



THE MAKING OF NARMAD AS A CREATIVE KING OF THE GUJARĀTĪ LITERATURE: A TRIBUTE THROUGH ATTRIBUTES

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ABSTRACT

In order to better understand, know and estimate the personality of Narmad as a human being and literary artist, it is must to examine the surrounding situations and contexts of his life with reference to the study of his autobiographical, socio-economical, socio-cultural, socio-historical, socio-political and the socio-literary aspects. The social situations, people's predicament and unavoidable circumstances right after his birth till his death need to be explored that made him not simply a *kavi* (poet) but the *Vīr kavi* (a brave poet) of the *Arvāchin* (modern) Gujarātī literature. His journey as a common man to be the brave poet is made of many unexpected and unavoidable pros and cons, negative as well as the positive attributes of his life. The making of Narmadāshankar Lālshankar Dave as *Vīr* Narmad- and always known and remembered as the same-the king of creative literature digs the deep roots of the sufferings and happenings of his life. Full with the emotive *josso* in his heart, Narmad is considered the poet of bravery, chivalry and aggression with the burning desire for patriotism. Compared to Dalpatrām with reference to the style and patriotism, Narmad is intensely passionate whereas Dalpatrām is sober and restrained. Further, Narmad has always been compared to Durgārām for his humanitarian and spiritual views, to Dayārām for his earlier phase of traditional poems and to Navalrām for his views on the social reformation. Various comparisons render Narmad a higher position in the history of the Gujarātī literature. Truly, the life of Narmad registers the image of that poet who turns out to be more and more shining like the gold, having passed through the social kiln of fire having foiling, boiling and burning. Really, lucky is Gujarāt to have a poet like *Vīr* Narmad born.

Key Words: making, socio-historic, British, *ākhyāns*, *bhajans*, *garbis*, *prabhātiyās*, *bhakti*

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social situations, people's predicament and circumstances right after his birth till his death need to be explored that made him not simply a *kavi* (poet) but the *Vīr kavi* (a brave poet), famously known as *Vīr* Narmad, of the *Arvāchin* (modern) Gujarātī literature. His journey as a common man to be the brave poet is made of many unexpected and

unavoidable pros and cons, negative as well as the positive attributes of his life. The making of Narmad as the king of creative literature digs the deep roots of the sufferings and happenings of his life. Truly, the life of Narmad registers the image of that poet who turns out to be more and more shining like the gold, having passed through the social kiln of fire having foiling, boiling and burning.

This article, for the sake of convenience to study the making of Narmad into a kingly creative poet, can be divided into two parts: The Biographical Context and the Socio-historical Context.

The Biographical Context:

Born at Surat in a very traditionally orthodox Nāgar Brahmin family of Lālshankar Dave on the 24th of August 1833, Narmad spent most of the years of his early childhood between Surat and Mumbai resulting into receiving his education in various schools availing vivid opportunities initially at Mumbai and later on at Surat. As a young child, Narmad's heart was full of enthusiasm and the spirit for the Motherland, especially Gujarāt. As a student, he was characterized by the zeal for learning with a capacity to win prizes and awards. In 1845, at the age of twelve, enrolled in the Elphinstone Institute, an English school established at Mumbai, Narmad studied for five years under the guidance of the Western teachers like Mr. Graham and Mr. Reid. Thus, Narmad's education through the English school helped him study both the Western life and literature.

Narmad's beginning of the social life is also very orthodox as he was, at the age of eleven in 1844, married to Gulāb, the daughter of Surajrām Shāstri. The death of Narmad's mother Navdurgā (Nani) in 1850 was followed by the death of Gulāb, Narmad's first wife in 1853. Narmad married again Dāhigauri, the daughter of Tripurānand Shāstri, in 1856. As a beginner of the social Reformation in Gujarāt, Narmad allowed Savitā Gauri, a widow of the Brāhmin caste, to stay in his own house in the neighbourhood. Narmad always believed that a widow always has a right of remarriage. Therefore, in order to set an example in the Gujarātī society, Narmad married a widow of the Nāgar Brāhmin

caste named Narmadā Gauri also known as Subhadrā in 1869 who later on in 1870 delivered a son named Jaishankar.

Before devoting the full time to be a *bhakta*-poet (devotee) of the Goddess Saraswati, Narmad accepted a teacher's job in a school at Rānder in Surat in 1851. The dissatisfaction delivered by the job as a teacher forced Narmad to leave it to reach Mumbai to settle there down permanently. Narmad got appointed as an assistant teacher at the Central School of Elphinstone Institute, Mumbai. As Narmad loved composing poetry very much, he resigned from the job of a teacher at Mumbai in order to devote full time to the service of the Goddess Saraswati. On 23rd of November, 1858, after going to school the last time on the last day, Narmad took his pen in his hand saying with the tearful eyes, *Āj thi hu tārā khole chham* ("Now I place myself in your lap") (Dave 1994: 50). Risking his life and career in the socio-economic context of that contemporary society, Narmad accepted writing as a full time profession. This step of serving the Goddess Saraswati taken by Narmad, later on turned into the creation of various crises in earning his bread and butter. A day arrived in the life of Narmad when he had no penny and nothing to eat in his house. Narmad told his friends with tearful eyes:

So, things have reached this pitch, no? I have held back from taking a job for the last twenty-four years and now after those twenty-four years, I have to silently put on the garments of servitude! You all wish that, no? Well then, so be it. I shall accept the assignment. But I tell you one thing. My heart will not be able to bear this blow for a long time. I feel that my end must be near now. (Broker 1977: 58)

However, Narmad decided to join the new job, he took some eight or more days to arrive at a final decision. Ultimately, since those circumstances were pressing, Narmad determined to join the already accepted job. On the very first day of his joining the job at ten o'clock in the morning, Narmad told some of his friends like Khāparde and Navalrām who were present there: "Friends, I am going to a job after twenty for years. I have not

been able to keep the vow I had made twenty four years ago of serving only Saraswati". People come to know about his unhappiness on the day of joining the job when Narmad said again, "I am going to slavery" (Broker 1977: 58). Thus, this shows the intention of Narmad that to him, any work other than creating poetry, was not less than slavery.

Thus, unhappily and unavoidably, Narmad accepted the job as a secretary in Gokuldās Tejpal Dharmakhātā in 1882 under the tremendous tension and depression due to regression. He continued getting engrossed in various literary and social activities, though overworked and thereby physically weak. On finding no option available as Narmad's health deteriorated, he had to leave his this job again in 1885. At the age of fifty three, he breathed his last on February 26, 1886.

The Socio-historical Context:

The arrival of the British in India and especially their long stay in Gujarāt and the last few years of the 18th century society of Gujarāt were coincided to be the years of darkness, ignorance, disturbance and chaos. These were as well the years of calamities, pains and terrors for Gujarāt. When Narmad appeared as a young poet on the scene of Gujarāt, the Gujarātī literature and the lives of people were ripe for a change from the medieval to the modern time. The successful settling down of the British on the soil of India including that of Gujarāt presented the models of the cultural, political and literary superiority to the native Gujarātīs. The new awakening may be as the Renaissance was introduced in various fields of knowledge. Narmad was really agitated and affected much to have seen the condition of the Gujarātīs and the social scenarios during those days. When Narmad attained his youth during this period of self-renewal and self-definition, the Gujarātī literature had to realize its potential. Though Narmad was very active and did not like to be idle as thoughts always coursed through his mind, interestingly, until 1854 Narmad never desired to be a poet but something else. In the words of Gulābdās Broker, the inner desire of Narmad gets reflected:

. . . I was furiously looking forward to the day when I could attain fame on account of my learning and authority- I thought of sitting for a lawyer's examination after studying law; I wanted to be a *māmlatdār* (not a magistrate) in order to impress people; I wanted to be a linguist like Sir William Jones and so I wanted to be an expert in many languages like Sanskrit, Persian, English, Urdu, Hindi, Marāthi and many more; I wanted to go to college again, and I wanted to give tuitions to Englishmen and live an independent life of enjoyment derived out of studies.

(Broker 1977: 15)

Further, more interestingly at Elphinstone School also known as College, Narmad as a student of the Gujarātī literature attended the poetry classes with all attention. Having a sentimental heart with unlatching emotions and feelings for others though unknown to him, the bravery of the soldiers in the poem "Shipwreck" by the 18th century British poet William Falconer (1732-1769) and certain other poems by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) not only thrilled but also quivered Narmad a lot. Thus, in the planting of the seeds of the growth of poetry in Narmad, the role of the Western poets cannot be neglected. The primary schooling of Narmad initiated the process of Narmad's making into a poet. Though the first poem written by Narmad was rejected and laughed at by his teacher Prof. Reid, Narmad did lose neither his heart nor courage, nor confidence. Thus, inspired by the exposure to the Western education, culture and poets, the seeds in Narmad were when completely grown, made him a great poet of the Gujarātī literature. The grateful and appreciative public of Gujarāt bestowed on him the honorific title of *Kavi* (poet).

The history of the Gujarātī literature before the birth of Narmad and after the birth of Narmad as a poet renders variously opposite characteristic features of the Gujarātī literature. The long stay of the British in Gujarāt, the British influence on the Gujarātī society and literature as well possibly divides the history of the Gujarātī literature into two. The pre-British period of the literature of Gujarāt is known as the *Madhya Yug*

(The Medieval Age) and that of the British Gujarāt (India) is known as the *Arvāchin Yug* (The Modern Age).

The literary traditions of the *Madhya Yug* that made a murmuring sound with its sweet melodies by the predecessors as well as contemporaries of Narmad extended unto the first half of the 19th century. The presence of the British in India, especially in Gujarāt made a serious impact of the West on the literature of the East, especially that of Gujarāt. Though the Gujarātī literature itself was rich enough with a variety of forms and literary creations, the exposure to the Western literary texts naturally broadened the vision of the literary artists of Gujarāt leading to the creation of the sizable corpus of literary works. Vishnuprasād Trivedi, a critic of the Gujarātī literature, comments on the Gujarātī literary traditions of the 19th century:

The land of aesthetic Gujarāt region was fertile with a good deal of poems. . . The *ākhyāns* by Premānand, the *garabi* of devotion and love, the enlightening *bhajans* by the Vediti saints etc . . . added to the taste of the common people's life. . . The folk songs, *garbi*, *garabā*, *bhajan*, anecdotes, stories etc. had a definite importance . . .

(Trivedi 1950: 7)

The list of the names of Narmad's predecessors is long. Nevertheless, a few among them to name were the saint poets like Premānand Bhatt (1636-1734), Shāmal Bhatt (1699-1769) and others who bewailed the futility of life through their religious as well as creative poems cum psalms. Most of the ecclesiastical women sang *prabhātiyās* worth for singing and thereby praying to God, especially created by Narshinh Mehtā (1500-1580), the Ādi Kavi (ancient poet) of the 16th century Gujarāt. Dayārām (1767-1852), the last poet of the *Madhya Yug* created possibly all forms in the Gujarātī literature like *pads*, *ākhyāns*, *charitra kāvyas* known as biographies, dialogues, *garbās*, *garbis* and poems of didactic *Bhakti* traditions. The poets of the *Madhya Yug*, according to Anantrāy Rāval contributed significantly in "nurturing the mind and the heart of the Gujarātī people". Thus, one notices

here the uninterrupted "stream of the long hierarchy of the poets ranging from Hemchandrāchārya to Dayārām" (Rāval 1999: 20). Dalpatrām Travādi (1820-1898), Karsandās Mulji (1832-1875), Nandshankar Mehtā (1835-1905), Navalrām Pandyā (1836-1888) and some other contemporaries of Narmad tried their hands successfully on plays, essays, *garbis*, marriage-songs and hundreds of short poems on miscellaneous subjects.

Narmadāshankar Lālshankar Dave still had to grow and get nourished as an established poet though it was believed that he had the skill "to capture the public imagination in order to be in limelight" (Pandyā 1971: 229). The variety of the forms available in the 19th century Gujarātī literature owes to Narmad who as a completely grown up and mature poet introduced not only the novelty but also freshness in the Gujarātī literature. Kanaiyālāl M. Munshi, the famous Gujarātī creative writer cum critic, appreciating the contribution of Narmad notes that the old Gujarāt died with Dayārām and "from its ashes, new Gujarāt, phoenix-like, was born with Narmadāshankar" (Munshi 1935: 225). Narmad as a literary stalwart of his time enriched the Gujarātī literature with newer and higher landmarks along with the cultivation of the Gujarātī language positioning it to a considerable and comfortable level. The prose produced before Narmad was, according to G. S. Khāparde "not adequate to serve the purpose of literature" (Cited in Broker 1995: 76). Thus, the poet Narmad was accepted to create the prose as well as poetry adequately in Gujarātī as the study of *Pingal*, *Rasa* and *Alankār* at Pune set Narmad well-versed in techniques, tools, measures, metres and the forms of all the genres of the Gujarātī literature. Mr. R. T. Reid, the English teacher of Narmad at Elphinstone School marked that Narmad's English was "remarkably good" and moreover, he also possessed the knowledge of languages like Sanskrit, Hindi and Marāthi (Dave 1994: 39). Influenced by the Western writers like William Cowper (1731-1800), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), William Hazlitt (1778-1830), Lord Byron (1788-1824), Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822), the Gujarātī writers like Narsinh Mehtā

(1500-1580), Dhiro Bhagat (1753-1825), Dayārām (1767-1852), Niranta Bhagat (1770-1846), Bhojo Bhagat (1785-1850) and Sanskrit writers like Kālidās (?), Bhavbhuti (?) and Bān (?), Narmad was exceptionally bound to turn out to be a prolific writer of prose, lyric poetry, literary criticism, political journalism, autobiography, lexicography, grammar, *pingal* and a history of the world. Additionally, Narmad also attempted his hand at editorship, religious writing and the activity of translation. Thus, having contributed variously with all the major forms of the creative writing i.e. prose and poetry both, Munshi considers Narmad “the father of Gujarātī prose” who made the Gujarātī language “a feeble vehicle of expression” (Munshi 1954: 242).

It is believed that Narmad began his career as an essayist. Narmad’s very first essay *Mandali Malvāthi Thatā Lābh* (1850-1) (The Benefits of Being United) finally followed into a collection of many essays known as *Narmagadya* (1865) with a variety of subjects. Navalrām and Narmad are very often looked at comparatively as critics and though Navalrām has been considered the leading critic of the Gujarātī literature, Narmad’s contribution to the field of criticism is “laid down in the history of Gujarātī criticism as a pioneer critic” (Joshī 1970: 107). Contributing the field of criticism, Narmad wrote an essay *Tikā Karvāni Rīt* (The Tradition of Criticizing) because “Gujarāt does not have the tradition to criticize” (Dave I 1996: 64). By this time, Narmad also became popular as a poet and many of his poems had been prescribed at schools for teaching students. Thinking that these students at schools require a *kosha* (dictionary) to interpret some Gujarātī words used by him (Narmad) in those poems, he attempted also at a Herculean task of preparing the Gujarātī lexicon that later on came to be known as *Narmakosh* published in 1876. Moreover, his compilation of the Mythological Dictionary entitled *Narmakathākosh* (1870) also catches our attention. Predating the dictionaries like *Narmakosh* and *Narmakathākosh*, he published *Narmavyākaran* (1865), a book on the grammar of Gujarātī language. Narmad’s mastery in the skill of prosody is visible when one goes through his *Pingal Pravesh* (1857).

Narmad’s journey from the first romantic poet of Gujarāt towards turning to be the first historian of Gujarāt is both noteworthy and praiseworthy. Even negligible is not the role of Narmad as a journalist. As a journalist, he edited *Dāndio* (1864), the *pol-khol-patrikā* meaning “A Town-Crier” in English. He edited Dayārām’s (1767-1852) poems which were published in 1860. He also edited Premānand’s (1636-1734) longer poem *Nalākhyān* published in 1875. He had even some dramas to his credit. *Rām-Jānki Darshan* (1876) is his first play and *Bāl Krishna Vijay Nātak* (1883) is his last play. He even collected the songs of Nāgar community published in 1870 and sang them at socio-religious occasions. *Kāthiāwād Sarva Sangraha* (posthumous 1887) is a collection of the folk songs of Kāthiāwād, Saurāshtra. His famous autobiography *Māri Hakikat* (1866) (*My Story*) rendered him the highest position among the autobiographers in Gujarāt as he initiated the form of autobiography for the very first time in the history of the Gujarātī literature. His knowledge of Sanskrit and English languages made him travel in the practice of translation. His translations include the *Bhagwad Gītā* (1882), a Sanskrit play *Sārsakuntal* (1881), Wordsworth’s (1770-1850) poems “We are Seven” translated into Gujarātī as “Vajee”, “Lucy Gray” translated into Gujarātī as “Lalitā” and Robert Southey’s (1774-1843) “Nelson” translated into Gujarātī as “Sāhas Desāi”. Thus, it can be noted that the making of Narmad simply as a poet is not only his making as a poet simply but also as a historian, grammarian, editor, autobiographer, lexicographer, translator, summary writer, prosody writer, critic, social thinker, social reformer and above all the first romantic poet in the history of the Gujarātī literature who is more remembered to have introduced the elements of romanticism.

Conclusion

The attempts of many critics of the Gujarātī literature to reap the benefits out of the literary as well as the social personalities and the literary rivalry of Narmad and Dalpatrām, the contemporaries to each other, have been registered in various history and literary books of the Gujarātī literature. Narmad has often been

compared and contrasted with his predecessors as well as contemporaries. One such dispute famously known and noted permanently in the history is the Narmad-Dalpat dispute. This dispute was due to their modes of working otherwise on the moral ground, it is believed that none of them was ready to compromise. Narmad is often compared to Dalpatrām for various poetic aspects. Nhānālāl, Dalpatrām's son, believes that the dispute between Narmad and Dalpatrām occurred in 1859 was due to the difference of the methods of their social reformation which later on resulted into the literary rivalry between the two (Kavi 1940: 61). However, there are certain common grounds where they both share their poetic aspects. Of course, the credit to introduce the new departure to Gujarātī literature can be given to both of them. Both of them have, whenever and wherever necessary, advocated for the relationship with the British. Like Narmad, even Dalpatrām has also appreciated the British Rāj and asked the people to be happy under their rule. They did not differ in their aim of serving the Motherland. Nhānālāl comments that "The difference between Dalpat's *dhire dhire* (slowly) and Narmad's *yāhom* (plunging into an action) in the age of Dalpat was a difference in terms of motion, not in terms of direction" (Cited in Jādejā 2011: 210-211). Thus, though they composed poems on Nature, patriotism, love and social reformation, they differ in their style, variety of subjects and the mode of description. The style of Dalpatrām is peaceful, skillful, beautiful and didactic to entertain and teach his readers whereas that of Narmad is overflowing with his *josso*, the emotive aggressions of his heart. Both, Narmad and Dalpatrām achieve differently their patriotic aim through poetry. Narmad is considered the poet of bravery, chivalry and aggression whereas Dalpatrām is considered the poet of patience and pleasure. Focusing on their nature of patriotism, Dilāvarsinh Jādejā, a Gujarātī critic, comments that Narmad's patriotism is "intensely passionate" reflected through his very bold and blunt use of language whereas that of Dalpatrām is "sober and restrained" (Jādejā 2011: 210). Further, Narmad has always been compared to other literary artists like Durgārām for his humanitarian and spiritual views,

to Dayārām for his earlier phase of traditional poems and to Navalrām for his views on the social reformation.

Thus, it can be observed that the nature of Narmad, the comments made on him and his various comparisons made with his contemporary poets and those of the earlier times by the critics of the Gujarātī literature render Narmad the higher position in the history of the Gujarātī literature. Gulābdās Broker in order to appreciate Narmad quotes the appreciative words of many Gujarātī critics as follows:

Shri K. M. Munshi, one of the greatest figures in modern Gujarātī literature, has called Narmadāshankar "First Among The Moderns." The great Navalrām, his biographer and friend has called him "The Spirit of his Time." Vishvanāth Bhatt, another fine scholar, has called him "Veer Narmad." Rāmnārāyan Pāthak, another veteran, has written a whole book about one aspect of his writing, and the present writer, in one of the transactions that he had the opportunity to publish earlier, has called him "Poet-Patriot-Pioneer-Prose-writer."

(Broker 1977: 80)

On the basis of Narmad's attributes, what can be a better way to offer him a tribute in his own words rather than others? In his very famous poem *Nav Karsho Koi Shoka* (Not to Mourn, Never), Narmad himself has advised his friends, fellow writers and readers not to mourn at all over his death. He desired these words to be inscribed on a stone but they have been inscribed in the hearts of his readers forever. Truly, the life of Narmad registers the image of that poet who turns out to be more and more shining like the gold, having passed through the social kiln of fire having foiling, boiling and burning. Really, lucky is Gujarāt to have a poet like Vīr Narmad born.

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