The Perception of the Literary Tradition of Gujarat in the Late Nineteenth Century

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I

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of interest in the development of vernacular literature among Indian intellectuals educated under the colonial system. Gujarat was no exception, and active debates arose among the literati on the question of defining the 'correct' language, creating 'new' literature and understanding their literary tradition. The aim of this paper is to examine how the Gujarati intellectuals of this period articulated their literary tradition, and what influence this articulation had on the social and cultural life of this region in the long term. It attempts to show how these literati, in describing this tradition, selectively appropriated ideas and idioms introduced under colonial rule as well as those existing in the local society from the pre-British period, according to their needs and circumstances.

By the time British rule began, Gujarat had already established several different genres of literature. Firstly there was a rich collection of Jain literature in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsha and old Gujarati. Such works were produced by Jain priests over many centuries and preserved in manuscripts, which were then stored in bhandars (storehouses) in Gujarati literature.
various places including Cambay, Surat, Patan, Broach, Limbdi and Ahmedabad [Mallison 1980: 88]. Secondly, there were religious kavya (poems) concerning themes related to Hindu gods. In Gujarat, Vaishnava bhakti poems, especially those on Krishna, were extremely popular. They were originally sung in public but had also begun to be recorded in manuscripts by the early seventeenth century [Mallison 1980: 89]. The languages used in them varied and included Sanskrit, Prakrit, Vraj and Gujarati. The third category was the Persian and Arabic literature, which developed under the patronage of Muslim rulers and governors in Gujarat from the fifteenth century. Fourthly, there were Islamic hymns such as ginans (hymns of the Ismaili community), written in a language which drew upon various sources, including Gujarati, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and others, for both vocabulary and grammar. They were transmitted orally, but had also begun to be recorded in writing by the early eighteenth century at the latest [Asani 1991: 11]. Besides these genres of literature, there were various kinds of ‘folk literature’ which were largely unrecorded, such as the ‘bardic tradition’ and bhavais (folk dramas).

Although the study of old literary works was not entirely unprecedented, it was only in the late nineteenth century, with the emergence of the press and literary associations such as the Gujarat Vernacular Society (established in 1848), that an organised attempt to define the literary tradition started. The people involved in such an attempt were mostly those educated under the colonial system, who often identified themselves as the ‘middle class’, that is, in their words, ‘interpreters’ between ‘the ruler and the ruled’ [Appendix to Education Commission Report 1884: Memorials 8]. Their interest in collecting and publishing old literary works was influenced by the nineteenth-century British notion of ‘national literature’, which regarded literature as nothing less than the ‘autobiography of the nation’ [Dalmia 1997: 271]. In fact, initially it was often the British officers and scholars who encouraged this development. For example, Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821–1865), a Scottish judge and the founder of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, started collecting ‘chronicles and traditions’ and copying inscriptions from various parts of Gujarat around the middle of the century, with the help of a famous Gujarati poet, Dalpatram Dahyabhai (1820–1898) [Forbes 1856: Preface]. In his voluminous work, Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Gooserat in Western India, published in 1865, Forbes quoted
extensively from the Jain chronicles such as Hemachandra’s *Devashraya Mahakavya* and Merutunga’s *Prabandhachintamani*, as well as from examples of the bardic tradition. Soon the Gujarati intellectuals began to take an active interest in collecting and preserving ‘classical’ literature, through which they also attempted to define their region and regional community. For instance, Manilal Dvivedi (1858–1898), a prominent Nagar Brahman scholar, inspected Jain manuscripts for a project supported by a Maharaja of Baroda to preserve these materials as well as to translate and publish them [Report on Publications 1894: 25; Jhaveri 1934: 70–1; Thaker 1983: 32]. Several collections of medieval poems also began to be published. Examples included *Kavyadohan* (whose English title was *Selections from the Gujarati Poets*) edited by Dalpatram Dahyabhai in 1861 [Derasari 1911: 117]; thirty-five volumes of *Prachinkavyamala* (*Old Gujarati Poetical Series*) edited by Hargovind Dwarkadas Kantawala (1849–1932) and Nathashankar Pujashankar Shastri, and published in the 1890s under the patronage of the Maharaja of Baroda [Kantawala 1890; Jhaveri 1934: 68]; and eight volumes of *Brhat Kavyadohan* (*Selections from the Gujarati Poets*) by Ichchharam Suryaram Desai (1853–1912), which were published between 1886 and 1913. It is important to remember that the kavis (poets) whose works were selected in these series had not necessarily been recognised as poets before the late nineteenth century. Many of them had hitherto been identified—both by themselves and others—not as men and women of literature [Bhayani 1998: 189], but rather as devotees of God.

It should be stressed here that their works were transmitted mostly orally, though they began to be recorded in manuscripts from the seventeenth century. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, it was almost impossible to know the original forms of these works. For instance, Narasimha Mehta is believed to have lived in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, but the earliest known manuscript of his works dates only from the seventeenth century [Mallison 1980: 89]. Dalpatram appears rather naive when he stated in the preface of *Kavyadohan* in 1861 that the language used for poetry four hundred years ago was not very different from that of his time [Nilkanth 1905: 6], for whatever poems he saw had already been reworked through centuries of oral transmission. Dalpatram, however, also noted the existence of different versions of the same poems, and emphasised the efforts he had made to ‘improve’ the poems he
had chosen for the book before publishing them [Nilkanth 1905: 8]. Thus it is evident that the works presented in Kavyadohan were not just selected but simultaneously recast by the literatus to suit his idea of good Gujarati literature, an approach which was rather common among his contemporaries.

Besides editing the collections of old poems, intellectuals also published books focusing on individual poets from the past. Narmadshankar Lalshankar (1833–1886), a famous Gujarati intellectual of the late nineteenth century, collected and published the works of Dayaram, while Hirachand Kanji, a contemporary of Narmadshankar, did the same with Akho [Jhaveri 1956: 78]. Hargovind Dwarkadas Kantawala, Ichchharam Suryaram Desai and Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi each studied Premanand, Narasimha Mehta and Dayaram respectively. The Buddhiprakash, a monthly of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, also published many articles on individual poets.

It is important to note that the literary tradition of Gujarat presented by the leading Gujarati scholars of the late nineteenth century (who were in fact mostly high-caste Hindus, as discussed later) consisted mainly of two kinds: one was the Jain literature written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsha and old Gujarati, and the other was works of well-known Hindu poets. In contrast with these two genres, Persian literature patronised by Muslim courts and Islamic hymns were given little importance in this picture of the literary history of Gujarat. In view of the fact that both Muslim and Hindu elites were deeply associated with Persian language until the nineteenth century, the neglect of Persian literature is rather striking. Even in the nineteenth century, several prominent intellectuals in Ahmedabad such as Ranchhodlal Chhotalal (1823–1891) and Bholanath Sarabhai (1822–1886) were acquainted with Persian along with Sanskrit and English [Parekh II 1935: 162, 225–6; Krshnarao 1888: 3]. Besides neglecting Islamic elements, the elite circles of Gujarat, with the exception of a few intellectuals, did not show much interest in ‘folk literature’, such as the bardic tradition and folk dramas. The tradition of Gujarat was thus articulated through a process in which some elements were selected while others were excluded. To understand how this selection was made, the composition of the people involved in this process needs to be examined.

The prominent members of the Gujarati literary circles in the late
nineteenth century were mostly Brahmans, especially Nagar Brahmans, and Vaniyas, including Jains [Isaka 1999: 93–129]. Nagar Brahmans, a caste long known for their association with administrative jobs in the pre-British period, actively joined new educational institutions under the colonial system from the nineteenth century and occupied dominant positions in the administration under British rule. Equally many Vaniyas, who also received school and college education, maintained a high social status as traders and administrators. Besides these two groups, Patidars, a caste associated with agricultural occupation, also began to participate in these elite circles, but their influence remained limited until the early twentieth century. In contrast with the high-caste Hindus, the presence of lower castes in public debates was hardly visible. In the case of non-Hindu communities, Parsi writers were often marginalised in the debates over Gujarati literature, as I have discussed elsewhere [Isaka 2002]. Equally, the Gujarati-speaking Muslims only had a minor presence in the leading literary associations such as the Gujarat Vernacular Society and the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad. In the early twentieth century, the dominance of the Hindu literati in the Gujarati literary associations made a Parsi writer, Kersasp R. Dadachanji, write to a prominent Brahmakshatriya scholar, Ambalal Sakarlal, as follows:

Your annual Parishad [the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad] is doing some good, but it is almost exclusively Hindu. It is not to blame for it does not exclude the Parsis, but the latter won’t join because of the undisguised attitude of hostility and contempt which some of its leading spirits have assumed towards us and of the determination to follow their own line, and eliminate our methods and lines of literary action. [Thakor and Mehta 1929: 1065]

Needless to say, such composition of the literary circles had a significant impact on the way in which the history of Gujarati literature was illustrated.

In the following section, we will examine in detail how ‘poets’ from the past and their works were described by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1855–1907), one of the most famous Gujarati literati in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His long paper, The Classical Poets of Gujarat and their Influence on Society and Morals (1892), offers a good example of late-nineteenth-century narratives of the literary tra-
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Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi was born into a Nagar Brahman family of Nadiad in 1855. Having graduated from Bombay University in 1875, he first worked as a private secretary to the Diwan of Bhavnagar State. Later, he went on to take a degree in law and began legal practice in Bombay. He voluntarily retired from the profession in 1898 and moved back to Nadiad to concentrate on writing. Among his works, Saraswatichandra, a novel in four volumes, published in 1887, 1892, 1901 and 1905 respectively, is the most famous. The story concerns a young educated man, Saraswatichandra, and his previous fiancée, Kumud Sundari. Due to an intrigue, Saraswatichandra leaves home before his marriage with Kumud, and she, as a result, is forced to marry another man. The novel includes many characters and sub-plots, but the climax comes when the hero meets Kumud — now a widow — and has a long discussion with her. In spite of their deep love, they decide not to marry each other, for fear that the social stigma generally attached to such a widow remarriage would damage Saraswatichandra's social position and prevent him from contributing to society. The novel ends with his marriage to Kumud's sister.

The popularity of the novel among contemporary readers can be gauged from the comment by the official reporter of native publications, which said that its final volume was awaited 'with the same eagerness with which our fathers expected the issues of Pickwick' [Report on Publications 1902: 11]. K. M. Munshi described the enthusiasm among Gujarati readers as follows: 'Young men in college imbibed Saraswatichandra's waywardness and sentimentality, and sighed over the loss of imaginary Kumuds. Families of culture named newborn girls after Kumud. Quotations were freely used in literature, speeches and private correspondence' [Munshi 1935: 256]. The success of this novel established Govardhanram's position as the leading writer in Gujarat, resulting in his election as the first president of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad in 1905 [Pandya VII 1957: 39]. It is worth mentioning that Govardhanram was also involved in the editing of Gujarati school textbooks. He was asked by the Bombay government in 1904 to make selections from the poets of...
Gujarat as well as to write some lessons for the revised vernacular textbooks [Pandya VI 1959: 305].

His paper, *The Classical Poets of Gujarat and their Influence on Society and Morals*, was written in English and read for the Wilson College Literary Society in Bombay in 1892 [Tripathi 1958: Preface]. This essay became well known, partly because it was later incorporated in his Presidential address (this time read in Gujarati) at the first Gujarati Sahitya Parishad [Jhaveri 1956: 372; Chandra 1992: 153]. As analysed below, in this paper, Govardhanram, while introducing famous individuals now categorised as ‘poets’, narrated the literary tradition of this region as a seamless and coherent process of development.

In the introductory part of this paper, the author described the poets of Gujarat in the following words:

Thus have the poets of Gujarat seldom sung about mountains and meadow-lands or about patriotism and war. They have neither seen nor praised any living kings and courtiers, for they have never been in touch with them. Industrious and peaceful, they were usually a home-keeping people with homely wits. [Tripathi 1958: 4]

These poets were thus homely and detached from power. Yet, according to Govardhanram, they in fact had a significant mission in society.

The mission which poets and philosophers feel within their hearts, is to take their countrymen a step forward, — a step in the line of progress and not a leap from one age to another. [Tripathi 1958: 61]

The poets have in fact wielded their power among the masses in this province and enriched them at a time when there were no other educationists in the land, and it is upon the basis of the society as saved or raised by them that modern educationists and writers have to construct their superstructure if they ever think of reaching the otherwise unwieldy masses. [Tripathi 1958: 62]

It seems that Govardhanram found in the medieval poets a kind of predecessor of the contemporary literati, who, having little access to real political power, tried to lead the indigenous population ‘a step forward’, believing it to be their mission. Here the image of medieval poets was almost like that of late-nineteenth-century intellectuals like Govardhanram
himself, who attempted to spread the message of social reform through their writings.\(^{15}\)

The writer, furthermore, tried to relate this poetic tradition to the strong mercantile culture, for which Gujarat was predominantly known. According to him, Gujarat ‘always yielded a rich harvest of merchants’. These ‘children of industry and enterprise’ were, he said, ‘soft and gentle at home’ and charmed by the poetry of the Vaishnava religion [Tripathi 1958: 56]. In this region, Vaishnavism had come to occupy a dominant position among the Hindu trading communities since the sixteenth century, which also resulted in the popularity of Vaishnava poems among these people. In Govardhanram’s words, Gujarat was thus ‘a country of merchants and poets’ [Tripathi 1958: 49].

The author felt that the works of these poets, who addressed their ‘own surroundings’, did not belong to the ‘refined world’ [Tripathi 1958: 4]. This awareness came from the common perception that such ‘refined’ literature had not developed in this region since the fourteenth century, due to the lack of state encouragement under Muslim and Maratha rules. Thus his lecture began as follows:

In a paper on the classical poets of Gujarat one cannot promise any such glowing picture as may be drawn by one dealing with poets of any of the great languages of the world. The poets of Gujarat have had, like their country, very hard times for themsevles [sic], and their themes have had a circumscribed field. All that can be said of them is that within this narrow field they have done the work of poets. The wonder is not that they have done so little, but that they have done anything at all. [Tripathi 1958: 1]

In these circumstances, it was not only Brahman intellectuals who contributed to the development of literature. Govardhanram stated that among 70 well-known poets in Gujarat between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, about 30 were Brahmans, while the rest included 9 Vaniyas, 6 Kanbis, 7 artisans, 9 sadhus, 4 Jain priests, 1 Maratha (whom he called ‘a Maratha bastard’) and 6 ‘ladies’ (whose identity as women was evidently regarded as more important than their caste-grouping) [Tripathi 1958: 5]. In the fields of poetry and religion, the writer asserted, the distinctions of caste and gender vanished [Tripathi 1958: 6]. Govardhanram seems to have found here his ideal world, free from any
oppression against lower castes and women.

Detailed analysis of how each popular poet in this region is described in his lecture further reveals interesting aspects of Govardhanram’s perception. In the following, we will examine his accounts of six poets who are likewise given prominence in other accounts of medieval Gujarati literature: Miran (‘Mira’ in Govardhanram’s writing), Narasimha Mehta (‘Narasinha Mehta’), Akho, Premanand, Samal Bhatt and Dayaram.

Miran, usually called Miranbai by adding the female suffix ‘bai’, lived in the sixteenth century. She was originally a Rajput princess of Merta in Rajasthan and was married to the son of Rana Samgo, a Rajput ruler of Chittor. Besides this, there is no reliable information about Miran’s life [Martin-Kershaw 1995: 19; Mukta 1994: 24]. According to the stories told in Miran bhajans (hymns), which have been sung until today, she rejected this marriage and spent her whole life praying and singing for Krishna. She eventually left Chittor and settled in Dwarka, the sacred land of Krishna in Kathiawad.

The Miran who emerges in this life-story is rather rebellious, or unconventional to say the least. Govardhanram, however, rather emphasised how ‘pure and innocent and sweet and God-loving’ [Tripathi 1958: 16] she was, and thus placed her within the familiar late-nineteenth-century discourse on women: women as symbols of purity and spirituality [Chatterjee 1993: 116–34]. Or, in the words of Parita Mukta, here the figure of Miran was ‘placed within a subordinated feminized domestic sphere’ [Mukta 1994: 28].

Miran’s poems were available not only in Gujarati but also in Rajasthani, Vraj, Punjabi and Eastern Hindi [Alston 1980: 28]. K. M. Jhaveri, in his book on Gujarati literature published in 1914, noted her non-Gujarati origin, but assumed that she had acquired a knowledge of Gujarati after she came to Dwarka [Jhaveri 1914: 34–5]. The Gujarati intellectuals’ claim of Miran as their poet reflected the development of the clear notion of linguistic boundaries in the colonial period. The late-nineteenth-century literati began to give a single linguistic identity to each historical figure. In this regard, it should also be noted that Govardhanram called the attention of the audience to the origin of Miran’s husband’s family, which he described as the ‘Kings of Valabhi, the ancient capital of Gujarat’ [Tripathi 1958: 15]. It was thus suggested here that Miran, who spent her early life in Rajasthan, had in fact some association with Gujarat
Narasimha Mehta, who lived either in the fifteenth or the sixteenth century, was born into a Nagar Brahman family in a village near Junagadh. He devoted his life to the worship of Krishna by composing and singing religious songs, and left many legends related to Krishna. He was believed to have been indifferent to caste distinction and to have sat and sung in front of Dheds, who were regarded as untouchables. When this act upset the members of his caste community, he declared that he loved Hari (Krishna) and Bhaktas (worshippers of Krishna) above all [Tripathi 1958: 17-18; Jhaveri 1914: 38-9; Munshi 1935: 146]. Govardhanram narrated this aspect of Narasimha Mehta in detail. It is not difficult to understand why he paid so much attention to this episode in view of the active debates on social reform during the late nineteenth century.

In Govardhanram's opinion, it was due to the 'combined work of religious missionaries and of poets' such as Miran and Narasimha Mehta [Tripathi 1958: 23] that the Vaishnava bhakti philosophy developed in Gujarat. This bhakti influence, according to him, led the mercantile classes to be 'weaned from the bosom of rival faiths' and Brahmans to be 'persuaded to give up all but the name of the old Vedic religion in favour of this Bhakti' [Tripathi 1958: 23]. Although they kept their status as Shaivas [Gazetteer IX–I 1901: 531], the Brahmans were described here as having adopted the 'spirit' of Vaishnava bhakti worship. They thus managed to secure their place in Govardhanram's 'country of merchants and poets', which was characterised by Vaishnava tradition.

Interestingly, Govardhanram expressed an extremely negative opinion of the Vallabhabhacharya sect, in spite of the fact that this sect also advocated devotion for Krishna. His view was undoubtedly affected by the Maharaj Libel Case in 1862. It all started when several social reformers in Bombay, including Karsandas Mulji and Narmadshankar Lalshankar, began to criticise the Maharajs, the heads of this sect, through lectures and publications around 1860. The Satyaprakash, the newspaper edited by Karsandas, was particularly vocal in its criticism [Dobbin 1972: 66]. Karsandas wrote a controversial article in which he strongly criticised Jadunathji Maharaj for 'defiling' the wives and daughters of his followers [Dobbin 1972: 68]. The Maharaj sued Karsandas and the publisher of the Satyaprakash, Nanabhai Rustomji Ranina, for libel in 1861, and thus began the famous Maharaj Libel Case in the Supreme
Court in Bombay [Report of the Maharaj Libel Case 1862: 3–5]. This resulted in the disclosure of shocking evidence about the Maharajs’ sexual conduct, and concluded with a judgement in favour of Karsandas. The implications of this trial can be analysed in different ways, but for the present discussion, it is enough to note the negative effect this incident had on the image of the Maharajs among the Gujarati elite. Govardhanram insisted that, thanks to the good influence which the poetic tradition exerted on the people’s morality, the influence of Vallabhacharya was prevented from ‘crawling like so many worms on the body social of Gujarat’ [Tripathi 1958: 57]. Even the Maharajs in Gujarat, the writer emphasised, had not had the ‘courage to do the one thousand nasty things’ they were charged with in Bombay, because here ‘the voice of poets’ was still ‘constantly ringing in the ears of their worshippers’ [Tripathi 1958: 59]. Thus the Vallabhacharya sect was hardly given any prominence in Govardhanram’s perception of Gujarati tradition, in spite of the fact that it had actually been extremely popular among Vaniyas in this region. Rather it was regarded as an undesirable influence from outside.

Akho, Premanand and Samal Bhatt are the three main figures consistently mentioned in works of Gujarati literary history between the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In his description of the life of Akho, an Ahmedabadi goldsmith, Govardhanram again disclosed his dislike of the Vallabhacharya sect and narrated how Akho criticised his Guru, the then head of this sect [Tripathi 1958: 26–7]. After the story of this goldsmith poet, the writer then examined in detail the works of Premanand, a Brahman in Vadodara. Premanand, Govardhanram stressed, had objected to the ‘vain pride and haughtiness of the Sanskritists of his time’ and tried to challenge them by producing ‘great works in Gujarati’ [Tripathi 1958: 31]. Govardhanram praised him highly for ‘supplying the people with adaptations of their time-honoured and revered tales and fictions into the language and life of Gujarat’ and even called him the ‘greatest poet of Gujarat’ [Tripathi 1958: 32, 30]. This emphasis on the ‘Gujaratiness’ of the poet’s works was clearly related to the desire of the contemporary Gujarati intellectuals to find their predecessors and discover the notion of regional identity existing in the previous literature. Premanand’s works in fact showed the earliest example of the usage of the word, ‘Gujarati language (bhasha)’ [Chavda n.d.: 12; Munshi 1935:
and fitted well into the picture of Gujarat and the Gujaratis held by the late-nineteenth-century literati [Isaka 2002]. This is why Nanalal Dalpatram (1877–1946), the poet and the son of Dalpatram Dahyabhai, described Premanand as the ‘most Gujarati of Gujarati poets, modern or ancient’ [Jhaveri 1978: 43].

It seems that Govardhanram sympathised with Premanand again when he noticed the poet’s attempt to avoid ‘pandering to the vulgarities of the masses or stooping to the sensualism of the Vaishnava poetry’ [Tripathi 1958: 32]. It is worth pointing out that contemporary literati, who were influenced by Western notions of purity and morality, often strongly criticised the ‘vulgarities’ in existing popular songs and stories. For instance, when Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth (1829–1891) published a book of folk dramas, he did not want to present them in their existing form, but in an ‘improved’ form, from which any ‘vulgar’ words had been removed. [Derasari 1911: 110–11; Jhaveri 1956: 198–201]. As described later, the lyrics of Dayaram, another ‘medieval’ poet, also faced similar criticism.

The extent to which late-nineteenth-century scholars were familiarised with Western literature can be gauged from Govardhanram’s summary of Premanand’s verse, ‘Ranayajya (Battle-Sacrifice)’: ‘[ ... ] Its subject is the war against Ravana, the Paris of the Indian Illiad [sic]. This Paris has kept his Helen, Sita, [ ... ]; ‘Always calling on Sita with what the great English poet would call “Tarquin’s ravishing strides,” [ ... ] he always returns to his post as did Lady Macbeth saying of King Duncan: “Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.”’; “The wife [of Ravana] feels proud of a husband who pleads so well in excuse of a fatal policy, and sends him to war with her sweet blessings. So felt king Henry IV, in the hands of great Shakespeare, [ ... ]” [Tripathi 1958: 38–9]. It is obvious that even in narrating and evaluating the old poems, Govardhanram could not help depending on idioms and ideas he had acquired from Western literature. The poems were now consciously presented in such a way as to prove their literary value according to Western standards.

Govardhanram attributed to Samal Bhatt, a Srigod Malvi Brahman from a suburb of Ahmedabad, the image of a contemporary social reformer. According to him, Samal Bhatt had presented a picture of a ‘new world of men and women who soared above the narrow-minded blasting
social institutions of his countrymen' [Tripathi 1958: 40]. After the time of Samal Bhatt, however, a ‘reign of confusion’ began in Gujarat, according to Govardhanram’s perception [Tripathi 1958: 50]. The writer described the situation of this region before the Marathas’ arrival as follows:

Like some innocent birds which nestle in some quiet regions where no rude hands might disturb them, the literary men of Gujarat had begun the great work in those very towns and villages where the Mahrattas were destined to come, but where, till then, there were seclusion and peace and quiet. [Tripathi 1958: 2]

Then, he focused on the example of Vadodara and stated that ‘this promising and hopeful garden was blasted at their [the Marathas’] approach’ [Tripathi 1958: 3]. As in the case of the Vallabhacharya sect, Maratha rulers were regarded essentially as outsiders, who caused a great damage to this region, but who could not wholly wipe out the foundation of Gujarati tradition inherited from preceding periods.

Among the poets of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Dayaram (1767/1777–1852), a Sathodra Nagar Brahman from a village called Chanod (in the present Vadodara district), is the most famous. He left various types of works in Hindi, Vraj, Gujarati and some other languages, and many of them were related to the Vallabhacharya sect and its philosophy. In particular, his garbis (lyrics), whose main theme was the love between Radha and Krishna, are well known. Govardhanram, while admitting the ‘poetical powers’ of Dayaram, was critical of the ‘lewdness of writings’ in his works [Tripathi 1958: 53]. The author’s judgement was probably affected by the life-story of Dayaram, which contained many episodes regarding his relationships with women. As mentioned above, it became increasingly common among the educated to criticise literary works on the basis of ‘lewdness’. It should also be added that Dayaram was an ‘open advocate of Vallabha’ [Tripathi 1958: 53], which further degraded his position in the eyes of Govardhanram.

In this way, the individual poets examined above were given certain positions by Govardhanram in the chronological history of Gujarati literature. In other words, they were all considered to be part of the seamless and coherent literary tradition of Gujarat. The poets and their poems were selected and narrated according to the way in which he wished
to project this region and its tradition. It should also be emphasised that Govardhanram consciously linked this literary tradition with the mercantile communities, through which Gujarat was projected as 'a country of merchants and poets'.

III

As this paper has shown, in late-nineteenth-century Gujarat, the local literati, who were educated under the colonial system, began to take an active interest in articulating the literary tradition of the region. The leadership of these literary circles was mainly dominated by Brahman and Vaniya elites. In their narratives on the classical literature of Gujarat, they focused on Jain literature and Hindu religious poems, while paying little attention to Islamic literature. Furthermore, as Govardhanram’s essay clearly illustrates, the genres of literature thus selected were recast, a process which in turn contributed to the formation of a specific notion of Gujarat and the Gujaratis.

The late-nineteenth-century ideas on the literary tradition of Gujarat seem to have had a significant influence on the regional elites in subsequent periods. For instance, M. K. Gandhi’s perception of Gujarati literature often resembles that expressed by the late-nineteenth-century intellectuals. People like Akho, Samal Bhatt and Dayaram are found in his speeches and writings. He used a hymn of Narasimha Mehta for the daily prayer at the ashram [Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi XIX 1966: 72–3], and projected Miran as a symbol of noncooperation [Mukta 1994: 187]. Jain and Vaishnava traditions as well as mercantile culture were given much importance in his picture of Gujarat [Isaka 1999: 320–1]. Gandhi did express his interest in folk songs and folklore, mentioning the works of Jhaverchand Kalidas Meghani (1897–1947), who had collected and edited folk literature in Kathiawad, and regretted the ‘gulf’ between ‘the language of the people and ours’ [Munshi 1935: v]. Generally speaking, however, the urban literati’s notion of the literary tradition of Gujarat was still largely confined to Jain literature and Hindu religious poems. Due to their close association with the state and their dominance in the press, the elite could present their notion of Gujarati literature in school textbooks and curricula as well as in papers, journals and other influential publications throughout the colonial period and
also in the post-colonial period.

It should be stressed, however, that constant attempts were made at the same time by some sections of the population to present alternative literary traditions in this region. They were often narrated, not as a part of the tradition of Gujarat, but as the distinctive traditions of specific communities in this region; for example, the tradition of the Muslims, the Parsis, the Dangs (the ‘tribes’ in the forested regions in Western India) or the Kathiawadis (the people living in Kathiawad). What we need to investigate, as our next project, is how these different narratives of tradition attempted to assert themselves against the dominant notion of the Gujarati tradition that was supported by the state. Such investigation might in turn help us to reconstruct our present perception of the literary tradition of Gujarat.

Notes
1) The major part of the collection of Gujarati manuscripts in the British Library was Jain religious literature [Blumhardt 1905].
2) For details, see Dar n.d. and Quraishi 1972.
3) The language used in these hymns is often difficult to place within any of the present linguistic categories. Shackle and Moir have analysed the linguistic sources from which the vocabulary of certain ginans derived [Shackle and Moir 1992: 42–3]. On ginans, see also Asani 1991.
4) Devashraya Mahakavya is a Sanskrit work by Hemachandra (1088–1172), which describes the glories of the Solanki dynasty [Munshi 1935: 41–2; Jhaveri 1978: 11].
5) Prabandhachintamani, written in 1305 by Merutunga, is an important work in the Apabhramsha literature. It records the life-stories of Puranic, historical and semi-historical figures on the basis of oral tradition [Chavda n.d.: 5].
6) Before the publication of this series, Hargovind, with several others, published the quarterly journal, Prachinakavya [Derasari 1911: 121–2].
7) Narmadshankar once compared himself with famous poets from the past. He assigned 70 marks to himself, 60 to Premanand, 40 to Dayaram and 30 to Samal Bhatt, while giving 100 to Homer [Sanjana 1950: 44; Broker 1977: 54–5].
8) For instance, the Buddhiprakash published a series of articles entitled ‘Gujarati Bhashana Kaviyonj Ithas’ (The History of Poets in the Gujarati Language) in the 1860s. Buddhiprakash, December 1861, pp. 266–73; January 1862, pp. 22–4; February 1862, pp. 27–9; April 1862, pp. 76–8; May 1862, pp. 100–3; July 1862, pp. 150–2; September 1862, pp. 208–9; November 1862, pp. 251–3; January 1863, pp. 8–9; February 1863, pp. 30–3; March 1863, pp. 60–1; April 1863, pp. 92–3; May 1863, pp. 102–3; November 1863, pp. 242–4.
9) On the Hindu elite contribution to Persian literature in Gujarat, see Quraishi 1972: 237–9. The language of the court had been Persian during the Mughal period, and even some sections of high-caste Hindu literati such as Brahmans (especially Nagar
Brahmans), Kayasthas and Brahmakshatriyas wrote in Persian [Divatia 1993: 45–6; Nayak 1954, 1955].

10) There were, however, some exceptions. Narmadshankar Lalshankar and Sorabji Hormaji collected folk songs, while Framji Bamanji published a book on the folklore of Gujarat and Kathiawad. The collection of bhavais published by Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth is also well known. For details, see Gopalan 1976.

11) On his life, see, for example, Joshi 1979.


13) It is worth mentioning here that Govardhanram took an active interest in writing pamphlets and papers in English for the ‘educated countrymen in India’ [Pandya V 1959: 178]. Moreover, while writing his novels in Gujarati, he wrote his diaries (which he called ‘Scrap Books’) in English [Pandya 1957, 1959]. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, this indicates the way in which English ‘seeped into the intimate and personal domains of men of the elite classes’ in colonial India [Mukherjee 2000: 9–10].

14) The well-known Maharashtrian social reformer, M. G. Ranade (1842–1901), also depicted the poetic tradition of his region in a similar way in the 1890s. He argued that many poets in the past expressed a ‘continued protest against the old spirit’ [Ranade 1902: 87].

15) On social reform movements in Gujarat of this period, see Chavda n.d.; Desai 1978; and Raval 1987.

16) For both Miran and Narasimha Mehta, no definite evidence is available about when they lived. Furthermore, it is difficult to know whether poems attributed to these poets were really their compositions or not.

17) In the second edition of this book, published in 1938, K. M. Jhaveri added a footnote here to suggest that in the time of Miran, the same language might have been used in Gujarat and the western part of Rajasthan [Jhaveri 1993: 40–1].

18) Due to the uncertainty as to when he lived, it is not known whether Narasimha Mehta was influenced by the bhakti movements of Vallabhacharya or Chaitaniya. For details, see Mallison 1974: 201. Govardhanram considered that Narasimha lived earlier than the rise of the Vallabhacharya sect [Tripathi 1958: 51].

19) The Vallabhacharya sect was founded in the early sixteenth century by a Telugu Brahman, Vallabhacharya (1479–1531), who preached love and devotion for Krishna. The new sect thus established was known as the Vallabha Sampraday or the Pushtimarg (spiritual nourishment), which soon developed into the largest and most influential sect among Vaniyas in Gujarat. Ahmedabad became one of the seven major branches (gadis) of this sect. The heads of the Vallabhacharya were called Maharajs (also called Goswami, Gosainji, or Vallabhkul) and considered to be the descendants of the founder. They had great influence over the sect’s followers and were even worshipped as gods [Gazetteer IX–I 1901: 536; Thakkar 1997: 47].

20) For instance, Thakkar 1997 and Shodhan 1997 have analysed this case from a gender perspective.

21) The first specimen among European sources in which the term ‘Gujarati’ was applied to a language was dated around the early eighteenth century [Grierson IX–II 1908: 333]. Thus, although there was no clear linguistic boundary between Rajasthani
and Gujarati before the nineteenth century, the notion of the Gujarati language was certainly in existence by the eighteenth century.

22) On the contemporary Gujarati literati’s perception of history, see Isaka 2000.
23) On the life and works of Dayaram, see Dwyer 2001.
24) A similar view was also expressed in a newspaper, Nyayadarshak, in 1888, which stated that many ‘obscene words’ in Dayaram’s poems were ‘sure to excite lust among lustful persons’. Nyayadarshak, 16 April 1888, in Report on Native Papers (21 April 1888), p. 10. The Report on Publication in 1899 also considered that Dayaram’s talent was ‘frequently prostituted in lewd and lascivious writings’ [Report on Publications 1899: 4].

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