



Technique and Style of the Modern Dalit Poetry : A Critical Exploration

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Technique and Style of the Modern Dalit Poetry : A Critical Exploration Modern Dalit Poetry deals with the pathetic plights and sufferings of the untouchables and the marginalized in a upper caste dominated society. The modern Dalit poets present the wishes and aspirations of the Dalit communities who want to fly freely in the open sky of liberty, equality and fraternity.

They also present the anger and fire of the Dalits against the upper cast mentality. But

Abstract

Modern Dalit Poetry deals with the pathetic plights and sufferings of the untouchables and the marginalized in a upper caste dominated society. The modern Dalit poets present the wishes and aspirations of the Dalit communities who want to fly freely in the open sky of liberty, equality and fraternity. They also present the anger and fire of the Dalits against the upper caste mentality. But so far as their language is concerned it is very connotative and figurative, containing all the chief features of a great language. We find the poets of Dalit poetry have acquired the knowledge of both language and literature. Their language seems to be a fine fusion of both feeling and form.

Keywords

Feeling and Form, Analogies, Technique and Style, Poetic Sensibility.

The poem, 'Poem of Man' by Waman Nimbalkar is a beautiful short poem containing almost all the important features of a good and ideal poem. Let us see the expression:

*A female of human being
Be ravished by a gang of wolves
And a male accepting neuterness.
Bending his head down immutably
Turns the soil up and down with his nail
These men flow away with the waves
And turn the faces windward. ¹*

Here in this poem we see that the poet has presented a very unbecoming and gruesome work of imbecility of modern human being who claims

to be the highest race of the society, but here in this poem, we find how this highest race of humanity stooped to such a low activity of ravishing or raping a woman which is very de-stable and hateful. But the beauty of this poem lies in its construction of words and phrases which are highly suggestive. The poet in a very euphonic way says that these men flow away with the waves and turn their faces wind-ward. The phrases 'gang of wolves' and 'turn the soil up' are very suggestive. Here we see that the fertility of a woman has been compared with the pure and chaste soil of the earth while the inhuman activity of a man has been compared with nails of wolves.

The other poem entitled 'A Poem' by Gajmal Mali is full of some other technique like technique and contrast, allusions and references. Let us have a glance of the very opening line of the poem:

*I did not someone toiling in the farms
And none shook my tired hands
With velvety palms. (P.10)*

This poem flings an irony on those people who think that dalit poetry is simply the revolt and revolution. But if we minutely observe the particular element of the poem we come to the conclusion that this poem is an exception because it contains rich technique, symbolism, contrast and some other allusions and references. In the very first stanza the poet takes image of Oasis of his father's dream but he is unable to find any epic or any verse in which he could be able to cherish dream of his father and mother. The second stanza contains a very fine image of contrast. We know that T.S. Eliot in his essay *The Function of Criticism* holds the view that comparison and contrast are the two important tools of poetic sensibility. He was of the opinion that honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. This is exactly what we find in two phrases of contrast that is 'tired hand' with 'velvety palms'. These two phrases are the symbols of good and bad, the rough and the sublime of the society. This poem also contains a beautiful image of allusions which enhances the beauty of the poem. In the last three lines the poet takes the image of Columbus which signifies here the discovering talent of humanity. On the other hand the phrase 'Romances in the orchards' reminds us of the love story of Rosalind and Orlando in the famous drama *As You Like It* by Shakespeare:

*Some played folksongs on rural bands
With the gusto of Columbus, they said,
We have discovered this land. (P.10)*

The poem 'With the Words' contains the term 'they' and 'I'. Like other dalit poets the term 'they' stands for those persons of cruelties and injustice who don't want to see the progress of dalit in modern society. On the other hand the term 'I' stands for the poet himself. The poem contains optimistic attitude. The poet uses the word 'fence' and 'thorns'. Fence here stands for the social code of conduct and several other social, economic and constitutional restrictions imposed upon the smooth path of dalit and downtrodden. The poet says that the thorns were very old and these thorns must give way to new birds and flowers which want to be bloomed flourished in the open sky of freedom and liberty, equality and fraternity. Similarly the term dungeons and germs are equally very important because they remind us of famous character Bakha in the novel *Untouchable* by M.R. Anand:

*Everybody thinks us at fault I do not know what she said about bhangis and chamars.
She was angry with the sahib. I am sure I am the cause of the memsahib's anger. (Anand, M.R.,
146)*

At another place in the same novel Bakha suffers a lot in the hands of upper caste and all of a sudden his innocent heart murmured:

But there was a smouldering rage in his soul. His feeling would rise like a spurt of smoke

from a half smothered fire in a fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him. Why was all this? he asked himself in the soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions which was his usual way of communicating with himself. Why was all his fuss ? Why was he so humble? I could have struck him. (Anand, 58)

Bhimsen Dethé is a great name in the field of Marathi Dalit poetry. His poem 'Crows Are Negotiating'; is analogical presentation of the corrupted leaders in the parliament today. Through this bird image or rather say an extended metaphor the poet has given an scathing and acidic attack on the so called mentality of the upper cast people who often think superior to these dalit. The poet rightly observes:

*Crows raised a commotion
On the tree
And People gathered
Centuries old problems
Crows mounted the dias
And delivered speeches
Calling for rebellion
And revolution
The crowd applauded
And garlanded the crows
And lent them hands. (Dalit Poetry, P.16)*

Here the phrase 'crows' are very suggestive. Here they stand for the modern leaders who raised voice in the parliament, but here the poet seems to be a bit misanthropist on analyzing the picture of the negotiating crows. The crowd on the other hand is very much like those of Shakespeare's crowd in the famous Antonio's speech of the drama *Julius Ceaser*. In that drama, Shakespeare shows that how the crowd are foolish and their sentiments are so fragile and delicate that they can be easily moulded.

Ram Basakhere's 'It'd be Wrong' is again the presentation of human miseries through some beautiful animal images. The poet holds the view:

*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. (Dalit Poetry Today, P.21)*

This poem is rich not only in theme but also in technique. In this poem the poet has taken the image of animal which is very suggestive. The poet flings irony on these people who want to have reservation in an employment. But he is of the opinion that before going to take any educational

concession and reservation, those people should become an untouchable. He addresses them as his friend and takes the image of an animal.

It is interesting to note that poetry is the best art to express the inner feelings of human being. In order to express those inner feelings and those cherished desire, the poet has to take a number of poetic tools. Repetition of words, phrases or even sentences is one of the important techniques to express the inner feelings of the author concerned. Let us see the example of repetition in the poem 'In Search of Path' by P.E. Sonkamble:

*I've seen myself
Walking through the burning sand unshodly?
I've seen myself
Paining harshly for the burned feet.
I've seen myself
Trying to keep away from the hot sand
By walking over dried cowdung
I've seen myself
Blistering on the feet now and then
I've seen myself
Tying leaves on my feet with its bark
I've seen myself
Being embraced by 'Aeknatha' (Dalit Poetry, 22)*

One of the important duties of the poet is to satirise the corruption and ostentations of the hypocrite people of this world. But the beauty of the satire lies not in its abusing in a direct forward manner but through some beautiful images and symbols. This is what we find in the poem, 'Philosophers' by Gorakh Bhalerao. The poet says:

*They shall talk of secularism, human values
And at night they will indulge in adultery
At eloquence from sex to meditation
or meditation to sex,
expert they are
Hence, philosophers they are. (Dalit Poetry, 35)*

These lines present a scathing attack on the corrupt politicians who are no less than negative philosophers. The term 'They' stands for such type of people who indulge in adultery and hypocrisy. The poet says that these type of people are so corrupt and hypocrite that during the day time, they talk of secularism and human values but in the night they are often seen indulging in sex rackets and adultery. They are so experts in this art that the poet gives the term philosophers to them. Here the satire is very remarkable and they remind us of John Dryden of Neo Classical Age.

Bhagwan Thag is great Marathi Dalit poet. He is the editor of the famous book *Dalit Poetry Today*. In that book he has included his own poem entitled 'The Revolt' which runs like this:

*Although my breathing sinterrupted
And soul suffocating
Still I'll not be destroyed
Or anyone's revolt against me
Will not harm a bit
The gun-bullet will not
Pierce my inner heart! (Dalit Poetry, P.41)*

Here in this poem the poet takes the metaphor of gun-bullet. Here it stands for the sufferings, in clemencies and imbecilities of the hypocrisies of the society who want to impose limitation and restrictions on the untouchables. The poet says that his inner heart is so intact and powerful that no gun-bullet will pierce it. Allusions and indirect references are very important tools of poetry. Sometimes the poet takes the help of various stories of the history and legends. The poem 'Excuse Me' by W. Kapur is a poem of love song with a different note like a Metaphysical poet. The poet addresses his beloved as dear girl and says that he is unable to sing a love song to her. So in this connection the poet takes the help of a number of allusions which are very remarkable. Let us have a glance of these allusions:

*Dear Girl,
Do you know the battle of 'Mahad'?
The black history of 'Kalaram Mandir'?
How the 'tiger' was dead?
Why 'Shambuk' was assassinated
In the kingdom of 'Rama', the great?
What 'Balachhi' case is?
Why 'Marathwada' was ignited. (Dalit Poetry, P.46)*

In poetry, sound plays a very important role. The poets generally take the help of sound in order to express their different emotions. When the poet has to describe the happy occasions and moments of life he takes the help of euphonic sound. But when he has to describe the dark and dismal aspect of life particularly the grief and sorrow of the people, he takes the help of cacophonous sound. This is exactly what we find in this poem, 'A Collection of Problems':

*Living in a violent, crazy gum-Arabic forest of life,
A collection of problems stands on the roadside,
Then all relevant Gum-Arabic-wood crowds,
in the eyes of burning embers,
Wails loudly in the world of corpses. (Dalit Poetry, P.50)*

Here the cacophonous sound with 't', 'd', 'r' and 'k' sound makes the sentence cacophonous. Through this cacophonous sound the poet seems to show a number of problems of the society which an untouchable has to face. These lines remind us of Shakespeare's famous phrase 'multitudinous seas incarnadine'. The Dalit poems written in Gujarat are very rich in both theme and technique. In this research work I have taken the help of three books for knowing the theme and techniques of modern Gujarati Dalit poets. These books are (i) *Prestine Land* edited by Harish Manglam and M.B. Gaijan Published by Yash Publications, New Delhi. (ii) *The Silver Lining* edited by Rupalee Burke and Darshna Trivedi from Dalit Sahitya Academy, Ahmadabad. (iii) *The Journal Unheard Melody* issue 10, Year 2014 edited by Dr. Amarnath Prasad. In all the above three books the Gujarati poets have contributed a number of beautiful poems full of proper images and symbols and other tools of poetry.

The first poem in the book *Prestine Land* is entitled as 'The Others' by Dalpat Chauhan. This poem is translated by Ulka Mayur Puri. The poem has beautiful images and symbols, proper words and phrases. They have been placed in such a manner that they create an aesthetic pleasure among readers. It has been written in free verse reminding us of modern English poets like W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. The image of Fire in the last stanza of this poem is very remarkable:

*Why huddle in Ghettos away from the town?
Let the caste-mongers burn our shanties
and get scorched a little in return.*

*Let these flames distend
beyond the skyand reach across.....
better off as ashes,
than being.....an untouchable. (Chauhan, Dalpat)*

The other poem 'The Pot Called the Kettle Black' by the same poet Dalpat Chauhan is a markable for its use of some animal images which are highly suggestive. In this poem the word 'dogs' stands for those hypocrite and corrupted fellows of the society who are not in favour of demolishing untouchability from society. The poet says:

*Dogs bark
give chase
Given a chance,
bite too.
And the dogs tell us
We won't bite.
Just stay clean
Quit your filthy vocations.
Abandon your disgusting food!
But before behaviour and beliefs
It is your stink,
garbage stink,
Manhole stink
Is what attracts the dogs, in the first place. (Chauban, P.202)*

The poem 'Oncology' by Dr. Harish Mangalam is very interesting and thought provoking. It has got a 'unified sensibility', that is feeling and thinking together. Some of the words and phrases, images and symbols are so interesting and beautiful that they call for our cerebral gymnastics to understand its inner meaning. The images and symbols which the poet has taken are from our day-to-day life. The title of the poem is itself very suggestive. 'Oncology' is the branch of medicine concerned with tumour including study of their development, diagnosis, treatment and prevention. The disease imagery used in this poem is very close to *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Let us see the malignant cancer which stands for the caste mentality and other class and creed feelings of society. Some of the words and sentences in the following stanza are cacophonous which shows the dark and dismal aspect of the thing:

*a malignant growth on a tree-back
and from it the continuously oozing
thick yellow pus.
They say cancer is a pernicious disease
which like maggots squirming in garbages
will eat into values. (Manglam, Harish, 206)*

The poem 'Jivli' by Maheshchandra Pandaya is based on an event of "Chandogy oupnishad." It has been structured in the form of dialogue. So this poem creates a dramatic effect. Some of the allusions are indirect references calls for our knowledge of this aforesaid 'Upnishad'. In this poem the poet takes the image of 'Shambook' who was the sage of the Shudra killed by Ram. It also contains the sage Dronacharya who was teacher of Kaurawas and Pandavas. The other allusion which the poet has taken is Eklavya' the young adivasi warrior and a potential warrior to Arjun. The poet seems to be in a

great rage and he wants to buy a gun:

*Let us go to village, O Jamni
I want to buy a gun
A gun, but why, Jivly?
Are You off your head?
What will you do with a gun?
Dear Jamni, my sister,
Don't you know?
Poor Shambook was meditating
On the Vedas and Rama killed him.
I want to shoot Rama with a gun. (Prestine Land, 209)*

The poem 'Kutch Earth Quake and Bhago, a Valmiki' by M.B. Gaijan is a very nice attempt to discuss the mentality of the upper caste people and the miserable plights of the Bhangis and Valmikis. Some of the images and symbols come in the poem again and again and point to the poem always back and forth. It reminds us of W. Shakespeare whose images come again and again in a particular drama with some imagistic variations.

This poem also contains the note of exclamation which seems to be very suggestive and it shows an ironical note.

*But
It is said fifty years back
Baba Saheb created the constitution.
Considered all are equal,
Brahmin is equal to Valmiki!
It is said it was the day of 26th January
Oh! Brethren Since that day
All are equal , Brahmin and Valmikis! (Prestine Land, 231)*

Conclusion

Thus, the modern Dalit Poetry describes victimized section of India. It shows the rights and dignity of Dalit through some beautiful poems. The Dalit poets write mainly in their tongues to create dalit condition in democratic India. In their poems, the poets have not only presented their sufferings and injustices, plights and pursecitions of the downtrodden but also raised their voice against the lopsided attitude of the so called upper mentality. But what matters most is their poetic renderings or artistic presentation through some beautiful images and symbols and other poetic craftsmanship.

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