

Analytical Study of Few Marathi Dalit Poems

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ABSTRACT

A thorough and thoughtful study of Marathi dalit poetry clearly shows that it is not inferior to general poetry in any angle. If we minutely dive deep into its theme and technique, language and style, we observe that Dalit poetry is rich in both theme and technique, feeling and form. They have presented a very realistic and truthful picture of contemporary society, the tyranny and injustice imposed on the dalit, the miserable plights and persecutions of the downtrodden. Some of the poets in Marathi Dalit Poetry have presented ideas, views and vision in such a brilliant manner that they often remind us of the great giants of the modern poetry like Eliot and Yeats.

Key Words – tyranny, injustice, plight, aspiration, downtrodden

Modern Dalit poetry written in different languages and vernaculars is now taking the shape of a new discipline in the field of Indian poetry in English. It has started taking its deep root in the fertile land of the Indian culture and civilization, myths and legends. Now the tree of this new poetry is blooming and blossoming with a new verve and gusto. Modern Dalit poets have presented a very realistic and truthful picture of contemporary society, the tyranny and injustice imposed on the dalit, the miserable plights and persecutions of the downtrodden, the multifarious aspects of human society, the unsatisfied desires and aspirations of the poor and the deserted, and; above all, a conservative Indian society in which there is a little place of the marginalized.

The general poetry of Indian Writing in English is generally supposed to be superior to dalit poetry, a new discipline developed recently. But a thorough and thoughtful study of dalit poetry clearly shows that it is not inferior to general poetry in any angle. If we minutely dive deep into its theme and technique, language and style, we come to the conclusion that Dalit poetry is rich in both theme and technique, feeling and form. Some of the poets in Marathi Dalit Poetry have presented ideas, views and vision in such a brilliant manner that they often remind us of the great giants of the modern poetry like Eliot and Yeats. Their images and symbols are very suggestive and up to the mark. Their psychological presentation with beautiful images and symbols and some new coinages is really very noteworthy. Their poems are not simply the collection of facts and figures, rather they are highly integrated and fully aesthetic appealing to the feelings and sentiments of a poetic man. In

other words, their poems have a fine fusion of both feelings and forms. In the words of Matthew Arnold, they are fine examples of both 'poetic beauty' and 'poetic truth'.

It is to be noted that education plays an important role in the overall development of the dalit and the deserted. Generally we see in our society that those dalits who take education and maintain their day-to-day life nicely and beautifully are generally treated well in the society. On the other hand, those who do not study and lead a life of filthy and dirty animals are not treated well by the upper caste people. Perhaps this is why Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi and some other champions of the dalit movement lay much stress on the need of proper education to the dalit and deserted. As a matter of fact it is education which makes a man great.

This paper is devoted to the critical study of some representative modern dalit poems written in Marathi language. The main purpose of this study is to dive deep into the theme of various dalit writers and their respective responses against the caste mentality planted since the time immemorial. The poets of Marathi language have done the tremendous work for upgrading the position of women and dalits in their different poems. Dalit poetry which appeared during the 70s was a reaction against the traditional and conventional caste mentality and social justice. In their works we get the spirit against social discrimination and fanaticism.

The contribution of Marathi Dalit poetry is very great. The book *Dalit Poetry Today*, edited by Bhagwan Thag, is a Monumental work published in 1991. This book deals with more than 50 poets and their respective poems in a very beautiful manner. In all these poems the different poets have given their different views about the themes of Dalit poetry. In this anthology the first poem entitled *No Freedom Without Fight* by Kisan Faguji Bansod is a very good poem about the freedom and liberty of the untouchables. The poet is in a very serious mood and he is of the opinion that without fight no freedom will come down to the downtrodden. He says :

Thy forefathers wer not coward like thou,

But their heir oh ! not dare and poor how !

They who held the head down with fear of death.

They surely and positively ruin and degenerate. (DPT – 01)

It is interesting to note that Marathi dalit poetry seems to be very much influenced by a great Marathi Dalit poet Chokhamela. This great saint poet was of view that outward appearance and colour do not matter. The only thing that matters most is the inner self or your good behaviour. It is God who loves at first the hated, the deserted and the deformed in the society. Chokhamela says:

Cane is crooked, but its juice is not crooked,

Why be fooled by outward appearance?

The bow is crooked, but the arrow is not crooked

Why be fooled by outward appearance? (DPT – 04)

In the poem *Blood Prints*, B. S. Hate presents a different theme in modern dalit poetry. He says that if one takes a glance over 20th century and if he looks around he will find wounds everywhere which are oozed and gushed since centuries. Their blood prints can be seen in the chimneys of factory, green meadows, garden of ripe fruits, mines with huge machines etc. He also says in a very beautiful poetic manner the story of foot prints:

The hands, which created all these

The generation which made these

At the cost of their energies and intelligence

Those died without having a single charm

You'll see their open foot-prints, (DPT – 05)

Namdeo Dhasal, a great modern dalit personality in Marathi literature has to his credit a number of great works including some poems. His famous poem *Eternal Pity* is a very beautiful and suggestive. Through some beautiful words and phrases he has presented nauseating feeling about humanity and the 'shrivelled gut' which stands for dried up bowel. He is of the opinion that the caste people are looking up light in those vaults of theirs. He is also of the opinion that even the side-walks are not even ours. Perhaps this is why he thinks that it is very nausea to be human:

Not even sidewalks are ours.

Made so beggarly it is nausea to be

Human

Cannot fill our shrivelled gut

Even with dirt.

Each new just day support them as if

Bribed -

Not a sign slips through the fingers of

day's plenty

As we can cut down. (DPT – 07)

Here what Namdeo Dhasal observes about the dalit mentality and their struggle for this existence in an entirely adverse society is very near to what Arundhati Roy observes in the classic novel, *The God of Small Things*:

When Paravans were expected to crawl backward with a broom, sweeping away their foot prints so that Brahmin and Christians wouldn't defile themselves by accidently stepping into a paravan's foot print. In Mammachi time, paravans, like other untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (Roy – 73-74)

Gajmal Mali, a noted Marathi dalit writer in his famous poem 'A Poem' presents a different attitude about the epic and other historical legend. He thinks that he does not find any epic which could nurtured the oasis of his father's dream. He also does not find any epic he will get the eternal grip of his mother. Perhaps this is why he does not want to believe in which there is no pangs of the dalits and the deserted. On the other hand, he is of the opinion that epics have poured pearl in showers and tender words with fragrant flowers. He also presents the view that Columbus has discovered the land of romances. Some also says with the verses all tender and drenched in gold. Some adored the odour of the farmer's head but they could not see the flames in his eye which the burning sun has spread:

In all these chequered epics,
 I could not find a single stream I
 That could nurture the oasis
 of my father's dreams
 I could not find in the epics
 A verse brief
 That could bear Mama's eternal grief
 I did not someone toiling in the farms
 And none shook my tired hands
 with velvety palms. (DPT – 10)

The other poem in this anthology which is very noteworthy to discuss is entitled as *It'd Be Wrong* by Ram Basakhetre. In this poem the poet flings irony on the so called upper caste people who think that if they

were downtrodden and oppressed, they would have education concession and reservation in an employment. But the poet raises a question saying that it is very early to state such types of thing but it is very difficult to become an untouchable. He says those people addressing them as friend and ask some questions:

My friend, Will you prefer to be an untouchable

Pull away a dead animal

Peel their hide like a cobbler

And join a loathsome foot-wear

Become a *manga* and unlucky pets

And more get nourished over slums

Stand with bare feet under wrathed sun

And beg for a handful water to drink

Get your eyes wet with thirsty hands

Bear on outrage over own sister

Promulgate with bleeding head 'Namantar'.

And hold your head tight

When your poor hut set on fire. (DPT – 21)

The poem *Stage* by Waharu Sonwane is a very beautiful poem reminding us of William Shakespeare's famous poem "AIL the World is a Stage' in *As You Like It*. The poet says that they had never been on the stage nor they have been asked to perform on stage. They also said they only praised those who played on the stage. On the other hand the players playing on the stage went on stating our sorrows on the stage. He rightly says:

We never had been on stage

Nor have been asked so

We were pointed out our steps

We sat there mutely for long

We merely praised them

They stood on the stage

And went on stating us our sorrows

Alas, our sorrows never became theirs

We uttered our doubts

They listened it and sighed

They warned and scolded us

"Beg for pardon otherwise..." (DPT – 29)

It is to be noted that the victorious and the strong have always exploited the oppressed and the defeated folk of the world. The downtrodden and the suppressed have been continuously crossed by the wealthy and the powerful. We look at the glance of history of the world we find that unequal economic and social structure, discriminations and exploitation is the common feature. In many countries of the world such type of exploitative system existed in one or the other form. Thus the poets of Dalit literature from Marathi language have done a tremendous work for upgrading the position of the downtrodden in a very poetic manner. In their poetry we get not only the revolutionary theme and the rebellious attitude but also a very fine poetic images and symbols. Dr. Rupalee Burke in the Preface of the book *The Silver Lining* rightly sums of Dalit Literature:

Dalit literature must cross the boundaries of national literature and seek to create a space in world literature like Black literature. It must be everyman's literature: Black literature talks about the sufferings and pains of Negroes, yet from the personal sufferings, Black literature rises to the summit of universal literature through the writings of Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker. This is because of the creative attitude which the writers adopt. If Dalit writers move beyond the mundane and superficial; if they strive for expression of human experiences in the universal sense, then they will be there to stay. (Burke & Trivedi – 15)

Hence the analytical study of the various modern dalit poems specially in Marathi literature clearly shows that modern Marathi dalit poetry is rich not only in its thematic presentation of the plights and the persecutions of the dalit and the downtrodden but they are also very abundant in poetic creativity. Some of the poets of Marathi Literature are very brilliant in presenting both poetic truth and poetic beauty. Their poetry often reminds us of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. Their presentation of language, style and technique is very remarkable. By creating some beautiful metaphors and the extended metaphors they have laid a milestone in the field of modern dalit poetry.

Citation -

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(All the poems cited are from this issue, abbreviated in the paper as *DPT*)

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