Hindus exemplify that social reality.

In our modern society, according to the latest statistics, one out of every three marriages ends either in separation or in divorce as we call it today. In the traditional Hindu society, there is no provision for a divorce. Separation of the couple witnessed by the elders of the community or the family was sufficient. Often separation happened at the behest of the man who sent his wife away to her parents. Although women walking out on their husbands are not common, in certain caste groups such things did happen and they do happen today also. In traditional Hindu society, the higher a person is placed in the social hierarchy the less frequent the occurrence of separation between a wife and her husband. This is because the institution of marriage is central

to the honour and respect given to a family. The communities belonging to higher social order tended to preserve the institution of marriage with greater concern for fear of loosing social status.

Nevertheless, all communities in traditional Hindu society did witness breakdown of marriages in varied degrees. When a man sends his wife away no ignominy seems to be attributed to him. Thus when Ramayana, the Vaishnava teacher of the 10th century sent his wife away and took *sannyasa*, his act was seen as a part of his social and religious reform. So while Ramayana climbs the glorious ladder, his wife goes into oblivion. Whether the initiative to separate came from the man or the woman, it is the woman who receives the ignominy.

There are at least two paradigms that emerge from the Hindu tradition regarding the issue of separation between a woman and her husband. The first paradigm has to do with Sri-Lakshmi who is described as "inconstant" before she finally settled down with Vishnu. In the epic Mahabharata, there is an encounter between Bali (the king of the demons) and Indra the chief of the gods. When Indra becomes victorious and begins to boast upon winning the hand to Sri, Bali tells Indra that he should not be deluded by getting the hand of Sri because many such Indras have passed away before him and Sri had lived with all of them and left them all. Thus Sri is seen as "inconstant" among the gods. It is only with Vishnu she remains inseparably together. The second paradigm has to do with the story of Sita and her separation from Rama. Sita was first separated from her husband when she was abducted by Ravana and lives in his custody for several years. When she was finally reunited with her husband, the society cast a nasty look at her as if her husband took her back from another man, and as such she was not a chaste woman. Rama had to formally seek separation from her in order to satisfy his subjects. Towards the end of the epic story, Sita was brought back to Rama once again through the intervention of the sage Valmiki. Although in later Sanskrit Kavya literature, Sita was restored to Rama and the two lived happily ever after, the author of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana does not reunite them in the end. Sita chooses to end her life defying Rama's wish. Thus the story ends on a strange note without telling us whether Rama in the end was a widower or a divorced man. If we follow the events carefully Rama was already separated before Sita died. Technically Rama did not have his conjugal rights restored because Sita did not go back to him as his

wife. It appears as though she went to him to hand over the children to their father and bid him farewell. The story of Rama and Sita is the epitome of a family tragedy. It provides an insight into how, because of the lustful behaviour of a man, an innocent couple devoted to each other had to separate in order to honour the will of the majority of the society. It also provides an insight into how the plight of a woman brought glory to her husband.

The two paradigms at another level provide a significant insight into how tradition tends to sublimate the social reality. In the first paradigm, the mythic tradition somehow does not rest until Sri is finally stabilized with Vishnu. While tradition does not bark at Sri for having "lived with others", the important point seems to be that she must finally be settled with her permanent consort, Vishnu. In the second paradigm, Sita is subjected to cruelty, isolation from her family and all the hardships that come with it. In a dramatic speech that she gives when Lakshmana, her brother-in-law took her to the forest to leave her there, Sita says that 'she was a woman born to suffer.' Here the author of the Ramayana captures the dominant perception of a woman in traditional societies like India. The characterisation of Rama has benefited immensely by the subordinate characterisation of Sita. Rama becomes known as noble because of his heroic deeds in the search for his wife, and Sita gains her nobility *only* by sacrificing everything. Rama is given back his kingdom and his children but Sita is the one who neither shares in the happiness of the kingdom nor in the reunion of the family. She remains the eternal loser, the epitome of ultimate sacrifice.

Such characterisation of women in sacred literature tended to reinforce the notion that women are a subordinate part of human society. No wonder Manu prescribes more than one wife to men of higher castes. In traditional Hindu society, it is permitted for a higher caste man to marry a lower caste woman but not the other way around. However, such marriages outside the caste boundaries are not the usual kind. But when they occur they must do so within an acceptable structure of social hierarchy. And such a social hierarchy is regulated by male-female relationships.

Issues of women

In spite of the above multifaceted theological outlook of the Hindu worldview, the role assigned to the Hindu women in traditional society is very much on the fringe. Hindu society, throughout its history, most certainly witnessed many women saints and poets. Nevertheless, in orthodox Hindu belief, women depend on men for their salvation (until marriage on her father, after marriage on her husband and in old age on her son). Religious reformers like Ramayana in the medieval Hindu society could send their wives away to the parental home in the name of pursuing celibacy in order to become deeply involved in their religious work. Even in the modern Hindu society, Gandhi saw sexual contact with his wife as an impediment to his spiritual growth.

These contradictions in Hindu society have raised some very fundamental issues not only in the context of gender equality but also in the broader context of human rights. The modern Hindu society has to come to terms with these contradictions. Some feminist scholars have utilised the available resources in Hindu society, such as its mythological texts and so on, to re-orient the social consciousness in a way that would lead to more opportunities and challenges for women. In spite of the fact that the Hindu society has witnessed, in the last many decades, an upsurge in the number of women taking up leadership roles in various contemporary institutions, such as politics, economics, science and technology, medicine, bureaucracy and so on, the many age-old practices of Hindu society, such as dowry and bride-burning still haunt its social consciousness. Many women artists, singers, poets and literary scholars have to still fight their way through the strongholds of male dominant stereotypes.

Some of the most critical issues that have dogged the feminist scholars for years and still continue to do so have to do with the stereotypical roles assigned to women in spite of their achievements in many fields of expertise where men traditionally held prominence. One such issue that is of critical importance is marriage and motherhood. Women in traditional Hindu society consider marriage and motherhood as the most important aspects of being woman. And this has become a snare in their attempt to overcome male generated prejudices. Hindu women continue to have lesser say in the determination of vital issues of abortion, birth control and family assets.

Another issue that feminist scholars on India have raised in recent years has to do with sexuality. Many subtle issues are intertwined in the larger issue of sexuality. Generally speaking Hindu society does not openly discuss matters of sexuality which often results in women being subordinated to male prejudices about sexual matters. Different phases of life of a woman are clearly demarcated by means of rituals. A young girl reaching puberty and experiencing her first menstrual cycle, is set apart and ritually purified at the end of that period. At marriage, her chastity is tested by older women. Young girls are more closely guarded in society than boys of the same age. Traditional Hindu society continues to uphold the chastity of woman as the most important factor in the consideration of marriage. In very conservative families, older women check out the bedsheets of the newly married couple to find blood stains on them which confirms the chastity of the bride. Blood in association with menstruation is seen as polluting and hence even today traditional women follow certain rules which include not participating in family activities, such as cooking and communal activities, such as staying away from temples and rituals during the period of menstruation. As such, menstruating women become taboos in the society. Such menstruation taboos are embedded in the Hindu ritual texts, such as the Rig Veda Samhita.

The widowed women are considered ritually impure and hence not to be present at auspicious ceremonies. They are considered to be messengers of bad luck. Besides, a widow cannot attain her liberation without a husband. Hundreds of examples that bewail the misfortune of a widow exist in the Hindu literature (e.g., the cries of the wife of Manmatha, the love god when he was destroyed by the fire of Shiva's third eye, and the debate of Sati Savitri with Yama, the god of death when her husband died prematurely are instances of the plight of the widow without children all too familiar to us). To this day, the practice of consigning the widows to a shelter attached to a temple can still be seen in sacred cities like Benares where they simply while away their valuable life. Although the practice of widow-burning (Sati) (practice of burning the widow on the pyre of the dead husband) is banned in India and is considered a crime, occasionally there are still cases reported in the media. Women without children are also considered inauspicious people and are un-welcome in family functions, such as marriage. While a widowed mother cannot give away her daughter in marriage (her auspicious married

sister or relative has to step in to perform that function), the sight of a woman without children is avoided in marriage.

Despite such subordinate roles assigned to women in both Hindu literature as well as in society, there are a number of examples where women asserted a great deal of independence. Such instances can be seen in the devotional literature of the Hindus. One of the commonest themes in the devotional literature associated with women is their longing to marry the deity. Feminist scholars have often seen this as an important act of denial of marriage which indicates not only their self-affirmation but also a radical rejection of male-centred conception marriage. Similarly there are instances of women devotional singers who left their husbands and families to follow an ascetic form of life. In some of these cases, such women had difficult marriages and devotional life is seen as a form of liberation (e.g., Lallesvari of Kashmir in the fourteenth century C.E.). It is interesting to note, however, that even when women sought freedom from the male dominant social practices, they seem to have done so within the framework of Hindu value system. Feminist scholars have seen this as a serious limitation in the struggle of Hindu women to achieve their independence in society. Nevertheless, such attempts need to be seen as significant achievements towards progress of Hindu women. In the mean time, they will continue to challenge the androcentric Hindu values and attempt to reinterpret their own roles in the continually changing Hindu society. No social system is cast in stone and so is the Hindu society.

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RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN HINDI POETRY AND THE INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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Abstract:

This article surveys religious thought during India's colonial history in the era of poetry that is classified as the modern period of literature which dates from circa 1860 and within the context of this paper, till independence. The poetry of major Hindi poets is assessed to determine what was the thinking on religion amongst the Hindi literary intelligentsia during the rule of British India. The modern period of literature is divided into three categories, each evolving from the preceding era and the categories are as follows: 1. Bharatendu era; 2. Dwivedi era and 3. Post dwivedi era.

The history of the world has always been shaped by human complexities. Literature has always recorded these complexities within the confines of the chosen genre.

The history of India reveals India to be a country that has been burdened by a series of invasions. But the invasion that really affected India the most was the British invasion. Given the many religious influences in India that had been introduced to the Indians by various means and the caste system and religion had become the primary units of social identification. This social consciousness predetermined the complexities in fostering any kind of Indian nationalism essential to overthrow an oppressive foreign regime.

The modern period of Hindi literature is the period that saw a change in the language of the literature. The shift was from braja bhasa to khari boli a shift that was engineered by Harishchandra Bharatendu who is considered the father of modern Hindi. Essential to the dialogue on religious thought and literature, is the shift in colonial prowess. British rule in India was preceded by Muslim rule and this was reflected in the poetry of the period. This period has been described as a time when western literary influences and Indian literary practices merged to create a movement in writing called *rastria aandolan* or national revolution. The literature of this period engaged in promoting national pride. Bharatendu was a major influence on the thinking of his literary contemporaries.

Given the nature of the colonial invasions, it was inevitable that there would be a call for divine intervention to free India and her people from oppression. Thus poets from different religious denominations expressed their call for divine intervention in their poetry.

Bharatendu's most major and influential piece of literature *Bharat Durdasha* illustrates his attempts at calling on the heavenly powers to create a free India. Being a devout Vaisnavaite, he calls Krishna for help in the following lines:

Oh ocean of mercy, Keshav,
why do you remain asleep,
The people of your land are greatly in need
...
Why do you remain so distant
Only you can now save us.

Balmukund Gupta, a contemporary of Bharatendu, whose religious affiliation lay with Mother Durga, wrote in *Durga Smriti*:

Oh mother, how do you sleep
Don't you see your child in pain.

Similar sentiments were expressed by many poets who were guided by their own religious affiliations, but what was acknowledged by many poets that

given the social consciousness of the people of India, the different sects had to unite to in order to create a sense of Indian nationalism.

The necessity of including non-Hindus in the call for nationalism did not go unchecked. In *Bharat Durdasha* Bharatendu attempts to create a sense of oneness as illustrated in the following quotations “Don’t believe just anybody, the elephant, peacock don’t know which temples to go to”. He ventures into more radical statements by writing, “God did not get stuck in the Vedas” and “Why bother about religious debacles, All theories are ours, so why challenge answers.” Equally radical was his statement “We have encouraged religion too much and propagated business of untouchability.” These statements serve to harness the collective energies of all Indians in an attempt to create feelings of Indian nationalism.

Pratap Narayan Misra a contemporary poet of Bharatendu courted the very same idea as Bharatendu. He reflected a more profound sense of urgency in grappling with the Hindu-Muslim antagonism. His following lines illustrate his concern about the differences that existed amongst Hindus and Muslims: “Spare me from false debacles, O Lord! Make me thy servant”. New ideas have come, and new battles have begun”.

Although Misra very eloquently tried to bring Hindus and Muslims together, he created the slogan “Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan”. The slogan propagated the sense that India was primarily for Hindus who spoke Hindi and this obviously antagonises the sense of a united India belonging to all who lived in India.

However, the poets of this period seemed very endeared to the idea that it is God only who could protect people from the colonial powers. Generally poets gave credence to the power of one God whether formless or with form worship was considered.

Within the development of Hindi literature, the next phase of literature was the Dwivedi period. The Dwivedi period of literature extended from 1900 to 1920. This period saw the continued simmering of national consciousness. The teachings and the philosophies of Ravindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi largely influenced the literature of the time. The

Dwivedi period is considered to be one which saw the creation of nationalistic poetry. Several parallel versions of patriotism were expressed and Lokmanya Tilak's slogan "Freedom is our birthright" had mass appeal even on the literature of the time.

The call for divine intervention in the poetry of the time clearly had a very important place. In fact in the poetry of some of the poets it comes across as though only God could save the people from the horrors of foreign rule. Makanlall Chaturvedi in his poem Balidevi writes:

Lord, your children still choose the body
They remain true to their chosen paths
but are killed with bullets.

Prasad Pandey, in his poem Ish Vinay writes:

Oh God, listen to my plea,
Relieve India of her pain.
Lord make her yours again
And don't drop her anymore.

The Rowlatt Act of 1919, described as the Anarchical and Revolutionary Act, was a confirmation of Britain's intolerance for any kind of uprising that would lead India to revolution. It was such regulations that prompted poets to express the above sentiments.

Perhaps the most influential poet of this period was Maithili Sharan Gupta. He was a major patron of the Indian National Congress and sought to create sentiments of nationalism through his poetry. He attempted through his poetry to seek the support of Christians and Muslims in order to create nationalism. Part of the process was referring to the history of Muslims and Christians in order to harness their support for a free India. In the poem "Kaba and Karbala" he writes:

In my mind's Triveni, I wish for one more union
A spiritual union of the hearts of Muslims and Hindus.
Only then will this be the abode of Ram and Rahim

If we gather and create a harmonious fort.

In an attempt to court Christians, Gupta wrote in the poem Hindu “By adopting the religion of the west, the colour of your skin has not changed.” In the poem he further indicates that Christ received his spiritual vision in India, so in effect Christians are as important to India as are Hindus.

Given the fact that the Dwivedi period of Hindi poetry was placed very much in the midst of the independence struggle, poets were much more vocal about transforming the Indian psyche in creating Indian nationalism.

However the third period which is referred to the post-Dwivedi period of the modern period of Hindi poetry, proved to be the strongest in challenging the Indian mindset into working together as a force to overthrow the British presence in India. This was the period that saw the presence of Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of the Indian revolution. His approach to India’s dilemma was based on religion and ethics. He harmonised the different political, social and religious streams of thought in his call for nationalism. His perception of nationalism itself was based on ethics and spirituality. He was influenced greatly by the Gita and as is well known, he promoted ahimsa and satyagraha as the means to relieve India of her oppressor.

Clearly, Gandhi’s philosophies influenced poets so much that odes were written about him, praising the philosophy he brought to the struggle. The following lines of Siyaram Sharan Gupta are worthy of quotation:

The Holy guest in a household, at all times,
Free from the bonds of the body,
Keeper of the house at all times,
Free from the bonds of the House.

Alone, you pure unchangeable mind are able to
To throw away as much dross and dirt
Gold and diamonds gems and pearls in strings.

Incomparable ever,
You, by birthright, belong to the Heavenly Race

Yet in the family arms of mortal care,
Most joyfully appear.

Gupta's adulation of Gandhi cannot be seen as coincidental. Whist in this poem he explores the blessed presence of Gandhi in India, he subtly lends support to the non-co-operation movement. By giving Gandhi a celestial status, inevitably he lends credence to Gandhi's doctrine of "ahimsa" in order to attain freedom.

At this juncture in Hindi poetry, there seemed to a lesser intention to invoke the divine powers to miraculously derail the colonial powers. The emphasis intensified in challenging people to take control of the situation and make a difference. The celebrated poet Nirala in the poem "Anamika" critiqued the Indian mindset in the following words:

Even the Pandavas cannot recognise this country.
Is this the same country, the famed land of Arjuna and Bhima?
The radiant celibacy of Bhishma flows in today's atmosphere;
Bright, Impatient and evergreen.

Pant, also a well-respected poet of this period, expresses similar sentiments as Nirala as revealed in his poem Pallav:

Oh the golden dream of the world,
The first dawn of the world.
Where is the truth of the celebrated Vedas?
Constant pain, destitution was once unheard of.
The land that was unaware of age, mortality and fall.

Allusions to divinity were projected in a different way as compared to the preceding eras of poetry. Ramkumar Varma in "Tandav" invites Shiva to eliminate the oppressor in the following lines:

Dance once more!
Lord Shiva! Tremor each string of creation.

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, relates the birth of Krishna to those who were jailed for opposing the oppressor, in the following lines of the poem *Vida*:

Jail, our beloved Mohan's wonderful, pure birthplace.
You'll always be considered a pilgrimage.
Hindustan, the devotees of Krishna.

Although there was a major call for nationalism, sectarianism emerged as a problem in the form of the Hindu-Muslim conflict. Muslims within the Congress Party separated and created the Muslim League. The Hindus retaliated by creating the Hindu Maha Sabha which promoted Hindu nationalism. Various political parties were formed and this fragmentation undeniably weakened the call for Indian nationalism.

Whilst poets called on Hindus to deconstruct their mindset, it was clear that with the passage of time Hindu-Muslim conflict which was allegedly encouraged by the British grasped the attention of poets. In an attempt to curtail this friction the famed poet Dinkar wrote the following very moving lines in the poem *Saamdheni*:

As Hindus and Muslims destroy each other
Mother India becomes destroyed.
And so burns the wings of the coming independence.
These arrows pierce the heart of the mother-land.
Pained, the mother falls unconscious.

It was this rift that separated the people of India more than any sectarian differences. Often Ram-Rahim was described by the literary intelligentsia as the two eyes of mother India. However, in spite of the interventions of poets and other mediums, the Hindu-Muslim conflict continued.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan even goes to the extent of removing the concept of God in an attempt to create unity amongst the people of India. In *Shant Sangeet* he writes:

Do not pray, O, do not pray!
Show your prowess in the field of battle,

Be firm and inflexible, be invincible;
Do not pray, O, do not pray.

On 20 February 1947, it was announced that Britain would finally give to India her independence irrespective of whether there was a compromise between the Muslims and Hindus. June 1947 saw the partition of India into Pakistan and India, an arrangement that had to be accepted by all. Since the War of Plassey in 1757, the British had ruled over India for 190 years. Although India fought with all the might she could muster, she was eventually dismembered in this struggle.

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GUJARATI LITERATURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

South African Gujarati literature has not been the focus of serious scholarly investigation. In the circumstances, any attempt at an accurate estimate of local Gujarati literature is likely to be a hazardous enterprise. In fact, this article may very well be the first to attempt such an investigation and, the lack of source material notwithstanding, I believe a reasonably holistic picture can emerge by careful examination of the available evidence.

Introduction

Whilst the first groups of Indians came to Natal in the 1860's as indentured labourers, the *passenger* Indians most of them of Gujarati stock came at their own expense as traders about fifteen years later. In time, the passengers set up their own community organisations, schools and halls, religious institutions, libraries and small retail shops, many of them going on to become wealthy wholesalers and factory owners.

The Gujaratis, by nature of conservative stock, were determined to maintain their ethnic identity notwithstanding the political, economic and social circumstances which threatened their survival as a minority group. Upto1960 the Gujarati language in South Africa was under no real threat, despite the position of English as lingua franca (Desai 1992:189).

Proficiency in English was a prerequisite for political and to some extent, economic success.

Within a few years of immigration the community made attempts to publish articles in Gujarati locally. The International Printing Press started by Madanjit Vyavaharik was the first to publish material in Gujarati. Its most important publication was the weekly *Indian Opinion*. The first editor was M.H.Nazar, a journalist trained in Bombay University who worked in consultation with M.K.Gandhi. Although it was first published in 1903 in the English, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil languages, after 1905 the sections in Hindi and Tamil were discontinued. Gandhi made a great contribution to the paper, both financially and by way of articles in Gujarati.

Other noteworthy efforts to publish in Gujarati were made by 'Indian Views' which served the Muslim community. Universal Printing Works in Durban served the Hindu Gujaratis. L.Harry's Printing Press in East London also published a lot of Gujarati literature. They all published in English as well. There were still very limited printing facilities and the people produced hand-written copies of work which were photocopied and then bound into booklets.

Since the first Gujaratis came as traders, their primary objective was to become financial success. In the circumstances, little attention was given to the arts. Besides the community was still trying to come to terms with an alien and hostile environment. Many of the early literary works produced locally were the efforts of writers born and educated in India. These writers continually urged and inspired the people to write in the vernacular, without much success, however since publishing was not economically viable.

"The most significant works in our modern literature continue to 'cling' to the community even while they thoroughly critique it" (Jaidev 1994: v). Gandhiji had also advised the laureates of Indian literature to write for the people and of the people they served. This conforms to the Marxist view that true literature is one which subserves the interests of the proletariat.

Gujarati literature tried, in far as it could, to embrace this Marxian ideal. Where style was concerned, it attempted to emulate the style developed by pioneers of Vedic literature. The true essence of literature from the Indian

perspective is captured in Acharya Vishvanatha's words *vakyam rasatmakam kavyam* (*rasa* is the soul of literature). Here the word *kavyam* although meaning poetry, should be interpreted as literature. In ancient times *kavyam* was a generic term used to incorporate all creative literature. In a simple analogy *bhasha* (language) was described as the body, *alankara* (figures of speech) as jewels which adorned the body, and *rasa* as the soul of the body without which the language would be dead.

There have been various definitions of *rasa* but the simplest way to describe it would be to say that *rasa* (in the literary context) is the aesthetic response the writer wishes to elicit from the reader by a deft and skilful manipulation to literary devices in the text. More specifically, the aesthetic response has to equate with an emotional response. heartfelt 'sentiment' or 'feeling' expressed in the main theme of the work to evoke an emotion. Bharatamuni, the author of *Natyasastra* (a treatise of dance, drama and music) lists the basic *rasas* in the following Sanskrit couplet cited in Panday (1996:9).

Srngarhasyakaruna rudravira blayanakah

Bihhatsadbl tasanjau cetyastau natyerasah smrtah.

(*Natyasastra*: 1.6.15)

love, humour, pathos, anger, valour, terror, disgust and wonder are eight (basic) *rasas* that support performing arts.

A ninth (*santa* – peace) and tenth (*bhakti* – devotion) were added at a later date.

Modern Gujarati writers, though influenced by English literature, have followed the Indian tradition and produced a volume of literature which is qualitative and quantitative. Nilsson (1992:316) suggests that the aim of the education policy of 1835 for schools and colleges in India was 'to create a section who was Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion and in morals and intellect'. The intellectuals of the time appear to have suffered from an inferiority complex and tried to imitate the western scholars. The first of the modern Gujarati poets, Narmad, who aimed to reform society through his writing and free the community from its orthodox beliefs, eventually abandoned all his ideas of reform and reverted to the traditional system. The Gujarati emigrants clung to their traditional role yet

risked being ostracised from their community and dared to go to a foreign country for a better life.

It is gratifying to note that in spite of the difficulties experienced by the Gujarati immigrants a fair amount of literature has been found to exist. In view of the political, economic, religious, cultural and social development of the Gujaratis in this country I classified the literature under such subheadings. I have also tried where possible, to maintain a chronological order.

Political Literature

It was inevitable that political literature would have been one of the primary Indian literary genres inspired by active involvement against political oppression. 'Apartheid' was a term used much later to describe racial segregation sanctioned by legislation. Initially, the term 'colour bar' was commonly used to signify discrimination on the basis of colour. The notion of 'white' superiority over 'non whites' is the theme of GH Patel's *Koi Gora Koi Kala* in 1958.

The first Gujarati academic to protest against political discrimination in Natal was MK Gandhi who came to South Africa in 1893. He was described as an astute politician by the British and is said to have shaken the foundations of British rule in India with his weapons of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*. He was a prolific author and, although he did not write 'creative' literature like poetry, he influenced the writers of modern Gujarati literature. This period (1920-1947) in Gujarati literature is known as the 'Gandhian Age'. He introduced a new style in writing. His language is direct, clear and unsophisticated. By its simplicity it acquires the desired penetrating effect. His sentences are short and to the point, which could be comprehended by the *majdur* or working class.

Gandhi inspired the people to write in their mother tongue. His convictions about the mother tongue are well known. In his autobiography (1945:381) he writes:

"It has always been my conviction that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children

and their country. They deprive them of the social and spiritual heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country. Having these convictions I made a point of always talking to my children in Gujarati. This happened twenty years ago (1905) and my convictions have only deepened with experience (1925)".

Gandhi's foremost contribution to Gujarati literature was the *Indian Opinion* in which he wrote hundreds of articles in Gujarati concerning the injustices suffered by the Indian community. He invited Gujaratis to contribute articles in Gujarati for the *Indian Opinion*. Although the thrust of the newspaper was political, it included many articles reflecting on moral and ethical values aimed at spiritually uplifting the community. Gandhi translated Ruskin's *Unto this Last* into Gujarati and called it *Sarvodaya*. After he left South Africa in 1914 he contributed a great volume of literature primarily in the form of letters and essays in Gujarati.

Pranshakar Someshvar Joshi, a figure little known to the present generation, fought resolutely against political oppression during his sojourn in South Africa. He was born in Jetpur, Gujarat in 1897 and came to the Transvaal in 1920. He served taught in an English-medium school in Johannesburg. Imbued with a selfless courage and resolve, he was not only at the forefront of the political struggle of the Indian community, but resisted any form of racial discrimination by the 'white' government. His mission has often been referred to as 'The Jihad against Colour Bar'.

Most of Joshi's books were written in Gujarati and later translated into English by himself. He was also a journalist and his articles were widely read due primarily to his objective estimate of political and social events. In 1926, impressed by Rev.C.F.(Dinbandhu) Andrew's book *Claim for Independence*, he translated it into Gujarati under the title *Svatantratano Davo*. He contributed regularly to the *Indian Opinion* and the *Indian Views*. In 1932 Joshi was instrumental in establishing the Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj and served as its first secretary. Thus began his direct involvement in the socio-political affairs of the Gujarati community.

Joshi's first original historical book in Gujarati, *Rangdveshno Durga* was published in 1936 and translated into English by him in 1938 and entitled it

Tyranny of Colour. It is a study of the 'Indian Problem' in South Africa. In its conclusion he wrote:

"The Union Government should gradually repeal all anti-Indian measures. The Indians should be rewarded the franchise, unrestricted rights of land ownership, and freedom of trade. The Union Government cannot keep cultured Indians without the right to vote. They cannot disallow the land ownership of Indians who are permanent residents of South Africa."

The Censor Board of South Africa placed a ban on *Tyranny of Colour* and some 200 copies were confiscated and burned. Nevertheless, Joshi's fame as a writer brought him into prominence. The renowned modern Gujarati author Jhaverchanda Maghani extolled the virtue of Joshi as a writer. In 1938 Sadhu Vasvani's *Krishna's Flute* as translated by Joshi under the title of *Krishna Bansi*.

Another Gujarati book by Joshi *Dakshin Afrikani Rangbhumi* (South Africa's Land of Colour) was published in 1944. This book served as a sequel to the *Tyranny of Colour*. The author discusses the social and economic problems of Indians in South Africa. It is a poignant of reflection over his thirteen-year stay in South Africa. In 1945 *Verdict on South Africa* a book written in English by Joshi. was published in Bombay.

In 1947 he wrote *British Shahivadni Janjiro* in Gujarati (The chains of the British Imperialism). K.M. Munshi, a world renowned author of Gujarati literature, commented that the role which Britain had played in the history of India and other countries in the world had been analytically documented by Joshi's book, and that his work was a significant contribution to the annals of British colonialism.

Three further books, *Apartheid in South Africa* (1950), *The Struggle for Equality* (1951) and *Resurgent India* (1953), all written in English by Joshi, appeared in print. Between 1926 and 1953, within a span of 17 years, Joshi published 11 books in Gujarati and English. It is little wonder that when Joshi desired to visit India when his wife was ill, the government confiscated his passport, charging him of political treason on four counts: (i) participating in political activities by way of speeches in Hyderabad during his visit to India; (ii) accompanying Reverend Michael Scott and Dr. Yusuf

Dadoo all over the Union to deliver lectures against the government; (iii) writing subversive political literature (iv) carrying out activities harmful to South Africa. He was placed under 'House Arrest', and therefore decided to leave South Africa in 1957 and continue his work in India. In India he wrote and published three books *Afrikani Mahakranti* (Great Revolution of Africa) and *Vishvana Mahan Dharmo* (Great Religions of the World) and *Unrest in South Africa* in English.

On Joshi's 75th anniversary Desai (1971:170) wrote:

"Shri Joshi's fine career as a journalist has left an indelible impress on his books on various subjects as a writer of strength and conviction....The versatile author deserves to be congratulated for his lovely Gujarati prose that beams with the idiom and richness indigenous to the language, such as could be coveted by a protagonist of the language who sees the summum bonum of the Indian nation only in the use of vernacular and disparages English."

Religio-Cultural Literature

Lallo Harry often referred to as Sant Hari was born in India in 1896. After a primary education in his home country, he came to South Africa at the age of 14 in 1911 and settled in East London. He soon joined his father in business and was therefore unable to continue with a formal education. As a youth he participated in the social and cultural activities of the community. He engaged in self-study and spent his time continually in the company of scholars such as Swami Bhavani Dayal, Swami Adhyandji and Pandit Harishankar Vidyarthi. Since L. Harry was a shoemaker by trade he wrote under the pen name of *Upankar*, meaning shoemaker. Later he wrote under the pen name 'Lahari'.

Lahari led a religious life and religion was therefore the main theme in his literature. He was widely read and had a good command of the Gujarati language. He established a printing press at home and used it to publish all his religious literature. He wrote poetry in the form of *bhajans* (devotional songs) and had his works published in many local Gujarati magazines as well as in *Akand Anand* a publication in Gujarat in India. His essays on religion have been collected and published in two books, *Jivansadhana* and

Jyanlahari. Further two books, *Kirtan Manjari* and *Lahari Vandana*, are a collection of bhajans and kirtans. He gave expression to his intense devotion to God by basing his compositions on *bhakti rasa* (the devotional sentiment).

Nardev Vedalankar was born in 1915 in Tundi, a village near Surat in India. He graduated at the Gurukul Kangari in Haradwar with a 'Vedalankar' (jewel of the Vedas) title and was a scholar of Sanskrit, Hindu scriptures and Comparative Religious Philosophy. In 1947 he came to Durban as a Gujarati teacher. Since he was proficient in both the Hindi and Gujarati languages, he worked with both linguistic groups. The Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa was established in 1948 by him to coordinate education in the Hindi language. He wrote school texts in Gujarati and Hindi to suit the South African context. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Maha Gujarati Parishad in 1975.

Pandit Nardev, as he became popularly known since he was a practising Vedic priest, has written several religious books in the Hindi and Gujarati languages. His books provide practical religious instruction in Hinduism and serve as informative religious literature. He presents the tenets of Hinduism in an intellectual style and provides a rational view of Hinduism.

His Gujarati religious publications include:

Dharma Shiksha Pathavali Parts 1-3

Lagnano Adarsha

Samajik Margadarshika

He compiled the *Arya Upasana* (Aryan Prayer) in Gujarati-English which is widely used in the performance of Hindu religious rites.

Dharma Shiksha Pathavali is a narrative on Hindu philosophy, religion and culture. It focuses on moral and ethical issues aimed at delineating the path to the good life. Almost all the Gujarati schools in South Africa and even abroad are using these books.

Pandit Nardev did not write any creative literature but, like Gandhi, he wrote numerous articles and hundreds of letters to people all over the world who sought his advice on contemporary issues. He wrote a series of books on

Hinduism in English and a set of religious tracts. The Gujarati societies regularly invited him to contribute to their annual publications. He researched social topics which were communitarian in their concerns and presented them at local conferences. The following papers are some of the many that invoked deep thought.

- * *Gnationi utpatti ane teno vikas*
(the birth of caste and its development)
- * *Dakhina Afrikaman jati sansthao ane antar jatiaya lagno*
(caste organisations in South Africa and intermarriages among them)
- * *Gujarati samajni jati sansthao, temna fundo ane temnun bhavishya*
(Gujarati caste organisations, their funds and their future)

On his passing away in 1994 hundreds of tributes were received the following lines of a tribute from The Cape Cultural Society are eloquent of his contribution:

"Writer of texts so profound. Teacher of the faith
eternal, pragmatic and sound.

What debt of gratitude shall Sanskrit, Hindi and Gujarati speak?
Will not their poetry, sweet song and dance granted lease of life
upon this Land cry out in acclaim profuse."

Mohanlal Balsara's literary career was stimulated by easy access to the Gujarati library of the Port Elizabeth Kshatriya Mandal. His avid reading helped him quickly acquire a flair for the subtleties and nuances of the Gujarati language. Born in India in 1913 he accompanied his father to South Africa in 1926 where he was educated in English to primary school level. He was influenced by the principles of the Arya Samaj and became active in community organisations in Port Elizabeth. As honorary secretary of the Kshatriya Mahasabha (he held the post for about fifteen years), he did not diverge from his practice of using Gujarati in both his speech and writing. Balsara researched the history of the Kshatriya (previously known as Mochi - of shoemaker occupation) group of Gujaratis who settled in South Africa. His writings on social reform were premised on the values of cultural solidarity, education and religion. Booklets on these issues were distributed widely in the community. He tried to eradicate orthodox traditional practices and to inspire a Gujarati renaissance. He believed that the pen was

mightier than the sword in reforming a conservative society. Balasara extolled the virtues of education as the basis for social reform.

The local community presented him with numerous medals in recognition of his contribution. In India he received a medal and a citation for his work and was referred to as '*adarsha lekha*' (ideal author). Some of his original writings include:

- ❖ *anantra tapasvi* - a short story on Buddha's teachings
- ❖ *bhagna hridayi kalapi* - a short account of the poet Kalapi's emotional turbulence in his life and its effect on his poetry
- ❖ *apna vadilono itihās: ansuno itihās* – a poignant historical of the kshatriya caste
- ❖ *dakshin afrikana gujarationun sammelan* - a detailed account, with commentary, of the First National Gujarati Convention (1975) in South Africa
- ❖ *siddharthano mahatyag* - a narrative poem on the Buddha's quest for nirvana
- ❖ *yogi lucien* - a brief account of an Afrikaaner youth abandoned Christianity for Hinduism.
- ❖ *dakshin afrikaman kshatriya vasahatni shatabdi* – The Kshatriyas' 100 years in South Africa

After Balsara's death his works have been systematically filed and safely stored; only a few of them have been published. The family and the community plan to publish more of his work in the future.

As it had been customary to invite and appoint trained teachers from India in the Gujarati schools, Umiashankar M Jokhakar was appointed at the Gandhi Bharat Vidyalaya in Johannesburg in 1950. He was the last of the teachers to be brought to this country before the government refused permission to bring teachers from abroad. He was born in 1913 in Surat and obtained his Senior Teacher's Diploma at the P.R. Training College in Ahmedabad. Although Jokhakar also wrote poetry, like his contemporaries he contributed a great deal more to religious and cultural activities.

Ishvarprasad is a collection of hymns (from the Veda and the Gita), bhajans and dhuns. It was compiled by Jokhakar, published in 1953, and is currently

in its third edition. He has written several essays on religion and language which have been published in local and overseas magazines. His outstanding contributions are:

- ❖ *gujarati bhashani upayogita ane teni jalvani*
(use of the Gujarati language and its maintenance)
- ❖ *apano varso*
(our heritage)
- ❖ *sanskar sinchan*
(nurturing culture)
- ❖ *vedokta grihashthashram*
(the stage of marriage according to the Veda)

Jokhakar is the recipient of many awards and citations for his service to the community. His love for poetry inspired him to become the secretary of the *buzme adab* in the Transvaal.

Kshatriya Mahila Mandal of Cape Town has compiled and published a collection of wedding songs, *lagnana geeto*. Wedding songs which form part of the Gujarati tradition are sung during the various ceremonies before marriage. The *geets* are expressive of *shringar*, *karun* and *hasya rasa*.

Creative Literature

Local Gujarati creative literature lacks the vitality of the genre in India. Serious efforts have been made, however, by writers of both poetry and prose to raise standards. An exasperated writer Jokhakar said "What is the use of writing Gujarati literature in South Africa? Who is going to read it?" Writers, indeed, have received little recognition and incentive. Only those who still recognise the importance of the mother tongue persevere in their effort to encourage the maintenance of Gujarati. The expression of various *rasas* as mentioned earlier is especially evident in creative literature even in South Africa.

Poetry

The only poet who has published more than one book of poems is Kanti B Mehta (using the pen name *Ashlesha*. Mehta born in Amchak in Surat, came to South Africa as a youth and obtained his secondary education in Johannesburg. He was fortunate to obtain a scholarship for teacher training at J J Training College in Surat. After completing his studies he joined the Gandhi Bharat Vidyalaya in Johannesburg as a teacher in 1955.

For the minority immigrant Gujarati community of South Africa it has been a struggle to maintain the mother tongue. It is refreshing to find a poet of rare distinction in the Gujarati language. There are very few who can express their inner emotions through poetry. Mehta's publications include the following books:

- ❖ *Ankur*
(a collection of poems of various poets in South Africa- compiled by K Mehta and K Prajapati)
- ❖ *ramkatha*
(written for children)
- ❖ *jankar*
- ❖ *gujaratna gungan*
- ❖ *baharo phool varsavo*
(a collection of the poet's poems)
- ❖ *maheki uthi phool suvas*
(a collection of the poet's poems)
- ❖ *manavatana mul*
(an unpublished but staged three act play)

Mehta's poems deal both with nature and the human condition. Many of them are odes to nature, bespeaking a deep appreciation of the beauty and wonder of nature. Again many deal with people, expressing the anguish, hypocrisy and degradation of human beings. The poet clearly attempts to convey a message to society. He is critical of the injustices prevalent in society based on class and caste. Some of his poems are written in metre, some are in free style. His efforts are laudable in a country where Gujarati as a literary medium is increasingly falling into obsolescence.

Svarachit Kavita, (self-composed poems), a collection of poems written by Babarbhai Chavada was published in 1991 after his death. He was born in 1908 in India and came to Cape Town with his father as a young boy. He was influenced by his family to 'uplift' their caste group. Being educated in the Gujarati language, he engaged in the promotion of the mother tongue by actively participating in Cape Town's United Hindu Association. In 1924 at the age of sixteen he wrote and presented a poem, at the Cape Town City Hall, in praise of Sarojini Naidu who was on a visit to South Africa. He was heartily applauded for his effort and this inspired him to write poetry.

Chavada wrote poems in praise of God; description of nature; old age; inspiration to civil activists; Mahatma Gandhi; Eid-ul-fitr; child marriage; divorce; and remarriage. Through his poems Chavada sought to instil moral values in the community.

Karsandas Prajapati wrote literature under the pen names *Chakradharai* and *Kalant*. He was born in India in 1934 and was brought to South Africa in 1936. His father sent him to be educated in Baroda in the Gujarati medium where he matriculated and also obtained his degree of Bachelor of Teaching (B.T.). When he returned to South Africa he taught at the Springs Gujarati school and then at the Gandhi Bharat Vidyalaya.

Prajapati has written articles on social topics and composed poetry which was published in several local Gujarati annual magazines. Some of his works were also published in Gujarat's popular monthlies for children, *Ramakadun* and *Gandiv*. He also wrote plays such as *Chalo Iagnaman* which was produced in 1958 and *Radiyali Raat* which was produced in 1979. He acted in both the plays which toured Durban and Johannesburg and the proceeds of these went to the *Indian Opinion*. His poem *Divali Avene* claimed third prize in the South African Gujarati poetry competition.

Muhammad Ahmed Mehtar, who was well known by his pen name 'Farooqi', was born in Surat in 1911. He came to South Africa at the age of nine and later attended the High-Grade Indian School in Durban. Although he was inspired by the Urdu language and has written poetry in Urdu, he originally wrote in his mother tongue Gujarati. Mehtar wrote articles in Gujarati for 'Indian Views' and later Mr. Moosa Meer invited him to become its sub-editor. He was instrumental in the establishment of the *Buzme Adab*,

a poetic society, which has branches all over South Africa. At each annual *kavi sammelan (mushaira)* of the Buzme Adab, Hindu and Muslim Gujarati poets met together and presented their 'new' compositions. The anthology of these poems *kavyaguchha* (a bouquet of flowers), though hand-written, was published by the society.

Mehtar also published his poems in a collection called *kavyakunj* in 1981. His poetry expresses his personal experiences and observations of life. He expresses joy when *ekyatana bi*, the seeds of unity, are sown by the getting together of Muslim and Hindu Gujarati poets. In his (*jivan*) *bhar bantu jay chhe* the poet is disillusioned by changing values, and life seems a burden.

Farooqi Mehtar has won respect in both the Muslim and Hindu communities for his humility of character and love for poetry. He has also been a prolific song writer and over sixty of his songs have been recorded since 1944.

In 1981 he also published a book of poems in Hindi named *Rekhaen* in the Devanagari script with the assistance of Prof. R. Sitaram.

There have been many women in the Gujarati community who contributed to literature though they have not been able to publish their works. Nevertheless Vijyotiben Dayaram's poems have been hand-written and compiled in a booklet entitled *Jyoti Kavyakunj*. Vijyotiben has been very active in community activities and has played a leading role in advancing the cause of women. In the same manner she has composed her poems which express her heartfelt desires. Many of the poems are a dedication to God. In a poem *vandarni vat* she lashes out at human kind by portraying the monkey race who remark that 'when we meet we do not ask the caste and creed of our fellow beings, but the humans find it very important to distinguish these differences and having done so sneer at the 'low' ones'.

Two sisters from Simonstown in the Cape, Padma Chotubhai Patel and Manjula Natvarlal Patel, have been active in promoting the Gujarati language among children. They have written numerous poems and articles for many local and national magazines and have contributed significantly to Gujarati literature. Padma Patel wrote a collection of poems for children set in a familiar *raag* (tune) which have been recited and sung at schools. The poems are educational and aim to make the Gujarati school lessons

interesting and exciting. The topics include colours, exercise, mother, alphabet, divali, Gandhiji, and care of the teeth which have proved to be very popular in teaching the children. Her articles are of a pragmatic nature.

Some of the other learned popular writers and some amateurs whose details I have not been able to give are Urmilaben Patel, Mr. Dolat M. Desai, Mr. N.N. Desai, Mr. Govind Parmar, Mrs. Laxmi Patel, Ms. Nirmala Desai, Mr. N.V. Mehta, Mr. A.M. Meer 'Alif', Mr. Y.I. Shekhji, Mrs. Taramati Mehta, Mr. K.C. Naik, Mr. Govind Patel, Mr. D. Bhatt 'Kailash', Mr. S.H. Dhupelia, Mr. E.M. Meer 'Yusuf', Mr. Babubhai Patel and many others.

The above personalities have also made regular contributions to the popular local Gujarati periodicals such as *prakash*, *yuvak*, *pragati*, *sharda*, *samaj*, *jay gurjari*, *pathik*, *adarsh* and live presentations at *kavi sammelans*.

Short Stories and Drama

An outstanding contribution to prose in Gujarati has been made by Gulabbhai Haribhai Patel of Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape. Born in Uitenhage in 1935 he began writing Gujarati articles and literature in 1952. Patel first studied at a local college and obtained his Matriculation Certificate through Union Correspondence College in Johannesburg. He took a keen interest in the politics of the country and contributed many articles in Gujarati to the *Indian Opinion* in Durban and *Pratap* in Surat. Many such articles, especially on apartheid were also sent to other newspapers in Bombay and Surat and as a result the members of the Security Branch raided his premises and confiscated invaluable equipment and written material.

G.B. Patel has written and published the following books:

- ❖ *sanskaritane chanyade*
A social drama published in 1956.
- ❖ *koi gora koi kala*
a collection of essays on 'colour bar' published in 1958
- ❖ *yovanni yad*
a collection of short stories
- ❖ *sadhana*

- ❖ a second collection of short stories
- ❖ *pathik*
a popular monthly periodical of literature which included stories, poetry, miscellaneous essays and drama of which he was also an editor.

Pathik was first published in April 1964. As the editor he used to send the material to be printed in India through lack of facilities in South Africa. The books were posted from Uitenhage to subscribers. *Pathik* was a periodical which could match the standards of Gujarat and it became very popular. However, the publication of *Pathik* ceased after two years due to printing problems.

Most of the stories in *Pathik* are set in the cities of South Africa. The themes illustrate the lives of the Gujaratis in their traditional setting.

Periodicals, Magazines and Special Editions of Jubilees

The limited scope of Gujarati literature in South Africa has inhibited the development and publication of creative literature. In spite of the negative attitudes expressed, first by the government and then by new generation of Indians (who grew up with less zeal for the maintenance of their mother tongue) towards the Indian Languages in South Africa, the Gujarati community strived to do their best within the limited resources available. While the fairly literate sectors of the community engaged cultural activities, they also tried their hand at writing.

The Gujarati community has been receiving periodic publications from Transvaal, Cape and Natal. The writers had the opportunity to exercise their creativity but were also pragmatic in their approach

Below I list the most popular publications that were available, perhaps omitting some which I have not been able to trace. All the following publications have been presented in a systematic style though almost all of them have been handwritten. They include poetry, stories and essays on a variety of topics.

Prakash

From the year 1944 *Prakash* was published by the Tarun Bharat Sangh Sanstha of Johannesburg. P. S. Joshi had served as its editor. It was stopped after three years.

Mahagujarat

This was a monthly publication from Natal and only survived two years, 1945-1946. Dr. N.P. Desai, a widely read Gujarati scholar and medical practitioner, had been the editor. The main aim of the periodical was to inspire interest (*ruchi*) in literature and language and introduce social reform.

Yuvak

The enthusiastic Gujarati youth of Port Elizabeth in 1950 ventured to begin an annual publication, *Yuvak*, devoted to literature in Gujarati. The editor was Manilal Ranchod. A very high standard of Gujarati with a Sanskrit bent (*sanskrit pradhan*) was used. The annual made a regular appearance from 1950 to 1960. It continues to be published but at irregular intervals.

Pragati

This annual was published by the Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj and compiled by Gandhi Bharat Vidyalay from 1958 to 1981. Many of its articles are contributions of the teachers and members of the society. The pupils of the school were also encouraged to contribute to the annual. Each edition also carried the annual report of the Gujarati school. The first editor was the scholar Mr. U. Jokhakar and the last was Mr. M.K. Patel.

Sharda

The Bharat Sharda Mandir (Gujarati School) under the care of Transvaal United Patidar society has published *Sharda* annually from 1962 to 1979. Mr. U. Jokhakar and Mr. Vinaychandra Patel served as the co-editors. After a lapse it is now published as a Diwali annual. In 1996 it presented its bumper 16th edition to mark the 60th anniversary of the school. Few

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contributions are made locally but most of the stories and essays are from authors in Gujarat. A teacher explained that since the Gujaratis have little access to books from Gujarat the society looks to Indian authors from Gujarat for contributions to fill this vital gap.

Samaj

The 'Lahari' family of East London had published their own annual from 1945 to 1952. The family owned a press and the dedication of each generation has contributed to the continuity of service to language and literature.

Adarsh

Adarsh Yuvak Mandal, a youth group from Johannesburg, has been regularly publishing *Adarsh* annually from 1977. The editor is the very able writer Mr. Karsandas Prajapati. It has maintained a high standard and includes poetry, short stories and other articles written locally. It has been very popular with the Gujarati community.

Cape Cultural Society Divali Annual

Following the implementation of the Group Areas Act the Gujarati community of Cape Town was relocated to Rylands, the suburb earmarked for Indians. The original Gujarati organisation known as the United Association changed its name to the Cape Hindu Cultural Society since it moved to Rylands. From 1974 the society has regularly published its Divali annual. Fifty percent of the articles are in Gujarati and the other half are in English. It is printed on high quality glossy paper and maintains a professional standard. Hundreds of copies are distributed all over South Africa. It invites contributions from local writers.

Jay Gurjari

With the establishment of the Maha Gujarati Parishad in 1975, and its enthusiasm for uniting Gujaratis nationally, the monthly periodical *Jay Gurjari* was initiated. The first editor was Mr. Ramlal Harry from East

London who has tirelessly served the community and has been a custodian of the Gujarati language.

Mahatma Gandhi Shatabdi Samiti Annual

- special twenty first anniversary issue (1969-1990)

This society was established in 1969 which was declared a Gandhian year by the general assembly of the United Nations to commemorate the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. The *Samiti* organises an annual eisteddfod which has proved very successful. The *Samiti* on its 21st anniversary published a souvenir brochure. Most of the messages of goodwill are written in Gujarati and more than half the articles published in the book are also written in Gujarati of a high standard.

Conclusion

"Literature" to most people may be synonymous with poetry and prose, but in this research I have tried to include a wide range of writing by the people. Most of the writers of Gujarati literature in South Africa may not be acknowledged as literary people in the strictest sense but, given the opportunity, they do have the potential to develop their skills. All the modern tendencies and trends in literature have been assimilated by Gujarati literature. With their efforts at expressing their concerns about socio-political issues, or giving vent to their emotions on various subjects, the personalities described have made invaluable contributions to the Gujarati language in South Africa.

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