

Contested Times: The Politics of Gandhi Yug

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This paper examines the early 20th century period known as 'Gandhi Yug' (1915-1945) in Gujarati literature. It revisits and delineates important historical and political events that shaped the ethos of its nationalist times such as the creation of a new public sphere with the arrival of Gandhi from South Africa; the salience of the peasant both in politics and literature; the establishment of the Gujarat Vidyapith in 1920; the first comprehensive dictionary in Gujarati in 1929, and the emergence of the 'folk' as a cultural category. This paper argues that although Gandhian thought was increasingly influential in early 20th century Gujarat, this was a contested age with a multiplicity of voices, competing imaginations and an array of conflicting intellectual positions often homogenised under a label like 'Gandhi Yug'. The paper also examines the question of violent resistance and the competing conceptions of region and nation that shaped the politics of these writers and thinkers. Through these examinations, the paper attempts to complicate the canon of 'Gandhi Yug' and also show that Gandhism itself was assimilated in complex ways, not always uniformly, not always unanimously.

Keywords: Gandhi Yug, Gujarat, Gandhian thoughts, non-violence

In 1915, when Gandhi returned to India after his successful experiments with Satyagraha in South Africa, he chose Ahmedabad as a base for his future political endeavours because of a number of calculations. These calculations were to prove immensely far-sighted not only for situations of financial crisis but also for the success of various Satyagraha movements such as the mill workers' agitation for a wage hike that eventually led to the formation of the first labour union in Ahmedabad, the Majoor Mahajan Sangh in 1918. Moreover, Ahmedabad as a textile hub also became a strategic choice as it bolstered the Swadeshi movement through the semiotic politics of Khadi that became what Peter Gonsalves (2012) has called 'Gandhi's mega symbol of subversion'. Furthermore, Gandhi's love for the mother tongue often pitted against the detrimental effects of colonial training in English, was to become a central motif in his views on nationalism and national training (see Brock 1995). Gandhi stayed in Ahmedabad only for 15 years until the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 when he vowed not to return to his Sabarmati ashram until India gained Independence. Yet, in that short time, he had not only inaugurated a new era that came to be named after him in vernacular histories as Gandhi Yug, but had also started a series of activities such as editing the journals *Navjivan* (Gujarati) and *Young India* (English), the establishment of his Kochrab and the Sabarmati ashrams, the opening of Rashtriya Shalas or national schools in many parts of the country, the establishment of the Gujarat Vidyapith in 1920 and so on, all of which bore tremendous significance to the social and intellectual life of Gujarat in the early twentieth century.

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This paper argues that although Gandhian thought became increasingly influential in the early 20th century Gujarat,² this was a contested age with a multiplicity of voices, competing imaginations and an array of conflicting intellectual positions often homogenised under a label like ‘Gandhi Yug’. In fact, Gandhian thought itself has been read and reread, interpreted and revisited by generations of scholars so that the man and his ideology, are not always without contradictions, ambiguities and even dissonances. Tridip Suhrud in his article ‘Rediscovering Gandhi: New insights from recent books on Gandhi’ has observed how the divide between “the religious, spiritual Gandhi and the political one, [...] between Gandhi the Ashramite and Gandhi the Satyagrahi” has come to shape both our academic engagement and our memory of the man. Shiv Visvanathan has also recorded the ironies of Gandhi’s life and thought:

Gandhi was a nationalist who fought the nation-state, an anti-colonialist who wished to redeem the British, a Hindu who happily bypassed the shastras. He was a Congress leader who wanted to preside over the dismantling of the Indian National Congress transforming it into a series of *seva sanghs*” (199).

Lending itself to a wide array of assessments and perspectives, Gandhism has been open to reinterpretation, cooption, and even perhaps reinvention. It becomes important to acknowledge that Gandhian thought in early 20th century Gujarat was, therefore, received and assimilated in equally complex ways, not always uniformly, not always unanimously.

The Age of Gandhi : Perspectives

Many scholars have seen Gandhi’s towering influence in the social and political life of Gujarat as shaping the emergence of a new public sphere --- one which saw the integration of political and social reform activities which were, till then, separate and unconnected (Yagnik and Sheth, 2005); the creation of a national imagination, and the rallying of masses around social movements through various symbols³ such as Khadi and the charkha (the spinning wheel) (Shukla, 1977). In 1936, Gandhi was chosen as the president of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad, and invited to give a speech by eminent lawyer and novelist K M Munshi. This speech is historically important because of the way that it effectively captures some of the salient questions and issues of the Gandhian public sphere and the way Gandhi issued a call for action to the literary and social elites of his time.

By 1936, Gandhi had already been involved in the establishment of his own university called the Gujarat Vidyapith and had completed the project for a dictionary of standardised Gujarati spellings called Jodnikosh by 1929. After the Dandi march, he had left his Sabarmati Ashram and established a base at a remote and poverty-stricken village Segaoon near Wardha and had also been involved in numerous social movements. It is in this context that the speech that he delivers becomes foundational in initiating a range of literary and social changes and stressing on the hitherto marginalised rural population and the stark differences between the worlds of the elite and the lives of the masses. Interestingly, the centrality of the rhetoric of the village and the lot of those on the lower rungs of society enters Gandhi’s discussion through the idea of democracy, which he finds limited and inadequate. When does democracy work and when is it not enough? This question acquires salience in the context of the constitution of the Parishad that was drafted largely by K M Munshi and which

² “In Gujarat nobody could possibly escape being influenced by Gandhi during the 1920’s and the 1930’s.” (Joshi,3)

³ “The Hoebers also argue that Gandhi’s mode of politics was based on a revitalisation of tradition, ‘the use of traditional symbols and language to convey new meanings and to reconstitute social action’ (Gandhi: The vii-viii). The concept of ‘swaraj’ or self-rule came to mean both political and personal independence. Spodek has also shown how Gandhi’s political methods were drawn from the risamanu and traditions he grew up seeing in from Saurashtra (363).

found itself challenged by others for precisely the reason that Munshi appeared to have sole right over it. While these critics coaxed Gandhi to make changes in this constitution, Gandhi asserts himself as a democrat and at the same time admits that one must acknowledge upto what extent democracy as a process is effective.

I am a democrat and in spite of that I tell you that Parishads like these cannot be run on the yardstick of democracy. They may have democratic elements but not the principles of democracy. By the time even the most illiterate of children, women and men learn the meaning of 'democracy', I may not be alive. But those who are, must remember that such institutions cannot be founded on the standard of democracy alone. If they are then there is a chance that it may turn out to be mobocracy. I would especially like to say this to those who tell me to make changes in the constitution in the name of democracy. But this does not mean Munshi has the sole right over the constitution. I have read it and according to me, I can draft the constitution in a language that both an erudite lawyer and a lay person can understand. (pp.445-446, translation mine)

If we were to establish a people's bank, he suggests as an example, what we would need are people who are diligent and conscientious and willing to work for the welfare of the people. The process of a democratic election for these posts may not necessarily ensure this. What is indispensable however, is personal integrity and a moral commitment to the cause. Democracy as a political process fails if the people involved in governance are not morally sound and committed individuals and it is vital institutions such as the Parishad that suffer the most damage as their contributive roles in society are curtailed. At the same time, coercing change in the name of democracy too is not democracy but mobocracy that holds offices and individuals ransom to get their way.

While Gandhi acknowledges Munshi's large contribution in the drafting of the Parishad constitution, he decides that this contribution is not problematic because Munshi alone does not have sole right over it. Each constitution, while it may have its own limitations, carries within it the possibility of change and modification (p 446). Which constitution does not allow changes, he asks. At the same time, he acquiesces to bring about those changes that he sees fit in a straightforward manner so that the constitution may be accessible to both erudite and the lay person. In other words, Munshi's 'undemocratic' drafting of the constitution is justified on account of his integrity even as the constitution as a democratic document itself is inherently open to change. Further, the changes that ought to be made in this constitution are again in the service of a democratisation of language and literature so that both erudite and the lay may understand them. And yet, who is to judge when it is that democracy works and when it doesn't? Who is to judge if Munshi has integrity and who is to further say what changes need to be made? Gandhi himself in this discussion does not take into account his own enormous normative influence. Instead, his call to action to writers urges them to leave their realms of cultivated and classical learning and to write for the poor in a language and voice that they can relate to. In this call, Gandhi himself becomes a representative of the interests and the needs of the poor:

What is the purpose of literature? Is it for Kasturbhai and Company, for Ambalalbai or for Sir Chinubhai? They are wealthy and can afford to hire writers and establish libraries. But what about the agricultural labourer? [...] Today in Segaoon where I stay, there are six hundred people. Among these there may be hardly ten who would be able to read. What do I do there? As the head of the Vidyapith, I have opened a library where books can be issued and read free of cost. But among these ten, all men, hardly one or two would be able to read and understand these books and 75% of them are harijans. [...] In such a village, what do I read to them? Should I read Munshi's novels or Sri Krishnalalbai's 'Krishnacharitra'? Krishnacharitra is a translation that I enjoyed reading very much but such a book will be of no use in the village of Segaoon. This is our plight today. If the writers of today don't hear this from me, who will they hear this from? I have not been able to bring a single child from Segaoon here with me. If I pay for his travel, then he will agree to come. But what will he do here?

Yet, unasked and unelected, I stand here as his representative and convey to you the pain of the village. This is true democracy. I learn this from the people and tell you that if you want true swaraj, you have to come to the village. (448-450)

Lloyd and Lloyd have interpreted Gandhi's widespread influence by drawing from Weber's⁴ concept of charismatic leadership that in Gandhi's case was reenacted in the familiar cultural model of the saintly man (5) or "a pilgrim searching for Truth" (Brown, 2011). More importantly, they have suggested that

Gandhi's earliest experiments in creation of a public sphere tried out organization forms that could be used to attract new constituencies into politics[...] if the coffee house is the quintessential formation of Anglo-American civil society, the ashram is the special institution of Gandhi's civil society" (*Rudolph and Rudolph, 2003: 391*)

The drawing of new constituencies into politics meant a foregrounding of the common man, the peasant and the socially marginalized. Indeed, in the first issue of *Navjivan*, Gandhi describes his objective to reach

...the huts of farmers and the homes of weavers. I want to write in their language. I will pray to God that in every house the women read 'Navjivan'[...] No sentence will be written without thought, there will be no useless adjective. In fact, the truth does not need to be adorned by an adjective. The art that one finds in pure reality cannot be found in one sullied by adjectives." (n. pag, trans. author).

Apart from the Ashram as a special institution of Gandhi's civil society, the Gujarat Vidyapith served a monumental role in the cultural life of Gujarat. In the Parishad speech, Gandhi defines its role in the following manner:

The Vidyapith is not a momentary institution. It will continue as long as we understand the meaning of swaraj. It is not stagnant. But like the Ashram, it is a dynamic institution. It existed in the past, it is here now and it will remain in the future. The Vidyapith has transformed many times and will continue to transform. It does not consist of Gidvani nor Kirpalani nor Kaka but the common man and the peasant. [...] It is not for the sophisticated of Ahmedabad. It is not a depot where they arrive and we dress them up for a while and then deliver them back to their parents. The Vidyapith is meant for the shaping of men and women from the village.

Part of the process of this shaping impinges largely in the domain of the linguistic and the literary as mentioned earlier. In fact, the emergence of the folk as a domain in the 1920s and 1930s in the context of Gujarat at least, came at a time when the idea of the 'popular,' 'of the people' or 'of the common man' was a central rhetoric of the times. The coupling of the words *lok* and *varta* to refer to folklore or *lok* and *sahitya* to refer to Folk literature is only an early 20th century phenomenon (Pande, 1963). The village as the authentic centre of human life and of a way of living based on simplicity and self-sufficiency also provided a seamless shift from the folk as cultural repository to the peasant as a powerful political constituency.

Even in the literature of its time, new forays began that saw rural settings, language and characters from the deprived classes and social issues as legitimate subjects of literature for the first time. While questions of untouchability, caste and the empowerment of women appeared for the first time in literature and the political domain, a variety of familiar Gandhian themes such as the dignity of labour, non-violence, abstinence of liquor and so on are dealt with in a set of attitudes that can be called "a paradoxical convergence of articulation and silence" (Nagraj 2006). A landmark story of the period Khemi by writer R. V Pathak was centred on the exploitation and eventual Sanskritization

⁴ Differing with Weber, they have also observed:

"While Weber and contemporary social psychologists associate industriousness and the economising of time and resources with achievement drives rooted in 'Protestant' character, Gandhi came to them through familial and religious socialisation in the Vaishnavite and Jain traditions of Gujarat." (*Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967b: 65*)

of a Dalit woman. These cultural silences guided by the axiom of ‘vani, vichar, achar’ or (speech, thought and behaviour) appear most characteristically in the work of Gujarati women writers who manifest the principle of Gandhian non-violence through a genteelness often synonymous with a refusal to engage (Kothari, 2006).

Yet, Umashankar Joshi, a writer generally associated with the canon of Gandhi Yug⁵ also describes the various ideological forces—from socialist realism and ideals to nationalist movements like swadeshi that had an impact early on even before Gandhian thought made its way into the literature of the time:

Gujarati literature grew inevitably in the atmosphere of the national upsurge during the 1920’s and more particularly during the 1930’s. The guiding spirit was Gandhi. It was, however, not so much Gandhian philosophy as things like nationalism, return to the village, preference for the language of the common man, a surface identification with the masses, that colored the writings of most of the poets. This was reinforced by the newly growing awareness of socialistic ideals during the early 1930’s. [...] it should be borne in mind that the main things in the Gandhian view of life, viz., compassion or love as the dispenser of man’s destiny, rarely figured as the dominant theme in Gujarati writings. It could be argued that the Gandhian philosophy has not yet found a vent in Gujarati writing as also in other languages. What is significant is the fact that the phenomenon called Gandhi released the creative energies in the life and letters of Gujarat. By 1930, it was a stupendous tidal wave. (Joshi, 1973: 3-4)

These words clearly describe an age of varied and shifting influences that were equally affected by regional as well as exterior events such as the World Wars and the fall of tsardom in Russia. Furthermore ‘a surface identification with the masses’ also described many of the attitudes of the Progressive Writers of the time whose work ranged from narratives as varied as Premchand’s *Kafan*, depicting abject poverty and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) that saw in modern science and technology the solution to traditional social problems. Socialist realism became acceptable to Indian writers in 1930s (Weir 136) and in the case of Gujarat at least it fitted well with the Gandhian vision of life. While Gandhi stood “for an ageless alchemy of love”, Marx exposed “a sharp polarisation of interests” both of which clashed in a post-industrial age only to be realigned in the “need for equality and social justice” (Joshi, 1973). Thus it is important to acknowledge the various prisms through which Gandhism was refracted and received even as it interacted and assimilated many of the movements of its times.

The discourses around social change, the democratisation of literature that saw on one hand the responsibility of writers to write for a rural audience and on the other, of the Gandhian agenda of bringing language and literature to the peasant nevertheless saw a lot of ambivalence. For example, while Gandhi stressed the importance of a democratisation of literature and the role of the writers of the day to write for and in the language of the common man, his project of the standardisation of the Gujarati language and its spellings nevertheless favoured a sanskritised register that had huge implications for economic and occupational prospects (Sebastian, 2009). His approaches to caste too were marked by a similar ambivalence. Although Gandhi grossly condemned untouchability as a blot on Hinduism he continued to identify it merely as a religious rather than as a social or an economic issue even as he firmly believed in the varnashrama system of dividing society into different castes. On his views on the social and domestic role of women, several scholars have shown how while some of his social movements saw a huge participation of women in public spaces, traditional hierarchies and patriarchal norms nevertheless remained largely uncontested (see Forbes, 1998).

⁵ Interestingly, Joshi’s own admission “I am not a Gandhian nor a Marxist” (6) questions the retrospective politics of canonisation that places him squarely in a Gandhian tradition.

Other Voices: B K Thakore, Munshi and Meghani

If we were to look at other influential voices during this period that shaped the ethos of this time we find a variety of people, from critic B K Thakore and nationalist Kanaiyalal Munshi and even the celebrated folklorist from Kathiawar Jhaverchand Meghani who in their own ways dealt with issues that were pertinent in their own spheres. In response to a letter that the famous Gujarati writer and critic B. K. Thakore wrote to him in English, Gandhi replied lightheartedly:

I should very much prefer your hybrid Gujarati to your chaste English. Had you written hybrid Gujarati I could have had some fun at the cost of the man of letters that you are and would have gloated over the fact that I would not write such hybrid Gujarati. Besides, the practice of writing in Gujarati, however hybrid, is likely to result in the writing of chaste Gujarati. (159)

This exchange⁶ based on the different kinds of Gujarati that Gandhi and Thakore could use is symptomatic of the differences between the two stalwart influences of the early 20th century. Indeed, Umashankar Joshi has remarked: “If Gandhi had enlarged and purified our vision of the social landscape, Thakore had rendered a similar service with respect to poetic and linguistic techniques ” (Joshi, 1973: 2-3).

For Gandhi, Gujarati was a project for cultural authenticity and the basis of communitarian and indigenous identity that provided a space outside the colonial machine. Sebastian (2009) has shown how Gandhi’s anxiety over the standardisation of spellings in Gujarati eventually led to the first Gujarati dictionary in 1929 (Sebastian 2009: 97).

Thakore, on the other hand, was a dominant poetic influence⁷ during the early 1930s and known for his reputation as a robust critic and historian. Although Thakore and Gandhi were born in the same year and were contemporaries, they stood for the values of two very different eras. Thakore was associated with the Pundit Yug, and belonged to a generation of writers who inherited Western education on one hand and learnt to look at their Sanskrit heritage with a sense of lost glory. At the same time, Thakore also stood for a literary tradition that was both rigorously classical and against lyrical sentimentality that characterised the work of another celebrated contemporary poet of the time, Nanalal⁸. Yet, Thakore always remained unassociated with any school of thought and clashed with almost every important thinker, ideologue and writer of the period from Gandhi to K. M. Munshi. He declined Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s offer to join him as assistant editor on his popular periodical *Maratha* because of ideological differences and even though the Indian National Congress had a widespread influence on intellectuals at the time, Thakore never joined it (Panchal, 1998: 12). On the other hand, Thakore’s response to the colonial situation was shaped by his university education that led him to challenge claims of colonial superiority by the need to reexamine history from an indigenous perspective. Indeed, in his formative years, Thakore writes that “the study of Indian history ha[d] become an imperious necessity” (qtd in Chandra, 2014: 63). At the same time, Thakore embodies a contradiction often characteristic of many writers of the time negotiating

⁶ In an earlier letter, Gandhi, perhaps in jest, wrote to Thakore: “I see that it will be necessary to agitate for introducing a new section in the Penal Code when we have a Parliament of our own. When two parties know the same Indian language, and one of them writes to the other or talks with him in English, the party so doing will be liable to a minimum of six months’ rigorous imprisonment. Let me know what you think of such a section and also, before we gain swaraj, what action should meanwhile be taken against those who commit the offence” (363).

⁷ He was well-known for his metrical innovations and introducing the sonnet form in Gujarati.

⁸ Sisir Kumar Das reinforces this:

“What was best in the poetic tradition and the critical school in the Dvivedi period in Hindi or the Satyavadi period in Oriya or the Niti period in Nepali Thakore represented that in his person. [...] He almost revolutionised the poetic taste and appeared as a resisting force against the world of emotion and sentiment, tenderness and musicality, platonic love and mysticism that was Nanalal’s” (210)

Western modernity and their own traditions. Sirish Panchal has observed:

He [B. K. Thakore] adopts a revolutionary and an iconoclastic stand in literature and literary criticism. Strangely enough, he finds himself quite comfortable in conforming to age-old traditions of Indian society and Indian family (Panchal, 1998).

While Gandhi stood for a democratisation of language, not without its own politics, Thakore in his capacity as a critic stood as a legitimising authority militating against popular taste and providing literary standards for scholarship, a position often at odds with Gandhism. Further, as a product of colonial education, B. K. Thakore portrays a characteristic ambivalence between admiration for the British and the need to create a rich indigenous tradition. Also, he did not, like K. M. Munshi, agree with Gandhi's methods and came out in stark criticism against the Kheda agitation in the 1920s.

Riho Isaka (2002: 4871) has shown how the idea of Gujarat in the late 19th and early 20th century was a project of contested imaginations and the narration of regional history by Gujarati intellectuals of the time was closely linked to the notion of Gujarati identity that they wished to establish. It is in this context that Kanaiyalal Munshi, an influential writer and nationalist of the 20th century becomes significant. Munshi's historical novels depicting the glorious Solanki period of Gujarat were immensely popular even as they have drawn criticism for portraying the Hindu heritage of Gujarat as its golden era and the Muslim period as a time of cultural decline (ibid 4869). Munshi was a Gujarati nationalist who campaigned for statehood and also coined the term Gujarati *asmita*, or identity. He became known as the founding father of Gujarat⁹ and has written numerous literary and historical works. In his *Gujarat and its Literature*, Gandhi remarked in the foreword that the book confined itself to the language understood and spoken by the middle class (v). He further added:

Munshi has alluded to Parsi-Gujarati. [...]And just as there is Parsi-Gujarati there is also Muslim-Gujarati though on a much humbler scale. [...] no reviewer of Gujarati literature can afford to ignore the existence of works which hundreds, if not thousands, of Parsis and Muslims read [...]” (vi).

Furthermore, although Munshi had initially joined the Indian National Congress and had cordial relations with Gandhi, he eventually resigned citing differences over the question of violent resistance. In his book *Akhand Hindustan* he wrote:

If war comes to India's frontiers or the British machinery of maintaining order weakens [...] if life, home and shrine and honour of women are threatened by goondaism, organised resistance in self-defence appears to me to be a paramount and inalienable duty, whatever form such resistance may take. (1942b: 262).

Just as his conception of the glorious heritage of Gujarat forged an idea of Gujarat predicated predominantly on Hindu culture, he went on to also put forth his own idea of India, or what he called Akhand Hindustan. This notion of a strong and united India “from Amarnath to Rameswar, from Dwarka to Kalighat” (1942b: 23) was conceived against the movement for Partition and represented a bold position where the use of violence for the sake of unity was inherently justified. While Munshi, is a complex ideologue whose views underwent significant change from the initial years to the later parts of his life where he seemed to gravitate towards the Hindu Right, his influence in the nationalist years provided for many, a counterpoint to Gandhi's politics of non violence.

Another immensely popular writer of the time Jhaverchand Meghani was interrupting the very idea of Gujarat through a perspective of the culturally distinct region of Saurashtra or Kathiawad. Also categorised as a writer of the Gandhi Yug, Meghani is canonised in Gujarati literature as a

⁹ Samira Sheikh has questioned Munshi's claim that Gujarat emerged as a culturally cohesive region in the Solanki period (12th century) arguing instead that it was only much later in the 15th century after Zafar Khan declared his sovereignty over Gujarat that this cohesion was achieved (6).

Yugkavi (Poet of the age) or a Rashtriya Shayar (National Poet) and some writers have also called him the People's Poet (Thakar, 2006:119). Meghani, remarks Sisir Das (1991:210), "wrote about the underdog without being a Marxist". The fact that Meghani was simultaneously known as the national poet and the people's poet is significant and ironic. It was Gandhi who gave him the title of 'National Poet' in a move that could be seen today as an appropriation of the regional in the service of the national. On the other hand, Meghani endorsed violent resistance and has remarked on his differences with Gandhi: "I am not his [Gandhi's] follower. I am neither a practitioner of his political ideology nor a devotee of his spiritual ethics" (qtd in Bharat Mehta, 2002).

Meghani's gigantic oeuvre covers literary genres, travelogues, folklore, songs, lullabies, etc., consisting of a staggering body of 88 books in the brief span of the 25 years of literary life. This body of work calls attention to the idea of Gujarat even before the idea of India, pointing to the significance of a regional nationalism in the face of the nationalist movement. Meghani wandered far and wide into regions of Saurashtra collecting folk songs, narratives and repertoires of popular memory. His sources were people from various occupations, castes, gender and class. His pioneering collection of folk stories *Saurashtrani Rasdhar* (1923-27) or A Noble Heritage: A Collection of Short Stories based on the Folklore of *Saurashtra*, depicts the heroic Rajput culture of medieval Saurashtra. In his preface, Meghani describes his collection as an attempt to redress the stereotype of Kathiawad as a land without cultural heritage and barren of literary inspiration (11). *Saurashtrani Rasdhar* is an instance that deconstructs the sense of regional homogeneity of Gujarat as a bounded region where Gujarati is spoken, conferring instead a literary and historical legitimacy to marginalised Kathiawadi usages. It allows for spaces of alterity challenging prescriptions of linguistic and historical modes of being and remembering. It also legitimizes the spoken language in all its unstandardised variety as a valid mode of literature.

Conclusion

I have tried to show here in large brushstrokes that the early 20th century period of Gujarat known as Gandhi Yug was a contested period with competing imaginations over the various sites, of language, ideas of India, the question of violence and the perception of a historical past. There were other sites of contestation, such as the attitudes towards caste and untouchability as well as the question of women's empowerment, that I have not taken up here and belongs to a separate discussion. Further, I have discussed writers perceived primarily to be within a Gandhian canon in order to complicate the label of 'Gandhi Yug' and to show the inherent complexities of the various negotiations or negations of Gandhism. The question of non-Gandhian writers, or those outside the canon as part of another politics of canonisation is not herein addressed. While Gandhian thought was increasingly influential, B. K. Thakore as a stalwart literary influence still represented the values of the earlier Pundit Yug associated with erudite language and eclectic scholarship. On the other hand, the nationalist Munshi struggled to accept Gandhian non-violence as an adequate means of resistance even as his own conception of Gujarati asmita and the glory of Gujarat shaped his imagination of an idea of India as Akhand Hindustan. Jhaverchand Meghani's voluminous work achieved the task of interrupting a homogenous idea of Gujarat by firmly establishing a regional identity for Saurashtra in the literary and historical space and negotiating it within a nationalist imagination. Further, by collecting and compiling the vast repertoires of oral narratives, he also contributed significantly to Gujarati literature bringing a historical perspective from below in a mode and language legitimised for the first time as literature. That each of these writers exerted significant influences in their own ways and

domains during this period shows the complex dynamics of the Gandhi Yug. This complexity also challenges both a retrospective homogeneity of the period and a politics of canonisation through a label like ‘Gandhi Yug’.

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