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An Outline History of Gujarati Theological Literature

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I. BEGINNINGS, 1813-1850

The beginnings of Gujarati Theological Literature go back to the arrival of the first missionaries in Surat—C. C. Aratoon, the Armenian convert of the Serampore missionaries, who arrived in 1813, and William Fyvie and James Skinner of the London Missionary Society who followed him in 1815. In any language the translation of the Bible is a major work of theological scholarship, involving the careful choice of theological terms which have already been used in another religion, and if necessary the coining of new ones, and the theological vocabulary established in the earliest translations has an influence on all subsequent theological literature. William Carey and his Serampore colleagues published a Gujarati translation of the New Testament in 1820; but this was never widely used and was immediately superseded by the much better translation of the L.M.S. missionaries published in 1821, and printed at the newly founded Surat Mission Press, which for well over a century printed the great bulk of Gujarati Christian literature, until its closure in 1959. The Old Testament was published in 1823, and the complete Bible in 1829.

One of the earliest theological writings of which we have record was a *Catechism* prepared by Aratoon in Surat, and taken with him to Serampore for printing when he left Gujarat in 1818. The L.M.S. missionaries, besides their labours on the Bible, produced during these early years many pamphlets and printed sermons, which, though primarily intended for evangelism, represent a comprehensive attempt to outline in Gujarati the fundamental Christian doctrines, as a glance at some of the many titles will show. For example, we find the following listed, among others, in the *Oriental Christian Spectator* in 1830: *On the Perfection of God*; *On the Creation*; *On the Fall*; *All Men Are Sinners*; *A Comment on the Ten Commandments*; *A Catechism*; *On Sin*; *On Regeneration*; *On Sanctification*; *On the Pardon of Sin*; *On Prayer*; *On Turning to the Lord*. No less than thirty-one such titles are listed in 1831, and each of these pamphlets

was about twelve pages long. It is clear that the men of that day thought theologically even when writing evangelistic tracts!

In 1831 the Bombay Tract Society began to add Gujarati translations of its publications, which were mainly in Marathi, to the volume of work already coming from the Surat missionaries. Among the Bombay tracts of this period we find *The Three Worlds*, an exposition of the great themes of heaven, hell and human life, in the light of the well-known Hindu concept of *triloka*. This tract was printed repeatedly for at least seventy years. Another title is *Search after Knowledge, or the Evidences of Christianity*, showing the prevailing interest of the period in Natural Theology as a support of the Christian message, an interest which is reflected again in the title *Youth's Book of Natural Theology* (pp. 274) translated from the English in 1849 by Pandoorung Gunoba. In 1834 we find the Surat series of tracts continued with *Concerning Salvation ; True Atonement ; The Sufferings and Death of Christ ;* and *On Faith in Christ*. The final series of fifty-two tracts gives a very comprehensive exposition of Christian doctrine. At the same time a polemical approach to Hinduism can be seen in such titles as *The Folly of Idolatry, Vain Ways of Seeking Pardon Exposed, and A Conversation between a Brahman and a Christian Minister*.

In 1834 we find the publication of a *Goojarat Hymn Book*. The vocabulary of hymns, like that of the Bible, tends to establish the standard theological terms, and is therefore of special importance. Words and terms used in favourite hymns become part of the conscious or unconscious background of theological writing, and it is interesting to see what a large number of Gujarati hymns written before 1863 are still used, without any sense of strangeness. The hymns in this first book were all in English metres. 1834 saw also the publication of a *Summary of Holy Scripture* (pp. 128); a *Book of Public Worship* (the predecessor of William Fyvie's *Manual of Public Worship* of 1839); an *Elementary Catechism*, probably that of Dr. John Wilson, which, with many revisions, is that still circulating, its 16th edition having been published in 1958; and *The Way of Salvation* by James Mitchell. In 1835 William Fyvie published in three volumes thirty *Discourses on the Sermon on the Mount*, which, though purely homiletical, cover each verse and so may perhaps claim to be the first Commentary ever published in Gujarati, and at the same time we read of the publication of *The Substance of Christian Doctrine*, translated from a book printed by the American missionaries then in Bombay.

In 1842-3 the Surat missionaries produced a new series of booklets of thirty or forty pages each giving the Biblical teaching on *The Birth of Christ, The Miracles of Christ, The Parables of Christ, The Doctrines and Precepts of Christ, and The Death*

and *Resurrection of Christ*, while in 1844 came a book of 39 pages on Christ's fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, a subject on which great stress was laid in the evangelistic and apologetic literature of the period.

In 1844 came Part I of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, translated by the L.M.S. missionary William Flower. Part II had to wait a further sixty years for translation! At the same time comes a *Catechism of the Christian Religion* (pp. 38), and a *Comparison of Christ and Muhammad* (pp. 42). A very interesting tract of this period is a lithographed *Letter to the Jain Priests of Palitana*, by Dr. John Wilson of Bombay. It is undated, but the fact that conjunct letters are not used and that the tract is lithographed point to a date before 1850. For the moral instruction of new Christians there is a book of sixty pages by James Glasgow, pioneer missionary of the Irish Presbyterian Church, entitled *Khrishti Ācharan : Vishvāshione Bodhvachan* ('Christian Behaviour: Instruction for Believers'); the typography and lack of English-style punctuation indicate a date about 1850.

II. THE CHURCH TAKES ROOT, 1851-1870

The major event of this second period was undoubtedly the great 1857-61 edition of the Bible, with which the name of James Glasgow is particularly associated. The Translation Committee, which included Dr. John Wilson, the Rev. Hormazdji Pestonji, and the Rev. J. V. S. Taylor, did its work in a most scholarly manner, and produced in 1857 a *Vocabulary of the Principal Words* to be found in the Bible, with the best Gujarati equivalents for each of them. The *Vocabulary* contains 780 terms. It should of course be remembered that then, as now, scholars working on different translations of the Bible, and on theological work in general, were aware of each other's efforts, and the different terms were chosen only after much discussion. The *Oriental Christian Spectator*, a monthly magazine founded by John Wilson in 1830 and published in Bombay, long served as a clearing-house for theological terminology. As early as November 1830—and he had arrived in India only in 1829—there is a learned article by Wilson on 'Sanskrit and Murathee Renderings of Theological Terms' in which he argues strongly against the Christian use of the word *svarga* for 'heaven', on the grounds that its meaning is limited to the sensual heaven of Indra, and recommends the word *devaloka*. It is interesting to note that, despite his scholarly arguments, *svarga* is the word which has come to win universal acceptance.

One of the scholars who worked on this 1861 edition of the Bible, and was responsible for the translation of *Chronicles*, was Robert Young, then Superintendent of the Surat Press, who was later to produce the famous *Young's Concordance*. It has been a tragedy for the Church in Gujarat that neither he nor anyone else has ever produced a Concordance in Gujarati, and as a new

translation of the Bible is about to be commenced in 1963 it is unlikely that a Concordance can be published for at least another decade.

An important event of 1853 was the founding of the Gujarat Tract and Book Society, which over the years has been responsible for a large proportion of Gujarati Christian publications, and whose annual printed reports form a valuable source of information for the whole period.

In 1852 there appeared an interesting little book of fifty-one pages on *The Existence and Attributes of God (Devasiddhānta)*. The book, whose author is not named, though James Glasgow is a likely guess, deals with the existence, unity and Trinity of God, and is a valuable source for theological terminology. Perhaps the most striking example is its use of the words *Mahāpurusha* and *Uttampurusha* for the *Persons* of the Trinity—more satisfactory terms, surely, than the word *vyakti* ('individual') which eventually gained currency. In 1852 there also appeared an *Abridgement of the O.T. Scriptures* (pp. 157) by James McKee.

The fifties saw the beginning of the flowering of Gujarati Christian verse. There had been, as we have seen, attempts to put English hymns into Gujarati, with the preservation of the original metres. In 1854 was published *Manohar Vāni* ('The Soul-winning Voice'), a volume of verse by Abdur Rahman, first convert of the I.P. Mission, which 'exposes the popular errors . . . and also sets forth the Christian truth in a winning form'. In 1855 came Glasgow's translation of the Scottish *Metrical Psalms* (in English metres), many of which are still sung, and whose words have sunk into the hearts of Christian people in Gujarat. He also translated the *Scottish Paraphrases* in 1858. In 1851 there had been published *Dharmagita*, a collection of hymns in English metres by William Clarkson and J. V. S. Taylor of the L.M.S., lithographed in Ahmedabad. Then in 1863 came the famous *Kāvyaṛpaṇ* ('Offering of Poems'), a book destined to have a wide influence on Christian thought and devotion in Gujarat. The first edition contained poems in Indian metres, both original and translated, by J. V. S. Taylor and 'a friend', who was actually a young man who came close to Christianity but never crossed the border. Taylor, an L.M.S. missionary who joined the I.P. Mission when the L.M.S. left Gujarat in 1860, had been born and brought up in India, had made a close study of Indian metres, and was later to become widely known as 'the Father of Gujarati Grammar'. His contribution to Indian theological literature must have been unique at that time, for he knew Indian languages and thought from the inside, and had also studied in the West at Glasgow University and at the L.M.S. training centre at the house of Mr. Cecil at Chipping Ongar, where he had become a friend of David Livingstone, so that he was able to combine deep theological insight with scholarly and poetical Gujarati expression. *Kāvyaṛpaṇ* is chiefly remarkable for the theological content of Taylor's hymns. In contrast to the

later tendency for hymns to be subjective and lacking in deep theological insight, we find for example his fine series of four hymns on the Trinity in the *Shanknāri* metre. It is difficult now to discover which of his hymns are original and which translations from Hindi and Marathi. But there is no doubt that the stamp of Taylor's theological language has remained on the vocabulary of Christian Gujarat.

In 1864 there appeared *Ātam Bodh* ('The Way of Wisdom') (pp. 80) by Vahalji Bechar, a book of Christian doctrine in verse. Vahalji Bechar later published his own translation of the *Psalms* into Indian metres (1876), and also a full-length study of the Kabir Panth, *Sources of the Kabir Religion* (pp. 344), in which he was deeply interested (1881). *Padmālā* ('Garland of Verse') (pp. 72) was published in 1867 and is described as 'poetical pieces on religious subjects by Native Christians'. Many of these were *bhajans* and *padas* which the Surat Mission Press workers had themselves composed to sing at their evening *gāyan sabhās* (singsongs). *Padapothi* ('Book of Verse'), published in 1896, was a selection from *Padmālā* specially designed for bazaar preaching. Another collection by Indian Christian writers is mentioned—*Kāvya-rachana* ('Poetic Compositions'). Of these various works, *Manohar Vāni*, *Padmālā*, *Ātam Bodh*, *Kāvya-rachana*, and the later *Garbāvālī* (1873) were chiefly in the *Rāga* and *Rāgani* styles, while *Kāvya-rājan* uses the *Chanda* metres.

Turning to more strictly theological works we find *Pavitra Lekhmālā* (*Scripture Extracts on Doctrine and Duty, with Introductions and Explanatory Remarks for Believers and Inquirers*) by James Glasgow (Surat, 1851). This book of 342 small pages gives a good outline of basic Christian doctrine. It is once more interesting to note that in the chapter on the Holy Spirit Glasgow uses the word *Purusha* as the equivalent of 'Person'. A couple of substantial pamphlets appear from the pen of William Clarkson, *What is Salvation?* (pp. 25) in 1854, and *The Word of Life* (*Jivanbhed Vāni*) (pp. 47), on 'the Work and Office of the Redeemer' in the same year. The first Church History appeared in 1862, the translation by J. V. S. Taylor—from the Marathi—of *Barth's Church History* (pp. 481), a work which for many years remained a standard textbook, and which introduced the technical vocabulary for many of the theological controversies of Christendom. *Barth's Bible Stories* from the N.T. were translated in 1859 by Robert Montgomery and, with the O.T. stories which followed later, are still in use. In 1855 there first appeared *Satdharmano Mārga* ('The Way of the True Religion'), a pamphlet of 32 pages setting forth 'the principal doctrines of Christianity concerning God and Man and the One Mediator and Saviour'.

This period saw the publication of many books on Indian religions, mainly controversial in tone. In 1854 came *Dharmanā Trājavā* ('The Balance of Religion') (pp. 108) 'on the falsehood of popular religion', translated from Hindi. In 1855 from the

Bombay Tract Society came *The Messiah and Mahommed*, and an abridged version of John Wilson's *Exposure of Hinduism*, which had first been translated into Gujarati about 1834, in which year a manuscript version of it had been read repeatedly by a man named Bhaichand of Surat, resulting in his conversion and baptism. In 1859 appeared *Questions on Hinduism* (pp. 70, translated by Clarkson) in which a 'rosary' (*manakāni mālā*) of eighteen questions each are asked and answered on such topics as *nirguṇa Brahma*, idol-worship, sin and merit, etc. In 1863 appeared *Vedadharmāno Mārga* ('The Way of the Vedic Religion') (pp. 45), and in 1864 Dunlop Moore's *Sachaina Mijān* ('The Balance of Truth') on questions at issue between Christians and Muslims (pp. 92). In 1864 a translation by Chhaganlal Bhagwandas of Baba Padmanji's *Ishvari Avatār* ('Divine Incarnation') (pp. 96), a comparison of Krishna and Christ, appeared, and in 1867 *Jainamatni Pariksha* ('An Examination of the Jain Belief') (pp. 53) also by Dunlop Moore.

In the field of devotional literature there were also developments. In 1855 a *Form of Public Worship* appeared, and in 1861 *Daily Prayers and Promises from the Holy Scriptures* (pp. 68), followed in 1865 by *Prārthnāpustaka* (pp. 76), a book of family prayers edited by James Wallace.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN GUJARATI, 1871-1890

The Presbytery of Kathiawar and Gujarat (then a Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) drew up its first course of theological study in 1864 for Chhaganlal Bhagwandas, a Brahmin convert, who later became the translator of many books into Gujarati. He and others studied privately, but in 1878 a theological class was begun in Ahmedabad. The need for theological textbooks therefore became acute, and soon began to be met. In 1878 J. V. S. Taylor produced his translation of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which is still in use, and is a valuable source-book for theological terminology. Reference should be made to Taylor's masterly avoidance of the word *vyakti* ('individual') in his translation of 'there are three Persons in the Godhead'. We are told that Taylor also produced—as a result of his theological lectures—a *Compendium of Christian Doctrines*, which is described as 'an elementary handbook for catechists and students of the theological class'. This, I think, must be his *Tattva Tantu* ('The Teacher and Truth Seeker') (pp. 44, 1884). This little book, in the form of a dialogue between 'Veda-dās' the Christian teacher and a seeker, is full of excellent dogmatic material, with a rich and highly-developed theological vocabulary. Here Taylor does not shrink from using *vyakti* in a compound formation, and his translation of 'there are three Persons in the Godhead' is 'Ishvarapaṇamā *trivyakti* chhe'. Taylor also translated, with

D. B. Wells, Walker's *Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation (Uddharmārgavivechan)*, a popular little American apologetic book of the time, which today reads perhaps more quaintly in the original English than in Taylor's translation! The Gujarati version was not published till 1889, eight years after Taylor's death.

A series of books now appears from William Clarkson, who before he retired from India in poor health in 1854 had been instrumental in the first great ingathering into the Christian Church in Gujarat, and who continued for forty years longer to write from England books for the Church there: *Kripāsāgar* ('The Ocean of Mercy') (pp. 116) in 1885; *Ishvarna Ātmānū Astittva ne Guna* ('The Person and Attributes of Spirit of God') (pp. 48) in 1888; *Ishvarna Ātmāna Kritynu Vanan* ('Description of the Work of God's Spirit') (pp. 78) in the same year; and also, in 1889, a *Commentary on St. John* (pp. 184), 'more practical than critical, and intended to deepen the devotional spirit of Bible reading'. This seems to have been the first full-length Gujarati commentary on a book of the Bible. In 1885 there appears a book 'of special interest to students'—a translation by Lazarus Tejpal from the Marathi of Narayan Sheshadri's *Historical Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Scriptures* (pp. 92). In 1890 appeared a Sacramental Catechism, *Khristi Dharmasanskār* (pp. 27), by J. Shillidy, and in 1888 (posthumously) J. V. S. Taylor's translation of the *Westminster Confession* (pp. 384), complete with Scripture proofs printed in full, an edition which remained standard until the new translation by W. G. Mulligan in 1949. In 1890 there appeared the first work from the pen of H. R. Scott, a *Harmony of the Four Gospels* (pp. 16).

In the field of Comparative Religion we have already seen Vahalji Bechar's *Sources of the Kabir Religion* (pp. 344), 1881. In this period we find also *What is in the Veda?* (pp. 63), translated from the Marathi and published by the Bombay Tract Society, 1883; *Muhammad's Miracles*, by the Maulvi Saheb Abdullah Bin Habib Al-Qurashi, the Maulvi of Nadiad who became a Christian (pp. 55, 1886); and *Christ and Mahomet Compared* (pp. 111). There is also an interesting trio of books translated from Marathi by Chhaganlal Bhagwandas, undated, but to be placed some time before 1875; *Remarks on Mohammedanism*, by Kasambhai Muhamadbhai; *Marks of a True Guru*, an interesting Christian commentary on Hindu texts describing how a true *guru* should be chosen; and *The Demon Superstition*, a book which deals with a large variety of popular Hindu beliefs and practices. A *Comparison of Zoroastrianism and Christianity* (pp. 225) by the Rev. Sorabji Kharsedji appeared in 1886.

In Christian verse and devotional literature we have two more books from J. V. S. Taylor: *Dainik Prasād* ('The Daily Portion'), 1874, and *Muktimuktāvali* ('Pearl Necklace of Salvation'), a translation from Marathi into Gujarati metres of *The Old, Old Story*. Vahalji Bechar's *Psalms of David* in Indian metres appeared in 1875, while in 1873 we first come across *Garbāvali*, a collection

of hymns by various Indian authors. This book gave Christian women and girls songs to sing to their *garbas*, or traditional Gujarati rhythmic dances, songs that reminded them of the Love of God, and of the joys and privileges of His service. In 1887 appeared the first Salvation Army Song Book, under the direction of Major De Latour. The *Large Song Book* followed in 1900. In 1889 Thomas McAnlis edited the first special children's hymn-book in Gujarati, *Dharmagita*, which ran through many editions.

(To be continued)

A CORRECTION

We are sorry to have let a mistake in printing go undetected in the January-March 1963 number. On p. 1 the last sentence should read 'This and several other facts connected with the Council are indications of possible developments within the Roman Catholic Church to favour Christian unity not merely . . .' instead of 'to favour Christianity not merely'.