



**Gujarati Dalit One-act Play *Hu Manas*
by Daltpat Chauhan.**

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Introduction

Dalpat Chauhan (poet, novelist, playwright and a critic) is one of the pioneers to have built the oeuvre of Dalit literature in Gujarati. More so, his contribution as a playwright is commendable as they add great value in the region where the actual theatre with respect to Dalit representations is miniscule. What is interesting in Chauhan's works is that on one hand where he becomes a powerful voice of the Dalits, a representative for them, on the other hand, his works have the ability to extend beyond identity representations alone and reach out to a larger universal concern. He has published several books to his credit: *To Pachi* (1983), *Malak* (1991), *Gheedh* (1999), *Kya Chhe Suraj?* (2000), *Anaryavrat* (2000), *Vanboti Vartao* (2000), *Dandubhi* (2001), *Harifai* (2001), *Munjharo* (2002), *Bhalbhankhalu* (2004), *Padchinh* (2004), *Dar* (2008), *Gujarati Sahityano Itihas* (2008), *Samarthan* (2009), *Rashvasuraj* (2012). Dalpat Chauhan has been a recipient of several prestigious awards like Gujarat Sahitya Akadami Prize for *Anaryavrat*, *Kya Chhe Suraj?*, *Harifai*, *Bhalbhankhalu*, Dolat Bhatt Gramya Navalkatha Award, Priyakant Parikh Award by Gujarat Sahitya Parishad and Dasijivan Award by Gujarat Government for *Bhalbhankhalu*, All India Radio Play Competition Award for *Anaryavrat* and *Patanne Gondarethi*, Narsinh Mehta Award and Santokba Gold-medal by Gujarat Dalit Sahitya Akadami for his notable contribution to Gujarati Dalit Literature.

I, a Human

Dalpat Chauhan

Characters:

A
First Person
Second Person
Third Person
Fourth Person

(All are standing around 'A' in a circle. There is sound of *thali*¹, being beaten continuously and keeping 'A' in a center, all walk around. Slowly, they begin to act as if they are running and singing a song.)

He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*².
He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,
he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,
he is a human being, *bhai*.
Human is the supreme being, he is a human, *bhai*.
Human is the supreme being, he is a human, *bhai*.

(All who are moving around A, suddenly stop. Singing stops. Only 'A' runs alone, and he sings a song).

He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*.
He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,
he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,

¹ *Thali* is a medium size plate.

² *Bhai* means brother.

he is a human being, *bhai*.

Human is the supreme being, he is a human, *bhai*.

Human is the supreme being, he is a human, *bhai*.

(Sound of siren as if the police van is arriving. All act like they are running to their respective spots. Shouting sounds like police is beating people and breaking things are heard. 'A' runs fast...sounds stop).

First Person: The one who is running, is a Hindu.

Second Person: The one who is running, is a Dalit.

Third Person: The one who is running, is a Christian.
(Suddenly, 'A' stops.)

A: No... No... I am a human, a simple human being.

First Person: No... you are a Hindu.

Second Person: No... you are a Muslim.

Third Person: No... you are a Dalit.

Fourth Person: No... you are a Christian.
(Suddenly, 'A' stops.)

A: No..I am a human being, a simple human being.

First Person: No... you are a Hindu.

Second Person: No... you are a Muslim.

Third Person: No... you are a Dalit.

Fourth Person: No... you are a Christian.

A: (With baffled eyes) No... No...I am... I am a human...a very simple humanbeing. Do you know, till yesterday, I was a craftsman, a millworker, I rana *throsal*³ machine, I ran four-eight sized looms, actually twelve sized...sixteensized...*khatapat*⁴...*khatapat*...but today I am unemployed.

³ Here *throsal* means throstle machine used for spinning cotton, wool, and other fibers. A mispronounces this word.

⁴ *Khatapat* a sound produced on running the loom. Gujarat once was known for textile production and the industrial revolution in

First Person: You are lying.
 Second Person: You are lying.
 Third Person: You are lying.
 A: No... I am not lying. I have never lied; I have continuously pleaded. I have always fought with the machine that is why I have become like a machine. Look at the dirty stains on my torn clothes, cotton, wires and sweat that are smeared on it. I was a mill worker. Look at this *sarani*⁵.

All four together: That is not *sarani*, it is a lie.
 That is not *sarani*, it is a lie.
 First person: You are lying. You steal cotton that is stuck on your torn clothes. Tell the truth, how did your clothes tear off?
 All four together: Tell the truth. How did your clothes tear?
 A: Because mills closed, understand Sir? The mills closed...
 (He acts like he is running the *throstle*, *sarani* and the loom.)
 A: This closed mill and this cotton was stuck to my hands by birth. That is why, I haven't stolen anything. Apart from this, I am a poor man...
 All four together: You are lying.
 You are not a human.
 You are something else.
 A: No... No... I am not anything else. Do you believe if I speak the truth? I am a hungry man. A hungry man.

Gujarat replaced the human resources with machines and with the introduction of denim manufacturing in the 1990's. The sound of *khatpat* is the sound of the running loom that had to used manually.

⁵ *Sarani* is a machine that prepares the warp. The cotton or silk thread reels are placed in a creel.

All four together: No, you are not a hungry man, you are a Hindu.
 No, you are not a hungry man, you are a Muslim.
 No, you are not a hungry man, you are a Dalit.
 No, you are not a hungry man, you are a Christian.

A: No, I am a human being, a hungry man. My master, have you seen hunger? Hunger. Look at my torn clothes and my hands that are always ready to be raised to salute others...!

First Person: *Arre*⁶! Why are your hands black?
 A: That is because I went to put off the fire that was burning the house of a Muslim. (He acts as if the house was burning, sounds of loud cry, mob, fire etc. are heard...'A' is trying to extinguish the fire) While putting the fire off... that is why....

Second Person: Your hands are full of blood.
 A: Blood, that is because I took an injured man to the hospital who was shot by the police. I carried him on my shoulder.

Third Person: Why do you have blisters on your feet?
 A: While saving a child from fire, I burnt my feet Sir...

Fourth Person: Why do you have a wound, as if struck by a knife, in your back?
 A: That was when I was saving a Dalit from a gangster... (An attack on a Dalit man..'A' jumps in to save him.) Yes...I got wounded while rescuing him.

⁶ *Arre* is an expression to give a strong reaction to something or to introduce a remark or response.

First Person: No... you are a liar; You have burnt someone's house.

Second Person: No... you are a liar; You have murdered someone.

Third Person: No... you are a liar; You have robbed someone.

All four together: No... you are a wicked gangster. You are not a human being (2).

Voices: *Nara-e-takbeer...allahuakbar*⁷.
Nara-e-takbeer...allahuakbar.
*Bajrang baliki jay*⁸.
Bajrang baliki jay.

A: Who is calling out this?

All four together: You are calling out.
You are calling out.

A: No... I cannot call. I cannot. Can you believe, I have forgotten to speak?
(Acts as if he is running)
(Sounds of running...galloping.... clopping... of the horses.)

A: Who is running?

Second Person: That is, you who is running.

A: No... I can't run; my hands and legs are tied.

Voices: Beat...cut...fire...e...i...e...i⁹...
(All begin to run around and then pause)

A: *Arre!* Where has the assassination taken place? Stop it...stop it...who is shouting for help? The flames are very high.

⁷ *Nara-e-takbeer* is a slogan that is used in Muslim's prayers and the meaning of both the *nara-e-takbeer* and *allahuakbar* is that *Allah* is Great.

⁸ *Bajrang bali ki jay* which roughly translates to "Hail Hanuman". Here *Hanuman* is another name of *Bajrang bali*, Ram's companion in Hindu mythology.

⁹ These are the undistinguished sounds that are heard when many people shout together.

All four together: You rob people. You set the fire on that is why everything got burnt.

A: No... I have been standing here in front of you.

All four together: *Arre!* You are there... there...there. You are everywhere.

Second Person: You are a Hindu.

Third Person: You are a Muslim.

First Person: Hey you! How do you have that burning log with you?

A: What? Burning log in my hands? No... No...this is a lamp of peace. A light. I want to spread the message of peace around the whole city.

Fourth Person: Light of what? (Laughs) Has darkness ever been here?

A: I have banished the darkness with a lamp. Light for peace...light for humanity... light for truth...light for brotherhood... (All laugh)

Voices: *Hindu-Muslim bhai-bhai*¹⁰.
Hindu-Muslim bhai-bhai.
Hindu-Muslim bhai-bhai.
Hindu-Muslim bhai-bhai.

First Person: You go away from here. Your lamp will be blown out. You go away from here. Your lamp will be blown out.

Second Person: You go away from here. Your lamp will be blown out. You go away from here. Your lamp will be blown out.

All four together: Go away... go away...

First Person: Go away otherwise you will be killed. You, a man of peace, a wicked man.

¹⁰ *Hindu-Muslim Bhai-Bhai* is slogan which is generally used to show the harmony and brotherhood between Hindu and Muslim.

Second Person: You cannot do anything here, you cunning human!

All four together: This Hindu is a gangster.
This Muslim is a gangster.
This Christian is a gangster.
This Dalit is a gangster.

A: No... I am a human being, a needy man. I walk on the footpath every day. I never walk on the roads. Have never gulped a meal two times in a day, have labored on the farms. I don't have clean water either. If I may speak the truth, I have never inhaled fresh air.

First Person: Liar, again... you are lying?

Second Person: You have polluted rivers- by working and sweating in the factory.

Third Person: You have spilled the tanks of oil by carrying them on your back.

Fourth Person: In the factory of medicine, your sweat and soar by turning it into gas.

All four together: This MIC, oleum, this monoxide¹¹-bonoxide¹², poisonous gases... you are behind the Bhopal Gas tragedy. Hey, you are responsible for the Delhi Gas tragedy. You are involved in the massacre of Bhiwandi, Ahmedabad. You are a knave and murderer...

A: No, No. I am a child of nature. Look, I have green branches of a tree, a wheat straw, a

¹¹ Here MIC means Methyl isocyanate that is an organic compound, an intermediate chemical used in the production of carbamate pesticides; Oleum means fuming sulfuric acid, is a term referring to solutions of various compositions of sulfur trioxide in sulfuric acid; and Monoxide is any oxide containing only one atom of oxygen, a well-known monoxide is carbon monoxide.

¹² Here bonoxide is used to rhyme with monoxide to say such and such oxide and many others are produced.

drip of dew, light of twinkling stars in my hands!

Second Person: By showing it, you are trying to cheat us!

A: No, I am not cheating anyone. I am a human... a very simple human being, a hungry man...anunemployed worker. Tattered farm worker, a wanderer...a lone man...you all seem like bigmen, (after thinking) God men, affluent, kings-like, the great kings, *arre*... presidents...(pause)

Will you give me a job, Sir? I am ready to do a job, any job, even if it is a menial job or if I have to work twelve hours or twenty-four hours a day. It is enough if the salary satisfies my hunger...*adhdhdh*...*dh*¹³...

First Person: Job....aha....*ha*¹⁴...

Second Person: A job, just for twelve hours.

Third Person: What will you do with the job?

All four together: A Hindu does a job.
A Dalit does a job.
A Christian does a job.
A Muslim does a job.

Fourth Person: You are nothing. You do not need a job. No need for a job.

A: I need it...I am a human being. A hungry man, an unemployed worker. To speak truthfully, I have three children, and a wife. To say more, they all are hungry just like me, Sir. My king...the great president...I need a job... a job...I am hungry.

¹³ *Adhdhdh* is expressing surprise and wonder at plentifulness.

¹⁴ *Aha...ha* is expressing surprise, sorrow, etc. If one loosely translates it into English, then it is like "ah!"

All four together: You are lying. You do not want a job; you do not have children and wife, you are not hungry.

A: Look at me, look at my clothes, look at my belly, how big is the hollow inside? It is like a tunnel caused by the Mumbai blast.

First Person: Now I understand, you are a Hindu, and you want a bomb.

Second Person: You are a Muslim; you need a dagger.

Third Person: You are Dalit, you need a sickle.

A: No..No...I am hungry; I need a *chapati*¹⁵. My wife and children are in need of a *chapati*.

First Person: (After thinking) You do not need a *chapati*. You need to work hard. You need to run a machine. You may come with me.

Second Person: You are not hungry. You just have to do *veth*¹⁶, you do not need anything else. You may come with me.

Third Person: You do not have a wife, or children. You are cattle or an ox. You just need to pull a plough. You do not need anything else. You may come with me.

All four together: Come, you are a slave.
Come, you are a *vethiyo*¹⁷.
Come, you are an ox.
Come, you are a machine.

A: No, I am a very simple man. I have to educate my three children at school-university, do you listen...!

First Person: A machine does not have children. You are a liar.

¹⁵ *Chapati* means bread or loaf which is made out of wheat flour.

¹⁶ *Veth* is forced or unpaid labour.

¹⁷ *Vethiyo* is one who is doing forced or unpaid labouring work.

Second Person: *Vethiyo* does not have a wife.
 Third Person: Cattle or an ox does not have children.
*Salla*¹⁸, a slave does not have a wife, understand?
 A: But I have a wife; for her I also need a home. I also need a job. I have to buy clothes for my wife. Do you listen?
 All four together: You do not have a wife, you do not have children, you do not have to educate your children, you do not need to buy clothes for them. Forget everything...forget.
 A: No... No... No...
 All four together: Then remember, you are a machine. You are a *vethiyo*. You are an ox or a cattle. You are a slave.
 A: I am a human being-just like you. I have two hands, two legs, a thoughtful mind...oh.... Why are my eyes closed? Why this darkness? Why do I have difficulty in breathing? I lose my way. Let me get out of here. (After pausing) My eyes are open, but there is no light. I walk but there is no path. My hands move but nothing comes to my hands.
 Voices: You are ox or cattle.
 You are a machine.
 You are a *vethiyo*.
 You are a slave.
 A: No, I am a human -like man of *vajjar*¹⁹...*waah*²⁰...*waah* I can see far away.

¹⁸ *Sallais* an abusive slang word often used for a man.

¹⁹ *Vajjar* is a corrupted form of *Vajra*, a weapon of the Indian Vedic rain and thunder-deity *Indra* and is used symbolically by the dharma traditions of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, often to represent firmness of spirit and spiritual power.

²⁰ *Waah* means wow or great and here it implies a joyful expression.

You all are liars. I am not alone. My children are with me. You also have children. I have a wife. You also have wives. There are men too. All these people keep their feet on this earth firmly! Everyone loses their fist. You are liars. You are scoundrels. You all are blood thirsty wolves, wolves!

First Person: You are in an illusion. Whoever is with you, they all are slaves.

Second Person: You are in an illusion. Whoever is with you, they all are oxen.

Third Person: You are in an illusion. Whoever is with you, they all are machines.

Fourth Person: You are in an illusion. Whoever is with you, they all are *vethiya*.

A: No, they are workers, not *vethiya*. They are farm workers, not slaves. Look, they have sticks in their hands. They have sickles and bombs *dhoom...dhadam....dhoom*²¹ (a bomb blasts, loud cries are heard) run rascals, run. Workers and farmers are coming united...run...otherwise...
(All pause)

A: (Stepping out to the front) Listen, the factories are running; farms are being cultivated with the plough, roads are under construction. Background voices of common citizens:
Workers unity...*Jindabad*²².
Farm-workers unity...*Jindabad*.
Workers-farmers unity...*Jindabad*.

²¹ These are the sounds of bombs when they are blasted or exploded.

²² *Jindabad* is used as a shout of encouragement or as a cheer and literally means "Long live".

Dalit unity....*Jindabad*.
A: I can see and listen to everything. I can understand the secret behind your belly fat. Now, if we cannot get something then we will snatch it. Now, I am the real human being.... our buildings smell of blood all the time- enough, be aware, we are coming... to become the voice of workers, farmers and the poor. I am on the top of all...I am a human being...I am a human being...
(All sing together)
He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*.
He is a human being like a human,
...he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,
he is a human being, *bhai*.
Whoever he is, whatever he is,
he is a human being, *bhai*.
Human is the supreme being,
he is a human, *bhai*.
Human is the supreme being,
he is a human, *bhai*.
(Sound of *thali* is heard gradually...sounds of feet cease slowly.)
(The Curtain drops)
