

NAMDEO DHASAL'S GOLPITHA: CRAFTING ALTERNATIVE AESTHETICS

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Abstract

Dalit poetry has overshadowed the subjects of poverty, untouchability, repression and revolution. Especially, it attacks on the caste system prevailing in Hindu religion. It is because of its ferocious attack, dalit literature is measured a unique genre in Indian literature. After 1960s in particular, the dalit writers exercised the conventionally denied literacy tools and exposed the Dalit poetry is quite different from the traditional poetry from the point of view of its source of inspiration and poetic subject matter. Namdeo Dhasal is also a by-product of social movements like Dalit Panthers. He makes his readers to acquaint with a different world through his poetry which was never seen before in the literary circles. Dhasal's first collection of poems *Golpitha* (1972) broke away the standards poetic styles and conventions; he profusely used vocabulary and language usual to dalits. In *Golpitha*, he exploited the filthy, abusive expressions used normally in a red light area sending shock waves to many elitist readers. Dhasal himself defines:

This is *do number ki duniya*, this is the bottom of the world. This is where my poem comes from. I have taken Vijay Tendulkar around this place. I have shown this to Narayan Athavale. I am showing it to you. I'll show it to anyone that wants to know what life is like here. I grew up here. I have a bond with these people. They are my people – these lumpen; I am one of them. My poetry is about life here (Namdeo Dhasal 162).

There is nothing that can quite describe the sensation of reading Dhasal's poetry; one's hair stands on end and readers feel slapped and spat upon, their head thrust down the gutter. The poet Dilip Chitre, Dhasal's friend and translator, called this a "loathsome and nauseating universe" from which emerged Namdeo Dhasal's voice, unique, shocking, searing. The playwright Vijay Tendulkar, no stranger to street vocabulary, wrote the introduction to Dhasal's first collection of poems, *Golpitha*, about Mumbai's underbelly, Kamatipura. Tendulkar wrote:

This is a world where the night is reversed into the day, where stomachs are empty or half-empty, of desperation against death, of the next day's anxieties, of bodies left over after being

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consumed by shame and sensibility, of insufferably flowing sewages, of diseased young bodies lying by the gutters braving the cold by folding up their knees to their bellies, of the jobless, of beggars, of pickpockets, of holy mendicants, of neighbourhood tough guys and pimps (Namdeo Dhasal 10).

As Dhasal describes this locale that it had over crowded rooms, filth, squalor, open gutters, sluggish and murky ground. He calls his area as an inferno on the earth. He goes beyond the boundaries of mainstream life and describes all those ill-fated human beings and identify with them. He explains the nature of the pain or unhappiness about the prostitutes working in his surroundings thus:

On a barren blue canvass

Clothes ripped off, a thigh blasted open,

A sixteen-year-old girl surrendering herself to pain.

And a pig: its snout full of blood. (Namdeo Dhasal 60)

As Dhasal's very first book *Golpitha* is largely about the lives of prostitutes in Mumbai. He believes that prostitutes are not defiled beings but they are innocent, cleaner and holier than the water of the river Ganges. He considers himself as an impartial spokesperson of all these ravaged women. By showing a deep respect or obeisance to them, he shapes the sculpture of their copulation and consummation. He remarks that in the eternal darkness of their lives these prostitutes have sown seeds of a revolution. But he feels that these prostitutes appear like petals of lotus. He is the first poet in Marathi who has related prostitutes with the lotus. Dhasal writes:

O Kamatipura,

Tucking all seasons under your armpit

You squat in the mud here

I go beyond all the pleasures and pains of whoring and wait

For your lotus to bloom.

– A lotus in the mud. (Namdeo Dhasal 75).

His treatment of the subject makes the reader more introvert and restless. He adopts a broad, humanitarian attitude of looking at the problems of prostitutes. Many of Dhasal's poems are considered important documents that replicate the lives of prostitutes in Kamatipura. Kamatipura, located in the center of Mumbai, is one of the largest red light areas in Asia where thousands of young girls working as prostitutes here. It is criss-crossed by streets upon streets of brothel houses. Dhasal writes:

This is hell

This is a swirling vortex

This is an ugly agony

This is pain wearing a dancer's anklets

Shed your skin, shed your skin from its very roots

Skin yourself

Let these poisoned everlasting wombs become disembodied

Let not this numbed ball of flesh sprout limbs (Namdeo Dhasal 74-75).

Perhaps, Dhasal was the very first to paint the lives of prostitutes on the literary canvass of India. He is very candid and frank in magnifying the traumatic existence of prostitutes who are the most marginalized and helpless members of human society. He not only fights their battle by depicting mere their life in his poems but also counters social system. On an occasion in reference to the lives of prostitutes in Kamatipura, Dhasal converses to his close friend Henning Stegmüller, a German cinematographer and photographer that "I enjoy discovering myself. I am happy when I am writing a poem, and I am happy when I am leading a protest of prostitutes fighting for their rights" (The World's Poetry Archive 2). Dhasal becomes sentimental while writing about the painful and troublesome life that prostitutes had to live. He writes about their tragic experiences.

Manda

Your mind is neither of ash nor of marble

I feel your hair, your clothes, your nails, your breasts

As though they were my own; they reveal to me, within myself

Colonies of dead; hunchbacks left to die in the streets;

Sandwiches; streets; milk of a she-dog that's just given birth to her litter

(Namdeo Dhasal 57).

The poet says that on the back of his tortured body there are weal of the whip-lashes of hunger, poverty, slavery, destitution and discrimination of dalits. In his another poem *Water*, he expresses his dislike for the eternal indifference and heartlessness extended to his community to the extent that they were deprived of their natural right to drink the potable water without any inhibition. He points out the irony in the claims of the so-called humanitarians and social workers and moral preachers who are generous to dogs and cats but refuse to quench the thirst of fellow humans only because they are labeled

as untouchable. In the poem *Water*, the poet has presented the extreme grief of those who have been denied access to a natural resource like water. The poet records his protest against the caste-system which arbitrarily deprives the dalits and the underdogs of their natural right to water. He underlines the significance of water in this poem:

O Lady give me some water, give me some water O Lady

Pour me a trickle O lady

My throat is parched.

O Big Brother, O village Patil,

O Master, O God My Lord,

Ouch Ouch O

(Namdeo Dhasal 45)

Dhasal's poetry is the poetry of revolutionary ideals and it is fully committed to its goal of total emancipation of the Dalits from enslavement. It focuses on the human problems and challenges, and brings about transformation through revolutionary ideals. Its prime objective is to challenge the existing social and political system and establish new social order on the basis of equality. His poems reflect a comprehensive atheism and intense rebellious feelings. Insurgence is an exceptional attribute of his poems. His poems expose and attack the socio-cultural discrepancy. They are deadly against the abstractions of god and religion. Dhasal rejects the very concept of God or divinity because the whole establishment is constructed on the basis of such myths created by the priestly classes for their own benefit and betterment. He raises some very pertinent questions about the existence of God and rejects the notion of God but fails to get any satisfactory answer.

Dhasal's very famous poem *Water* may be considered as an excellent poem by Dhasal. He has painted a horrible and frightening side of the caste or *varna* system. From the point of view of content and expression, this poem offers a unique experience. Dhasal initiates a sharp attack on the established forces of capitalism because farmers, peasants and land-labourers are confronted with a number of difficulties, problems, sufferings and pains. They are being crushed under the authoritarian, exploitative, social, political and economic forces. A number of factories are being shut down adding to an ever-growing number of unemployed people. The farmers are being robbed of their produce. The poet finds a capitalistic design behind the economic marginalization of these underprivileged people and the proletariat. Dhasal acknowledges their contribution to the nation-building. His poem becomes a weapon

in the battle of liberation of these working masses and explores the disheartening poverty that dominates the villages of the country.

Dhasal expresses that he and his community have been disillusioned with the notion of freedom. Therefore, he wants to know the real meaning of it. It is a difficult question to which there are perhaps no answers. He looks at the idea of freedom from the perspective of the 'others'. He argues that in the free and sovereign society of India, the Dalits are treated as the 'others'. They have never been allowed key position. For them the very idea of freedom has no meaning at all. They are not free even today in a caste-ridden society. The real meaning of freedom is to create it for others. The consciousness of freedom is associated with high ideals, birth or rise, progression and attainment of certain ideals. However, this has not materialized in the life of dalits. He writes about his disillusionment:

I did not reach
Any destination, as
There was none,
I was frustrated
As man is disillusioned
With his freedom. (Namdeo Dhasal 14)

A cursory glance at dalit poetry reveals that it has been inspired by Ambedkar and Phule or their other icons. It expresses their deep sense of gratitude to them. There are multiple strands in Dalit poetry – it protests against the painful tradition bound submissive life and a profound sense of gratitude towards Ambedkar for giving them a new sense of self, identity and for inculcating a fighting spirit for construction of a new society. This has made their poetic experience a kind of collective introspection and expression of Dalit mind. Dhasal writes in *Golpitha*.

You are that Sun, our only charioteer
Who descends into us from a vision of sovereign victory,
And accompanies us in fields, in crowds, in processions, and in struggles;
And saves us from being exploited.
You are that Sun
You are that one – who belongs to us. (Namdeo Dhasal 42)

Thus, undoubtedly, Dhasal creates a different kind of poetic aesthetics through his poems and this was altogether diverse from the conventional concept of classical literary aesthetics based on

Satyam, Shivam, Sundram. Sharankumar Limbale, well-known dalit activist and critic also asserts: “Dalit literature is not pleasure giving literature. Consequently, the aesthetics of dalit literature cannot be based on the principles of conventional or classical literary aesthetic that privileges pleasure derived from beauty. This is why there is a felt need for separate dalit aesthetics” (116). Every human being is born with free spirit but prevailing social, cultural and political forces deprive him of his natural freedom. The idea of untouchability is completely unnatural and subjectively imposed on a large section of humanity by the prevailing social set up with an express motive of absolute marginalization. However, the Dalit literature challenges the validity of all these socio-cultural practices and rejects them. It reveals the collective conscious of dalits that has been silenced through centuries of exploitation because of their castes. It is an absolute assertion and allegation of their articulation through literary forms.

References

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