

Shri Purushottam Parikh: A Social Reformer and an Able Historian

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Abstract:

In the positive results of the 19th century in Gujarat is the emergence of printing press and beginning of English Education. Purushottam Parikh was also an educated social reformer, a successful historian and journalist. His contribution in the upliftment of patidar Samaj is special; the present article is about the introduction of his deeds.

Key Words:

Patidar community, Kanabi-Paatidar “Kadava Vijay”:

The 19th century was significant for social, religious, educational activities in colonial India. The acceptance and spread of Western-English education by the contemporary intellectuals like Raja ram Mohan Roy was a notable event. Attaining higher education became an aspiration among the youth even though it more suited the needs of the colonial set up. For instance, the University of Mumbai, the University of Kolkata, and the University of Madras were started in 1957. These events had a long-lasting effect on colonial India. In Gujarat too, the aware-class of the society was influenced by Durgaram Mehta, Narmada Shankar, Forbes, Ambalal Sakarlal Desai, etc. They influenced masses by the way of newspapers, magazines, and articles. Besides, they inspired the educated youngsters to participate in national debates and discussions. We should note here that there were only a few such youngsters. Generally, the education level of colonial India was too low and those farmers who worked on the soil were far away from education even after independence for a very long time. Therefore, their participation in regional and national issues was low. However, some youngsters contributed to the national interests by reforming their respective communities. Among them, Purushottamdas Parikh was a unique personality. The late 20th century marked the use of Subaltern Historiography wherein the voices of the farmers, women, tribes, Dalits, etc., were found in the center. Therefore, the study of Shri Purushottamdas Parikh is inevitable in the context of issues of farmers in colonial India.

The 19th Century is considered to be vital for social reforms and restructuring of values in life in India and Gujarat. Even economic and industrial sectors developed in India and Gujarat during the same time. Ruled by the British, Gujarat came in direct contact with the country, as a state with a unique culture. The process of building contact was significant because Britain of 15th and 16th centuries was trying to break away from religious and social dogmas through Renaissance, Reformation, and Humanitarian to liberate an individual. Apart from that, as a complex process, the basic human relationship also changed due to an imperative from Industrialization. Under the influence of materialistic and intellectual effects, perhaps for the first time, a new era of systematic social reform started in Gujarat wherein Narmadashankar, Durgaram Mehta, Mahipatram Rupram, Dalpatram, Hargivind Dwarkadas, Kantawala, Karsandas Moolji, and Navalram Lakshmiram were the frontier social reformers to launch a fight against the prevalent social ills to restructure the society.¹

These great social reformers fought fiercely against centuries-old social vices like Sati (burning of the widow with her dead husband), superstitions and necromancy, female infanticide among Kanabi-Paatidar and Jadeja-Jethwa, expensive post-death rituals, exploitation of widows, both physical and psychological, child marriages, and malpractices of so-called religious leaders; as a result, Gujarati society started moving forward to a new direction. There were several social reformers who were at the foundation of the progressive movement.

Purushottam Lallubhai Parikh, from Kadava Patidar community, was one of the social reformers whose work was so extensive that he can be placed with the social reformers listed above.²

❖ Early Years:

The Patidar community was under the quilt of the darkness of superstition and social ills during the late 19th and early 20th century. Amidst, Purushottamdas Lallubhai Parikh (from Viramgam) was born in 1880 in Jetalpur (Ahmadabad), his mother's maiden home.³

¹ Shashtri, H. G. (Ed.) Parikh, P.C. (Ed.), *Gujarat no Rajkiy Ane Sanskrutik Itihas (British Era-Vol.8)*. B.J.

Adhyayn-Sanshodhan Vidyabhavan, Ahmadabad, 1984, Page. 217

² Patel, M. Rao Bahadur Becharadas Ambaidas Lashakari, C.S.I. *Gujaratna Samajik Ane Audyogik Neta*, 2007, Ahmadabad, Page. 9.

³ *Dharati, February 1986, Page. 13*

After completing his matric examination, he started teaching in M.J. High school at his native place, Viramgam. His first marriage was in Gomatipur, Ahmadabad. The couple had a son, Prabhudas whose successors are still there. His second marriage invited great resistance and opposition from the community but finally, he won.

❖ A Social Reformer:

The priest of the temple of Goddess Umiya (Unja), community Goddess of Patidars would open the Western gates of the temple once every twelve years and announce one date of marriage. Thus, there was only one date in twelve years when couples from the community used to get married. The prevalent belief was that a child of a minimum of 45 days must be married otherwise, Goddess Umiya would get angry! Such superstition was deeply rooted in the community, which encouraged the social ill of child marriage.

In 1910, the atmosphere of the Patidar community was intense because social reformers and the conservatives of the temple had a great conflict to eradicate the system of deciding wedding dates. Social reformers like Purushottamdas Parikh and Shri Durgadas Lashkari had taken charge of the temple. The police of the Gaekwad government used to guard the temple day and night when the conservatives had called a mass gathering in the village. A handful of youngsters gathered in the compound of the temple because the situation was so intense that they could not step out of the temple.⁴

Finally, Purushottamdas roared, “We will not rest until we eradicate the ill of organizing wedding only once in twelve months. If we will have to die, we will and be blessed by Goddess Umiya. Truth triumphs in the end.” His words turned out to be true.⁵ Finally, the custom of deciding such child marriages ended. The whole reform activity was supported by Rao Bahadur Behchardas Lashkari.

Purushottamdas’ first wife died of severe illness. In order to get married again and challenge the custom that prevented him to remarry, he married a girl in Ahmadabad with all the rites and rituals. Shri Durgaprasad Lashkari, Dr. Pitambardas, Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan, and a number of social reformers joined his groom’s party.⁶

⁴ *Ibid*, Page. 14

⁵ *Patel, M. Bandhya Vivah Ek Vivad, Patidar Hitwardhak Trust, Ahmadabad, 2005, Page. 23*

⁶ *Dharati, Page 14*

❖ The Rise of a Monthly, “Kadava Vijay”:

Under the guidance of Gurudev Shri Jaydevlalji, Purushottamdas started a monthly “Kadava Vijay” in 1907 to remove the darkness of social ills from the Patidar community, which continued for seven years even after his death by his followers. The starting of ‘Kadava Vijay’ and removing social ills, were immensely supported by Purushottamdas’ friends including Shri Keshavlal Vakil, Sheth Dwarkadas Jivabhav, and Shri Kuberdas Master, Purushottamdas had initiated a movement of stopping the post-death rituals through Kadava Vijay. It led to massive awareness among the community to stop such rituals, mass-feast to get rid of the expenditure.

❖ An Educator:

The first convention of Patidar met in 1910 in Viramgam and Dr. Pitambardas Kuberdas (from Ahmadabad) presided over it. Shri Purushottamdas Parikh was the honorary secretary of the convention.⁷ The convention resolved to bring about social reform through increasing education. In order to implement the resolution, Purushottamdas and his friends collected donation of Rs. 2000 by visiting each house of the community and started ‘Kadava Patidar Shubechhak Samaj Boarding’, the first hostel for Patidar students in a rented house on Pirmasha Road in Ahmadabad with the faith that they will get other support.⁸ With the efforts of Purushottamdas Parikhk, Suryamalji* gave Rs. 15000 and started an education fund. In no time, the amount of the fund increased up to Rs. 100000. An institute, Shri Kadava Patidar Hitwardhak Mahamandal was started under the presidency of Darbarshree, which started Shri Kadava Patidar Hitwardhak Mahamandal Boarding. After the death of Shri Suryamalaji, his son donated Rs. 1, 10,000 and the boarding was names ‘Darbar Suryamal Kadava Patidar Boarding House’ which is still functional in Ahmadabad.

❖ A Successful Historian:

In 1913, Purushottamdas started an initiative. After studying several sources such as Government Gazeteer, official records, archives, historical books, and prepared *Kanabi Kshatriya Utapatti Ane Itihas*, which is a systematic and chronological history of Patidar.

The book exposes how the stories of the evolution of Patidar from numerous Gods and Goddesses are but myths. The history of Desai-Patels has been written in the book. ‘Ill rituals hamper upward

⁷ Patel, M. *Kadava Patidar Sabhaoma Sudharakono Abhigam*, Ahmadabad, 2007, Page. 108

⁸ *Ibid*, Page. 108.

mobility' is the motto of a historian, which is why Purushottamdas tried very hard to eradicate such ill rituals for the development of the Patidar community.

The writer of the book considered all the social ills including child marriage, female infanticide, post-death rituals, selling of bride/groom, etc., as sinful acts of the community. He opposed these rituals actively with the support of Bahechardas Lashkari and Patadi Darbarshri.

Purushottamdas Parikh, a young man who sacrificed his youth for the sake of historical research, and an inspiration for the community and a social reformer died at the very young age of 38 in 1918. When Patidar community was under the dark ages, Shri Purushottamdas came as a successful social reformer and an able historian like Veer Narmad, provided great encouragement to the youth of the community, and ignited a fire of social reform among them.

As all the revolutions are led by the intellectuals in the world, Purushottamdas Parikh was the first intellectual, historian and a social reformer who studied the history of Patidar community and correlated the same with the new ideas of the modern world to bring about social and national awareness among his fellow community men and women.

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