

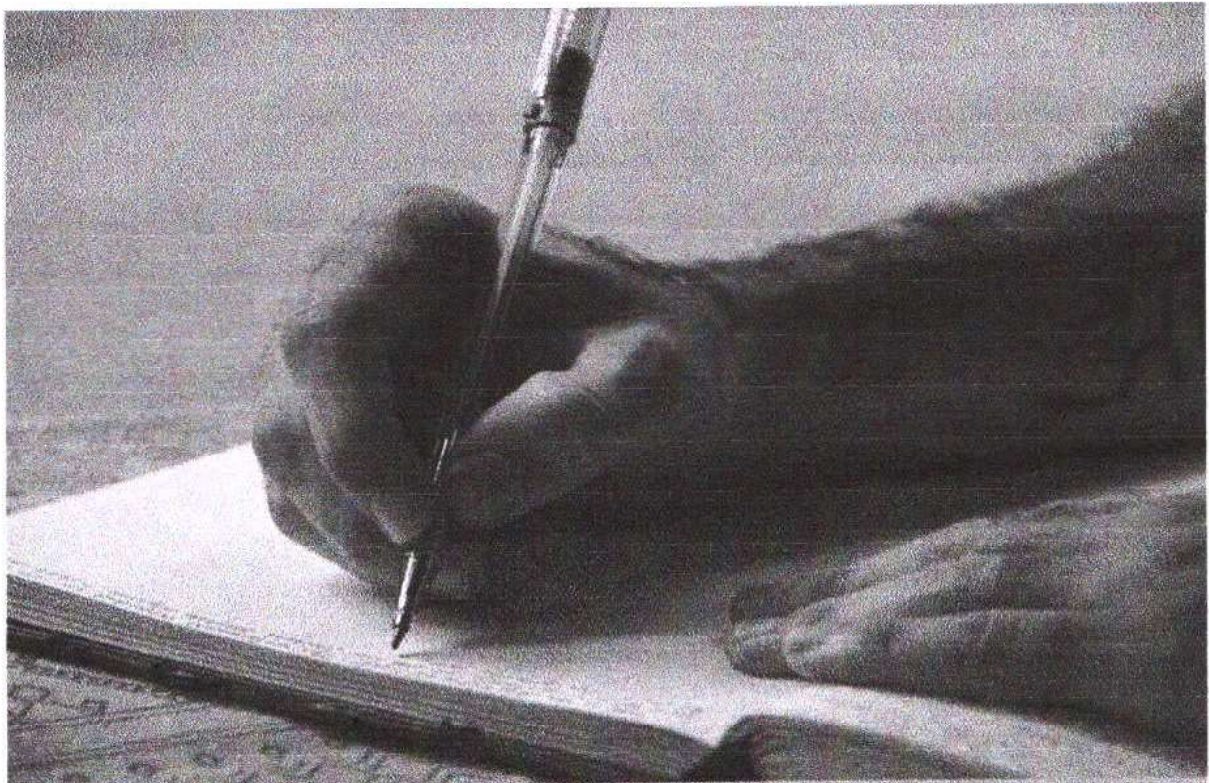
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Dalit Poetry: Illuminating Voices of Silenced Self

Abstract

Of the marginalized literatures of world, Dalit literature occupies a more prominent place as a branch of humanity studies. Being subdued at every place, it has been erupted in post colonial era which is known for marginal's act of "knocking" at centre. Glancing at development of Dalit literature, one can easily assess contribution of Dalit poetry, as pioneering form, though not popular like Dalit autobiographies, made the path to further development of Dalit literature.

My paper focuses on Dalit poetry in general, which canvass the journey from Dalit exploitation to Dalit resistance. It has registered voice of silenced self of dalit people. Maharashtra has been the pioneering land for development of Dalit writing. Inspired by Maharashtraian Dalit poets, other Dalit poets across India have made their contribution in development of Dalit poetry. Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arun Kamble, Hira Bansode are prominent Marathi Dalit poets. Apart from these poets, Siddalinguaiah, Balbir Mahopuri, Valmiki, and Telugu Feminist Dalit Poet - Darisi Sasi Nirmala – have given significant contribution for Dalit poetry.

Key Words: marginalized, Dalit literature, exploitation, resistance, Dalit poetry.

Namdeo Dhasal (1949-2014) is a maverick among dalit writers and one of the founder members of Dalit Panthers, has received Life Time Achievement Award from Sahitya Akademi in 2004. His prominent volumes of poetry are- Golpitha (1973), Murkha Mhataryane Dongar Halavila (1975), Tuhi Yatta Kanchi (1981), Khel (1983), Ya Sattet Jeev Ramat Nahi (1995) and Tujhe Bot Dharun Chalalo Ahe Mee (2006). Eight volumes of his poetry have been translated by Dilip Chitre, noted bi-lingual poet, into English as Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of Underworld Poems 1972-2006.

His poetry is a guerrilla war against social, cultural and economic Exploitation; as a result his themes touch all walks of life. He himself says, "For what makes one speak or write are the themes that create an excruciating turmoil inside you, heighten your sensitivity and leave you tenderly troubled. This is the sort of inner disturbance from which my poems come" (Dhasal 167).

Being "one of the *iumpenproletariat*- scum of the earth" (Chitre 19), he speaks on the behalf of all underdogs –prostitutes, laborers, vendors, mujara dancers, tamasha artists etc – in his poetry. The poem 'Mandakini Patil: A Young Prostitute, My Intended Collage' is representative of every prostitute. He peeps into their world through symbolic words which open before us the tormenting world of pain and loss.

On a barren blue canvas

Her clothes ripped off, her thigh blasted open,

A sixteen-year old girl surrendering herself to pain.

And a pig: its snout full of blood.

Being raised in slum area, Dhasal has a sensitive mind for the downtrodden people especially- prostitutes- who are "ultimate symbol of human degradation – an object of exploitation through sexual possession, and an otherwise loathed non-person, left to living decay after use" (23). He sarcastically condemns the man- woman relationship

in sexual intercourse where women are waste material to use and through. He marks - "Take a few whores; take a few pimps; take a few chewing sticks to clean the teeth; / And throw them away after use; and then gargle with the holy water of the river" (58).

Dhasal's keen interest for Marxism and rage for Capitalism is seen in poem "I Slew the Seven Horses of the Chariot of the Sun" through metaphor of sun, which stands for capitalism.

You watched the distress sale of our cows and buffaloes
Without any compassion;
You stared coldly at our barren and land teeming with
Poverty; (123)

Dhasal in the same poem attacks the so called Capitalist as "punish the landowners and the feudal lords/ whom caste and money have made powerful and arrogant" (123). Further, Dhasal in his poem 'Now Now' pay tribute to his father figure Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, who stood for them as messiah. He quotes like this in poem "Ambedkar; 1980"

"To start education
Make B for Babasaheb.
He was far more beautiful than Lord Ganesh.
So don't trace
Shri Ganesh.
The lord of the people is never ugly
He comes from among men
True/Holy/Beautiful." (Chitre, 2007)

Though Dhasal is known for his angry man image or rebellious spirit, he is a poet with optimistic vision. He believes in humanitarian principle and sang the song of humanity in one of his poem in following way.

Man, one should act so bright as to make the sun and
 The Moon seem pale
 One should share each morsel of food with everyone
 Else, one should compose a hymn
 To humanity itself, man should sing only the song of
 Man. (36)

Apart from Dhasal, Hira Bansode is a stern critique of exploitation and pain. Being, a Dalit feminist poet, she treats women issues in delicate manner in her poetry. She has been a staunch supporter of women cause in her themes. She expresses a need of Dalit feminism in introduction of her poetry book 'Phyriad',

For her, words are weapons to deconstruct history. She sums this in words "when poetry explodes,/soft words become bayonets/ And chest breaking sobs of the cheated/ ----- poetry's honey flowered noose/ strangles the evil and their rotted minds-----
 ----- Give long life-make them victorious /In their battle with injustice./ Make war on Injustice! Make war! (Translated by Christian Novetzke)

The 'sun' has become constant metaphor for dalit poets. Like, Dhasal, Hira use metaphor of 'sun' in her poem "Lost Sun". Here she expresses her anger for wounds of "innocent hearts" given by "a tin plated culture" of upper caste. The 'innocent hearts' (dalits) are in mood of retaliation.

The fight is inevitable, inevitable.
 The lightening of revolution
 Ignites each wounded heart.
 Rebellion shakes in every vein.
 How can war not proceed?

Whether to victory or defeat? (Translated by Christian

Novetzke)

Many of Hira's poems are a severe critique of patriarchy. She feels that, woman has been constant object of victimization throughout the history and tradition. Like Dhasal, she also attacks sexism, women confinement and their being treating as commodity. Citing historical figures-Drapadi, Sita, Ahilya- Hira shows Juan face of patriarchy in her poem "Hippy" where she hails patriarchy as "cruel butchers". she further, in her poem 'petition' talks about injustice, negligence, and lost identity of women, due to patriarchy

My, father, my brother, my husband –

Under the weight of these well-fleshed relations

My hollow existence gives way,

Pressed down day by day.

I have lost my identity,

My independence, my rights, my opinions.

(Translated by Christian

Novetzke)

Hira's poem "Sanskriti" is an attack on upper caste culture which is 'heartless'. She criticizes the so called 'ancient' and 'lofty' Indian culture and its bias treatment of caste dominance. Hira blames it as 'evil stepmother' like Kunti, who abandoned her son Karna. Now, having been awaken regarding exploitation and injustice of upper caste culture, she open a 'flag of rebellion' and sing a 'song of revolt' in this way

As you demolished our homes with the force of a volcano

We became ashes, ashes, destroyed.

Today the embers awaken us.

Our useless grief we drown.

Our loyalty, given for a morsel of bread,
 Stands today as a flag of rebellion.
 We sing songs of revolt.

(Translated by Christian

Novetzke)

Balbir Madhopur is a Punjabi Dalit poet, with two collections of poetry in his hand; they are Maroothal da Birkh (Tree of the Desert, 1998) and Bhakhda Pataal (The smouldering Netherworld, 1992). Through his poetry he has been a stringent critique of caste and untouchability. At the same time, he also talks about social exclusion, human rights violation, caste atrocities. In one of his poem, he use metaphor of 'Changiya Rukh' (A tree lopped from the top, slashed, and dwarfed) to show exploitation of dalits by upper caste people. He says,

Many a time
 I'm dwarfed
 Like a tree cut at the top
 Over whom passes the power line
 I get pruned out of season
 When in passing
 Someone is curios know what my caste is.

- Bhakhda Pataal (The Inferno, 1998, P.41)

Apart from this, Telgu Dalit poetry, especially written by women poets, has its own identity as it brings forth untouched issues of the world of Dalit women. They are marginal, as have been neglected by Dalit male poets and upper caste feminist poetry. Telgu dalit poetry addresses the class, caste and gender discrimination issues of dalit women. The

prominent dalit feminist poet, Darisi Sasi Nirmala, in her poem “Dalituralu” criticizes patriarchy including dalit one. She talks about subjugation and victimization of dalit women.

I am dragged
here and there
under someone's buttocks
a seating plank
some one or other
drags me along
by a nose rope
To make me dance

Further, she exposes the double standard of state machinery in dealing the issues of upper caste women and dalit women. State machinery makes discrimination. She recalls

You peacock of high caste
Preening your plumes
In the Narmada valley
Your call echoes and rouses
Each corner of the world
But my sister's struggle
To dam the swollen streams of arrack
Choking them
Their hoarse voices
Will lie buried in
Telugu earth
(‘Muttugudda Kapputunna)

Dr. Siddalingaiah, popular Dalit poet-activist, follows the foot prints of Namdeo Dhasal. Like Dhasal, his poetry reflects fury and rage of suppressed mind of dalit culture. In this regard D.R.Nagraj comments, "the politics of cultural fury was the central message of siddalingaiah's poetry. Siddalingaiah looks back in anger in his poem "The song" which is manifesto of angry dalit poetry, and urges dalits to retaliate through the lines

Kick them and smash them
Skin these bastards alive.
They say there is only
One God and for each one they build a
Different temple.
They say all of us are God's children
And when they see pariahs they fly as
If they have seen snakes.

Conclusion:

Dalit poetry has come forth from its transition period. Initially it focused on issues of self-pity and suppression but in the passage of time it has reflected itself in angry mood. With phase of development it has started to retaliate. This mood of rebellion is clearly seen in the poetry of Dhasal and his path-followers. Through the weapons of words, marginal have tried to knock the centre. Dalit poetry has tries to bring forth the hidden issues of silenced self of the Dalit people.

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