

The Revival and Reconstruction of Marginality in the Select Poems of Namdeo Dhasal

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Abstract: The discrimination between the haves and have nots is the longest existing system of hostility and unfortunately is still in existence in various forms. Religion, caste, gender, sexuality, culture, tradition, economic status etc. are some of the major factors that drag some particular communities to the margin who are called subaltern by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. In course of time the subaltern start speaking and questioning the mainstream supremacy through all the possible ways among which literature occupies a major role. Through dismantling the pre-existing, pre-compiled traditional literary history, the marginalised community embraces the subaltern identity and expose the menacing, unplumbed real world. Dalit poetry is one of the strongest branches of protest literature with powerful themes and the selection of piercing words that contain the angst and anguish of the oppressed community. NamdeoDhasal's contribution to Dalit poetry gain worldwide acknowledgement with his extremely powerful social realistic poems. His poems not only unveil the caste oppression but also discuss the social problems which are considered indecent to be addressed. This paper is an attempt to explore the poetic contribution of NamdeoDhasal in the field of protest literature through analysing his selected poems. How he uses poetry to be a revolting weapon and its effects in the society is also analysed. The paper proceeds to focus on the social realistic and existentialist elements in Dhasal's poems and the relevance of the bugging or haunting style he executed in the expression of marginalised realities.

Key words: Dalit Poetry, Marginalised Community, Social Realism, Protest

The hegemonic power structure prevails in India drags a number of communities to the margins on social, political, cultural, religious and even geographical aspects. These groups get excluded from the society's established institutions and denied the means by which people have a voice in their society. The strong binaries create a number of 'other's in our society and make the lives horrible. The long existing deprivations initiate a sense of protest in the marginalised communities at the peak of tolerance level. The Harlem Renaissance, The Black Literature, Feminist theories and Literature, Dalit Movement, LGBT Movement, Minority Literature etc. are some of the predominant forms of protest. The voices keep on rising from the margins and finally those voices achieve some acceptance in the hegemonic society.

Literature is one of the strongest forms of protest and the marginalised groups subvert and undermine the existing elitism of dominant class. There exist a core and periphery in literature as there exist the significant presence of 'haves' and 'have not's in the society. The Dalits in India are one of the most humiliated social groups in the world itself. Caste discrimination and the "polluting" identity on Dalits may be one of the most heinous oppressions ever existed. The denial of human status, restrictions on the access to food and water, serfdom, extreme level of physical and psychological harassment etc. are the characteristics of dalithood.

Inspired by the Black Panther Movement, the Dalits also form a movement called Dalit Panther Movement in 1972. The revolutionary Marathi poet NamdeoDhasal is one of the founder members along with J.V Pawar, ArunKamble, PrahladChendwankar, UmakanthRandeer, DayaPawar and WamanNimbalkar. NamdeoDhasal's voice of protest in the Maharashtrian literary scene succeeded in fracturing 'Marathi Literature's Tranquillity'. The language of modern Marathi poetry and literature is born in the late 19th century with the advent of colonial education and print capitalism due to which texts from English literature were translated into the Marathi of the time producing a new hybrid idiom. This becomes the language of self-description of many significant modern Marathi writers and their self- descriptions often were nationalistic, romantic and based on an orientalist glorification of the upper caste past.

NamdeoDhasal who brims with the eagerness to agitate, follows the language of Euro- American avant-garde elements like surrealism, imagism and so on. His works challenge the nationalistic, romantic self-description of Marathi poetry with depictions of the dark world of urban squalor, explicit sexuality and despair. Despite the bleak themes, his vitality and vivacity of expression is so sublime and exquisite that he deserves to be ranked among the radical voices of protest in India.

Sachin Ketkar in his essay, "In the Organized Harem of the Octopus: Poetics and Politics of NamdeoDhasal" says, "Dalit literature in general and Dhasal's poems in particular embody the asymmetry of the core and periphery – the 'us' and 'them', the 'ours' and 'theirs' – and question the nature of the Marathi world picture and the periphery to which Dalits are relegated" (90). NamdeoDhasal is very particular in deviating from the expected ways of literature. His topics are not sweet so as the selection of words too. When he wants to represent the hard and bleak realities he chooses the vulgar and indecent words to suit the same. He focuses on unveiling and addressing the realities which are a part of Indian society but left unacknowledged as they are far from the sophisticated culture.

NamdeoDhasal uses poetry to be the weapon to fight against the savarna representations in literature by turning the themes and language upside down. Dhasal's blistering revision and interrogation of mainstream history, not only represent the Dalits exclusively but almost all the oppressed communities who stay in the dark gutters. The hijra community, prostitutes who sell their bodies to fill the belly, the pimps, goons, beggars etc. got depicted in the poems of Dhasal. Though not accepted in the beginning, the sufferings and the pain of these people of periphery are read by the readers and Dhasal could bring forth the social issues to the notice of the society.

NamdeoDhasal's first collection of poems *Golpithatook* Marathi literary circles by storm and broke all the rules of traditional Marathi literature in 1972. DilipChitre, a friend of Dhasal is a well-known critic and translator who took 40 years of efforts in translating NamdeoDhasal's poems and published the book entitled *NamdeoDhasal: Poet of the Underworld*. 'Golpitha' is the name of a red light district of Mumbai city notorious for all the dark sides of India. To represent such a place with its dwellers, he uses the language of the very same people. Dhasal continues to highlight such marginalised groups with all the pain and intensity in rest of his poems too.

"Kamatipura" is one of the most popular and criticised poems of NamdeoDhasal. It is the largest and oldest area known for prostitution in all of Asia. Dhasal had his childhood near Kamatipura experiencing the extreme poverty and deprivations. He saw the angst and anguish of the prostitutes of Kamatipura where distinctive stench, leaky drainages, the smell of human urine, stale food and garbage, sweat, smoke and many subtler aromas pervade. He says, "This is hell. This is an ugly agony" (74). He describes Kamatipura as "pain wearing dancer's anklet", "hell", "ugly agony" and as "swirling vortex" (74).

The metaphorical representation of prostitutes as porcupines can be interpreted as socially constructed body of the prostitute which resembles the body of porcupine which is not at all attractive. The expression "wearing the syphilitic sores of centuries" (74) depicts the extreme level of physical pain which is age old in nature. The mainstream society considers the places like Kamatipura to be the syphilis to the cultural society. At the same time because of the prostitution, the women are getting into the serious sexual diseases like syphilis. The brilliant use of such painful words highlights the intensity of sufferings. His expression "death gathers here" reveals the dangerous condition at which the women dwell. The grey colour of the porcupine may be the sign of gloom and sadness in the lives of the prostitutes. This painful and diseased body of the prostitutes resembles the condition of Kamatipura which is "squatting in the mud" of whoring.

With the explicit depiction of wounded Kamatipura, Dhasal reminds the cultural society of its exact colour. Dhasal's avant-garde technique can also be read as his attempt to bring about 'explosive' processes of cultural change. Dhasal's poems introduce unpredictability in the Marathi 'semiosphere' and renew the hackneyed language of Marathi poetry.

In his poem "Their Orthodox Pity", Dhasal seeks comparison between "them" and "us". He speaks about the social constructions of caste hierarchy which restricts him from being a human being. The suffocation he feels of his identity provokes him to mock at the system which sympathise the plight of the Dalits through meaningless words. He begins the poem by saying that "Their orthodox pity is no taller than a Faulkland road pimp" (98). The dominant class' sympathy for the Dalit community is compared to the pimp's sympathy for the prostitutes which does not have a pinch of sincerity. It is quite ironical to listen the hollow and futile words of the upper class who themselves focus on the existence of dalit's broken identity to sustain the hegemonic hierarchical power structure. So the sympathy parallels the pimp's feelings for the prostitutes who are the inevitable ones of their survival. For him it is disgusting to be a human being like this. "This life...so beggarly, it is nausea to be human" (98). Even the feeling of being human is nauseating because merely being a human does not guarantee food, shelter and care. The law of the nature and the law of the land favour the mighty as if they have 'bribed' the laws. Living in such a condition is torturous for each and every dalit. The intense criticism on the sympathizers through words is well executed in the poem which is a slap on the society who thinks they do everything for the upbringing of the marginalised communities.

"Arsefuckers Park" is one of the famous poems by NamdeoDhasal which evokes a shock in the very title itself. Along one of the Kamatipura lanes, there is a public park named DurgadeviUdyan. This is the place where Hijras conduct castration of men to make them eunuchs. This park is also used as the place where hijras and gay men engaged in sexual activities. As a result, DurgadeviUdyan becomes GanduBagicha or Arsefuckers' park. Despite the moral sanitisations done by the Government, the place is still known as GanduBagicha. NamdeoDhasal depicts this place in some of his poems as a metaphor for a third space that the activists try to establish. Just as the efforts to sanitise the park have resulted in a sense of emptiness and futility for the speaker, the efforts of the savarnas to sanitise the language of poetry have resulted in the clichéd sentimentality which is superficial and hollow.

Along with addressing the cultural space of the homosexuals and hijras, Dhasal emphasises the fact that the representations of dark realities will always be dark. In Sudhanva Deshpande's words, "The more his (Dhasal's) critics are exasperated, the more he enjoys being outrageous" (72). In some sense the poet is suggesting that the Marathi culture has become a 'GanduBagicha'. This poem is a perfect example that contains avant-garde features. The surrealistic metaphors and comparisons of the poem make it a challenge for the existing literary model.

These poems of Dhasal show the existential elements that emphasize the free and responsible agency that is inevitable in human life. The representation of homoerotic elements has high relevance though the institutionalised binaries include only man/woman and heterosexuality. The need for existence of these communities and their desires are well executed through the metaphor of GanduBagicha. GanduBagicha is a reality and so the factors discussed in the poem are also to be accepted.

Unlike the glamorous Mumbai highlighted with the world of Bollywood, Kamatipura— the slum is a tiny but glaring reality of the lives of Dalits who reside throughout the nation. Dhasal is a political activist and poetry is only the literary form of his activism. Dhasal's poetry speaks for Dalits and other marginalised communities and is addressed to the same. So it is more down to earth and realistic in nature. He writes from experience, not from assumptions or speculations and the sharpness will be higher. The quest for an accepted identity can be achieved only through speaking in their own language. The self is to be explained and it is perfectly done by NamdeoDhasal by showing a way for his successors.

The worldwide acceptance and acknowledgement of NamdeoDhasal's poetry shows the success of revolutionary activism. Contradictions, complexities and agonies of all sorts are what one finds when one reads Dhasal's poetry or considers his politics. The significance of NamdeoDhasal as a poet, thinker and politician can be grasped best by understanding his vision which insisted on opening up the veiled realities with harsh representations.

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