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ADVENT OF POPULAR IN GUJARATI FICTIONS: ITS LITERARY HISTORY AND POLITICS

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Abstract:

Gujarat has turned out to be the centre for varied interpretations in the last decade, particularly because of two-fold reasons: firstly, the communal riots of 2002 and secondly, the economical move that Gujarat has made. The idea of Gujarat varies time to time – from the motherland of Gandhi to the platform of Modian politics. This shift has occurred due to various reasons; the foremost being among them is advent of popular. The invasion of popular in Gujarat has deeply affected the realm of culture, politics and literature. The paper discovers the seeds of popular in Gujarat, its steady rise, impulses behind its growth and its effects on socio-cultural life of Gujaraties. The years after the formation of Gujarat formed the childhood of popular and the post-2002 period is its youth. Popular in Gujarat is in its full bloom today, hence the paper tries to prepare a brief historiography of popular in Gujarat mainly focusing on literary domain. Thus, the paper pithily surveys the significant trends in history of popular fiction writing from beginning to present day and its struggle with the main stream or canonical Gujarati literature.

KEY WORDS:

Popular Culture, Popular fiction, GP fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Gujarat, the region having multiple and 'vibrant' identities, has become the centre for miscellaneous interpretations in the last decade, particularly because of two reasons: firstly, the communal riots of 2002 and secondly, the economical move that Gujarat has made. The idea of Gujarat varies time to time since the day of its formation in May, 1960 – from the motherland of Gandhi to the platform of Modian politics. This shift has occurred due to various reasons; the foremost being among them is advent of popular. The invasion of popular in Gujarat has deeply affected the realm of culture, politics and literature. Each and every society undergoes certain changes with passing of time and when these changes take hold of the socio-cultural-political lives of the people; this always results into the stimulant for the origin of popular. It is difficult to identify popular in its initial stage as it becomes the part of our cultural life; it can be only observed by the man of the mid-post-transitional era. Gujarat is passing through its mid-transitional era where the popular is about to instill itself in the main stream culture of Gujarat. The two standpoints that gave speed to the rise of popular culture in Gujarat are westernization and modernization in India. Yet, it is difficult to separate the modernization from the westernization as in India it is considered that the process of westernization is the beginning of the modernization.

The term 'popular culture' first surfaced in US in the 1950s when non-categorical culture had become a wide spread social reality. Popular culture emerged in the post-war era which gave people regardless of class or educational background, considerable buying power, thus propelling them into the

unprecedented position of shaping trends in fashion, music, and lifestyle through such powers. Since then, popular culture had played a pivotal role in the evolution of the modern society. This why the historians now tend to characterize the periods since the 1950s with the terms such as the hippie era, the disco era, the punk era, the hip-hop era, and so on. The study of Popular cultural is the post-disciplinary perspective of cultural studies. It is bit difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the study of popular culture and in cultural studies and the study of popular culture in historical studies, literary studies, anthropology or sociology.

Raymond Williams defines the term 'popular', in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983), as:

'Popular' was originally a legal and political term, from *popularis* (Latin = belonging to the people). [Popular] ... referred to a political system constituted or carried on by the whole people, but there was also the sense ... of 'low' or 'base'. The transition to the predominant modern meaning of 'widely-favoured' or 'well-liked' is interesting in that it contains a strong element of setting out to gain favour. ... [In nineteenth century,] 'Popular' was being seen from the point of view of the people rather than from those seeking favour or power from them. Yet the earlier sense has not died. Popular culture was not identified by the people but by others, and it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work (cf. 'popular literature', 'popular press' as distinguished from 'quality press'); and work deliberately setting out to win favour. ...; as well as the more modern sense of well-liked by many people, with which of course, in many senses, the earlier senses overlap. The recent sense of 'popular culture' as the culture actually made by people for themselves is different from all these; it is often displaced to the past as 'folk culture' but it is also an important modern emphasis. The range of senses can be seen again in 'popularise', which until C19 was a political term, in the old sense, and then took on its special meaning of presenting knowledge in generally accessible ways. Its C19 uses were mainly favourable, and in C20 the favourable sense is still available, but there is also a strong sense of simplification, which in some circles is predominant. 1 (Uppercased 'C' stands for 'century')

For Williams, the term stems from the legal and political term meaning 'belonging to the people' but in its historical shift towards the widespread modern usage of 'well liked', it has received pejorative implications which signifies it as something 'inferior kinds of work', as well as, something set out 'to gain favour'. The terms such as popular culture, popular literature, and popular art in current critical usage typically covers the sense both of 'for the people' and 'of the people'. Williams suggests that this is a relatively recent development, as previously the term such as 'folk culture' was reserved to imply the culture produced by the people. Since the term 'popular' reflects a swift shift in life-style of the people, we can say that, there has been an etymological relation between popular and people. According to Williams, 'Popular' means (a) belonging to the people; (b) low or base; (c) well-liked by many people; (d) deliberately seeking favour or wide approval; (e) inferior; and, (f) something of the people and for the people.

Discussing the importance of 'popular' in cultural studies, Stuart Hall, in his *Notes on Deconstructing "Popular,"* elucidates:

Popular culture ... is an arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture already fully formed – might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters.²

Popular culture has always been set up in resistance to the puritan ideology of aesthetic purity and highbrow intellect in modernist culture. It has become an expression or construction of youth culture and has enabled the formation of sites of enunciation for a variety of 'marginal' groups. This much primary understanding concerning 'popular' would certainly assist us to comprehend the idea of 'popular literature'. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 'popular literature' –

... includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Popular literature, unlike high literature, generally does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure. The growth of popular literature has paralleled the spread of literacy through education and has been facilitated by technological developments in printing. With the Industrial Revolution, works of literature, which were previously produced for consumption by small, well-educated elites, became accessible to large sections and even majorities of the members of a population.³

According to this definition, popular literature implies the writings: (a) intended for masses; (b) set to find favour of large audience; (c) designed primarily to entertain; (d) without high degree of formal beauty or subtlety; and, (e) facilitated by spread of literacy and technological developments in printing. Popular literature is often conceived as 'minor literature' or as 'inferior literature'. The definition of popular literature is time-bound which always undergoes alterations with passage of time. The nature of popular literature is ephemeral, that is, something losing its appeal and significance with passing of time. The border line between the artistic and popular literature is very much murky. An instance of Shakespeare

rightly endorses this claim. When Shakespeare was alive, he was considered a writer of popular literature; but modern academic milieu regards him as a creator of artistic literature. Popular literature includes genres such as romance, fantasy, science fiction, novels, detective story, murder mystery, comic books, and cartoon strips. Recently, the plays intended to amuse the audience are also included in the list of popular literature genres.

The paper is divided into two parts: the first discusses the rise and development of popular in Gujarat; and the second surveys the history of the Gujarati popular fictions and its literary politics.

[1]

Over the past a few decades, the urbanization, liberalization and globalization of the economy, the IT revolution, the success of global Indian diaspora, the affirmation of religious identities, reinterpretations of history, the rise of mass media and political landscape, empowerment of women and hitherto neglected, liberty of expression, and spread of film industry-cinema have given rise to popular culture in India and Gujarat is deeply influenced by these occurrences. Being a coastal state, Gujarat has been in touch with foreign countries for centuries. First Parsees came in Gujarat and got mixed with Gujarati culture leaving a slight impact on Gujarati culture. But Gujarati culture could not resist itself against the invasion of English culture which came with the arrival of the British in India and establishment a firm in Surat in 1614. During this period, many Gujarati also went abroad for commercial and other purposes. A Gujarati community known as 'Patel' was/is the largest in India to explore the world. It was also the time when many non-Gujarati Indians came and became the part of Gujarati cultural tradition. All these have brought a shift in traditional Gujarati culture. Up to the nineteenth century, Gujarati culture underwent numerous drastic changes – from inclusion of the western dance steps into Gujarati Raas-Garba to the replacing of Gujarati kheer with English cake. However, all these attacks could not replace the essence of Gujarati culture; it just gave new form to it. (Because none can dare to remove Gujarati Athana from dinner table, he/she can change flavor only.)

All through the nineteenth-twentieth century, Gujarati society witnessed a particularly social reshuffling. Huge numbers of the former peasantry now moved in dense cities to work in newly growing mass-production industries. Industrialization and the rise of organized capitalism streamlined virtually every sphere of life: new concepts of harmonized time, the blending of previously dispersed local cultures, dehumanizing life of factory work all contributed to a synchronization of experience, producing a sense of shared fortune across the wide region. Simultaneously, increasing social density and the division of labour in capitalism augmented social segregation, particularly giving rise to vibrant middle classes. The need of man-power in the intricate administration of capitalist industry as well as the state appended widespread of literacy strengthened these new groups. These sorts of changes had immense insinuations for political as well as cultural life of Gujarat.

A noteworthy move in the sources of power took place with the concurrent concentration and differentiation of the society. The idea of the popular as discrete from the folk and elite entails not just the huge numbers of the commonplace people, but large numbers organized as the people. The pre-industrial Gujarat was controlled by the feudal mode of production and during that time, there was difference between the cultural styles and forms of folk and elite cultures. The peasants and workers were the part of the folk cultural tradition which was chiefly oral, community-caste-tribe-based and was communicated from the generation to generation acclimatizing itself and always lodging new changes with genuineness, spontaneity, authenticity and creativity. Folk culture was in constant interaction with the elite cultural tradition which was textual, formal and systematic. There existed a process of reciprocity in the adoption and adaption of styles, themes and forms between the two. Hence, folk cultural tradition has also been described as 'part-culture'. This traditional mode of culture was ensconced into the organic bases of the traditional social structure as caste, tribe and community. The peasant and feudal economy being relatively stable in respect of technology and social institution, the folk culture continued not only to assimilate new cultures and styles of life within the established traditions but also protected it from attrition so long as the traditional economic and social structures continued. It had gargantuan elasticity to incorporate and integrate the alien culture forms and styles.

As the traditional agrarian-feudal economy undergoes capitalist and market-oriented transformation, the traditional social structures which legitimized access to cultural forms, styles and roles in accordance with one's position in the class and the caste hierarchy undergo changes due to politicization and democratization of the traditional communitarian structures of the villages and the cities giving place to a new form of cultural differentiation which has been variously described as 'popular culture' or 'mass culture'.

Emergence of popular culture coincides with the revolutionary changes in the technology-means

of communication leads to the expansion of mass media on one hand, and, growth in transport and travel facilities on the other. These technological innovations strengthen the efficacy of communication of the people, cultures and style of life. Unlike the folk-elite culture, the popular culture is not based on the communitarian social structures institutionalized by custom and tradition. It is not even territorially encircled. Its form, style and representation are not directed by the pre-determined traditional rules and customary explanations but by free flowing market forces. Popular culture, having essentially eclectic esthetics, acquires its authorization not from the submission to the elite or formal norms but from the impulse to contrive or manipulate people's motivations to supplement the market forces for monetary benefit. However, it is technologically fluctuated in the power of self-amplification, development and dominance as it flies with the swift wings of the print and electronic media. For backing, it does not have to depend upon any institutionalized social groups as all traditional cultural institutions did. It creates sponsors on its own by means of a new social phenomenon called 'audience' which is part of neither any community nor group. Audience is faceless agglomeration of individuals who for a certain moment of time share commonality of viewership or audience experience of mass media through their exposure to the message or symbols having cultural significance. Forms of advertisement, calendar art, popular cinema, telefilms, documentaries, etc., constitute its one aspect and the culture programmes casted through radio and television represents its other manifestation.

The growth of popular has resulted in a deeper social transformation in Gujarati society which can be noticed through the indicators such as: discontent with the traditional rural life, massive migration to the cities, growing charm for consumerism and weakening of the bonds within family, kin-kith and local communities due to psychic and social mobility. The emergence of popular culture in India, particularly in Gujarati, has consequently led to the production of popular fictions, poetry and drama. Hundreds of the popular fictions are being read in book-form, magazines or in the column writing; popular fictions are widely appreciated as 'new' canon.

[2]

The influence of popular has been slightly visible since the beginning of Gujarati Arvaachin Sahitya (Modern literature) which covers the era from 1850 to present day. Here it was flapped under the main stream literature in such a way that it was almost impossible to distinguish popular from the canonical. It is only in the Adhunik Yug (1955-1985), the presence of popular came to be noticed. It is the era which was marked by the spread of education, passion of decolonization, industrial development of Gujarat, technological advancement, feeling of freedom and etc. To cater the needs of newly educated masses, more and more reading material was produced. The period also boomed with hullabaloo of printing presses as post-1960 years brought printing industries in Gujarat. Number of publishing companies took newspaper, magazines and books to each corner of the Gujarat that obviously resulted into cultivation of reading taste and competition among the publishers. The rivalry of publishing houses consequently led towards the introduction of popular substances in the reading material for the public. The primary purpose of the introducing the popular substances was to attract more and more readers, so fetching of popular in Gujarati literature was totally an economical strategy. Spread of education gave birth to the people with pens who started to write down to amuse themselves and others. And this generation of writers was nourished by the spread of newspapers and magazines. As the newspapers and magazines wanted such material which can provide amusement and enjoyment to the masses, these writers got a platform to present imaginary thoughts. These writers focused on the popular thrust areas such as adventure, suspense, romance, love-triangles, rivalry and etc. Before we go to the politics of Gujarati popular (GP) fictions, let us survey a brief historical account of GP fictions.

One can roughly say that the history of GP fictions begins Vaju Kotak. Vaju Kotak was the one who initiated popular tradition in Gujarat. Vaju Lakhmashi Kotak (January 1915 – Nov. 1959), born in Rajkot, is well-known Gujarati popular fiction writer who initiated very famous Gujarati magazine, Chitrlekha in 1950. Basically man of media, Vaju Kotak started his career as popular columnist to provide entertainment to the readers of Chitrlekha. He was also famous as the script writer. His famous fiction are: Ansu na Toran (1976), Ansu ni Atashbaji (1973), Balpan na Vanarveda, Buddhi na Brahmachari (1984), Chundadi ne Chokha (1976), Ghar ni Shobha, Ha ke Na (1970), Juvan Haiya (1980), Chandarvo (1975) and others. Most of his novels appeared in form of serial novel in Chitrlekha.

Following Vaju Kotak, there came Ashwini Bhatt who is also very famous name in the field of GP fictions. He has written many popular fictions such as Aakhet, Aakrosh ane Aankansha, Aayano, Angaar, Ardhi Rate Azadi, Ashaka Mandal (1979), Fansalo (1985), Kamthan, Karamat (1998), Kasab, Katibandh, Nirja Bhargava (1987), Angar (1996), Othar (1984) and etc.

Subsequently Rajanikumar Pandya also paved this field. Well-known in Gujarati literary circle,

Rajanikumar Pandya started his career as a bank-manager. He was very much interested in Hindi films and movies earlier, but later on he turned into a popular writer. He is popular for his two docu-novels Kunti and Pushpadaah later made into television serials. He is the person who named a Gujarati Magazine as Shabdasetu. He also wrote immensely for this magazine, there will not be any doubt if one says Shabdasetu provided him platform to develop as writer or he has made great contribution for the development of Shabdasetu. He, presently, works as a columnist for Divya Bhaskar, a Gujarati daily.

In this tradition of popular fiction writers Rasik Mehta is very important figure. Rasik Mehta has written more than one hundred twenty works. His popular works are: Andhi Atit Ni (1976), Sesphool (1972), Anarkali (1980), Chambal ni Chameli (1976), Chambal no Chitkar (1975), Dhabkar (1968), Madar Manjali (1964), Madhuchanda (1979) and many more.

Then there came Sarang Barot. His original name was Dahyabhai Dolatram Barot. By profession was an assistant camera man in Bollywood who turned out very popular writer. He has written thirty novels in his life time. The major theme that dominated his novels was family issues of day-to-day life. His famous works are: Nadvan (1968), Renbasera, Nadi Naav Sanjog, Vilas Vahu (1976), Agankhel (1974), and Suryamukhi (1963).

Another famous writer, Vitthal Pandya (1923-2008), the son of Sabarkantha, was the famous as an assistant director of a movie called, Reporter, casting Raj Kapoor as a hero. He worked as an assistant director for many Hindi and Gujarati movies and also as an actor in Gujarati movies like Mangalfer. The well-known among his forty-five famous fiction are: Mitha Jal na Min, Sukh ni Sarhad, Nain Varsya Raatbhar, Samana to Pankhi ni Jaat, Yaadon na Bhina Ran, Lohi no Badlato Rang, Aakhu Aakash Mari Ankho ma, Manas hovani Mane Bik and Bukani Bandhela Rasta. Many of his fictions are transformed into movies and many a times the plots his fictions are derived from the movies.

One of popular writers of recent times is Dr. Sharad Thakar, a famous columnist and doctor. He writes his Doctor ni Diary in Wednesday supplementary reading called 'Kalash' and Ran ma Khilyu Gulab in 'Sunday Bhaskar' of Divya Bhaskar. His lucid style which can touch the hearts of the people is the hall mark of his writings. He has authored more than thirty five works. He is famous for his works such as Doctor ni Diary, Shwet Kagad Lili Lagani, Ran ma Khilyu Gulab, Aeni Sugandh no Dariyo, Tan Tulsi Man Mogaro, Sapana ni Haveli, Vagada no Tahooko.

Apart from these Mahesh Yagnik, working as a columnist for Divya Bhaskar presently, is famous for his Anjalpani which appeared in Divya Bhaskar in serial form. Kajal Oza-Vaidya is well-known for her Vahali Aastha, Ek Sanj Na Sarname, Dariyo Ek Taras No, Tara Vina Shaher Ma, and, Lili Sagpan Lohi Nu. Varsha Pathak, Vinesh Antani, Gunvant Shah, Ashokpuri Goswami, Chndrakant Sheth, Dinkar Joshi have also contributed a lot in the field of popular fictions. The supplementary reading, generally known in Gujarati as 'purti,' of the newspapers like Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh, Divya Bhaskar has contributed a lot in formation of popular in Gujarat.

GP fictions can be characterized by writer's love for name and fame, sophisticated style, personalized language, and issues of day-to-day life. In post-2002 years have witnessed a shift in theme of GP fictions.

Popular fictions are best understood as, what Bourdieu says, "art-as-commodity" produced for its "commercial values" by mass-market culture industry and consumed by the individual readers pursuing personal needs for experiences such as adventure and excitement within guaranteed limits. In Gujarat, it has been also witnessed that ruling class decides a text's status as a canon or popular. In post-2000 years, it is very difficult to say what criteria make a text popular. It is observed that those working in academia or having connections with some Sahitya Parishads through their writings of 'whatever' quality become main stream writer, and many who seems to possess real literary quality are deemed as popular writers. Popular fictions are written in a large number and a condition that has aroused is that it seems that popular fiction will surpass canonical fiction in numbers of readers putting canonical fictions category of minority.

A significant question that we need to consider here is what makes popular fiction different from the canonical one. On the basis my reading, I can conclude that the absence of certain factors makes a text popular and their presence makes it canonical. These factors are: 1. Criteria of Teachability: which means - a. level of difficulty, b. suitability for the level and type of targeted course (in India, universities have the sole authority of confirming the status of canon, it is mandatory for a text to have teachability), and, c. length, 2. Aesthetic Qualities: which hints at - a. innovative, complex use of language and form, b. artistic unity, c. technique, and, lack of obvious political content; 3. Intellectual Resonance: which denotes - a. balance with already existing knowledge and its capacity to empower intellectual tradition, and, b. authentic and significant subject matter; 4. General Human Interest or Universality: which suggests the portrayal of essential human experiences magnetizing all irrespective of time, age, and place, and, 5. Cultural Representativeness: which signifies - a. competency of creating cultural harmony, b. faculty of depicting cultural life of people, c. capability of creating unique cultural identity, and d. trimetric of land,

culture and identity. If a text passes from the ordeal of these factors, it would become a canon. Unfortunately GP fiction do not possess these qualities; they chiefly deal with the pop culture that has emerged in Gujarat, and not with essential Gujarati cultural manifestation; they do not make any contribution to intellectual tradition but feed popular intelligentsia; they do not have any aesthetic value, they possess commercial value; they are not universal, they are short-lived that appeal to particular group of readers only. However GP fiction is widely appreciated in Gujarat. Gujarat is a very good market for the consumption of popular fiction. All the popular fictions of the world, written in English, are available in Gujarat in Gujarati as there is a tradition of translating the popular fiction into Gujarati with its arrival in market. But this does not mean that GP fiction is inferior, it has the capacity to serve according to the tastes of people.

Here we also need to distinguish the difference between Indian popular fiction and the western popular fiction. The terming as 'popular' in India seems more an aesthetics-based classification whereas the same term denotes the power-based cataloging in the western milieu.

Thus, at end, one can surely say that the advent of popular has brought many changes in the socio-political-cultural life of Gujarat and Gujaraties and has largely affected literary domain. However the school of aesthetics may regard popular fiction as derogatory one, the school of social power considers this type of fiction as 'counter canon' which has emerged out as a canon of its own category.

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