

“A Critical Study of Symbolism and Imagery in Namdeo Dhasal’s Poetry”

Arjun S. Kharat

Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College, L. N. Road, Matunga (E), Mumbai-19, MS, India

Abstract

Namdeo Dhasal’s poetry is very subtle and multi- dimensional in nature. It involves a different nature of his world of experience and sensibility which is very rich and varied, therefore, it is incredibly significant in the history of Dalit literature. In order to appreciate his poetry in a proper way it is necessary to understand his world of experience and sensibility. His life was filled with varied experiences that resulted in multi- dimensional nature of his poetry. His outlook towards life is shaped by diverse experiences he acquired from the rural world and the lowered-world of Golpitha in cosmopolitan city like Mumbai. In the present research paper an attempt is made to critically understand his unique application of symbolism and imagery in poetry.

Keywords: Dalit literature, Symbolism, Imagery, Dalit Aesthetics etc.

Namdeo Lakshman Dhasal was born in a Mahar caste family in 1949 in Pur-Kanersar village near Pune. Mahar is one of the untouchable castes in Maharashtra. His father would work as a butcher in the slaughter house in Mumbai, and lived with his family in the red-light area called Golpitha. Namdeo was the only child who survived among his siblings. Dhasal’s childhood is vividly portrayed in his semi-autobiographical work *Hadki Hadvala*. He reflects on how he was brought up by his mother whose husband had gone to Mumbai to make money. *Hadki Hadvala* means infertile piece of land traditionally gifted to Mahars who lived in the village outskirts for performing certain caste duties.

For some time, he was sent to Pune at his aunt’s house for his early elementary education. In 1955, Namdeo and his mother went to Mumbai to live with his father. They lived in a room with no air ventilation, no proper water and electricity supply in the area called Dhor chawl, a very filthy and congested slum in Mumbai stuffed with several families. The area comprised mixed population of Dalits and Muslims who lived together as a community.

His published volumes of poetry include *Golpitha* (1972), *Murkha Mhataryane Dongar Halvile* (1975), *Amchya Itihasatil Ek Apariharya Patra: Priyadarshini* (1976), *Tuhi Yatta Kanchi* (1981), *Khel* (1983), *Gandu Bagicha* (1986), *Ya Sattet Jiv Ramat Nahi* (1995), *Mi Marle Suryachya Rathache Sat Ghode* (2005), *Tuze Bot Dharun Chalalo Ahe mi* (2006), *Mi Bhayankarachya Darwajyat Ubha Ahe* (2007), *Chindhyachi Devi Aani Itar Kavita* (2012) and *Nirvanaagodarchi Pida* (2010). His fictional work consists of ‘Negative Space’, *Hadki Hadawala* and *Ujedachi Kali Duniya*. He also published five non-fictional works i.e. *Andhale Shatak* (1995), *Ambedkari Chalwal Aani Socialist, Communist* (2001) *Sarvakahi Samashtisathi* (2006), *Buddha Dharma: Kahi Shesh Prashna*, *Dalit Panther Ek Sangharsha* (2014) and a play entitled *Andhar Yatra*.

Namdeo Dhasal's world of experience is an independent topic of research so does his world of imagery. He begins his career as a protest poet and employs images that enrich the content of his poetry. His use of symbolism and imagery is significantly unique and distinct. His poetry registers protest through the entire set of new images. He never felt short of images while representing his experience through poetry. Every time he appears to be employing new images in his poetry. His outstanding images enrich the content of his poetry. And also make his poetry very comprehensive. His images are enriching to the varied content of his poetry and that these images are of very diverse nature as well. His poetry can be understood with the help of his application of images, poetic sensibility, his self-reliant nature, artistic mind, and ability of keen observation.

Recurrent use of 'Sun' as a symbol of knowledge and change:

While expressing their protest through poetry Dalit poets have denied the entire existing socio-economic, political, religious and cultural system in India. Moreover, in their literature they have deliberately tried to reject employing traditional images. Instead, in their poetry images drawn from the nature appear recurrently. That is why in Dalit poetry the same images have been appearing again and again. It may seem that their images are lacking innovations. Dhasal's imagery does not give us a sense of repetitiveness because every time he employs them innovatively. Every time his images give different experience to the readers.

The 'sun' is one of such symbols taken from the nature, and it has been largely used by almost all the Dalit poets. Unlike any other Dalit poetry, Namdeo Dhasal's poetry gives various manifestations of the 'sun' image. In Dalit poetry the 'sun' primarily represents the change or transformation. But Namdeo Dhasal uses it for the variety of meanings and inferences. For instance, 'Countless burning Suns in the blood' (Transl.), appears in Golpitha at page number 31 in the following manner: Countless burning Suns in the blood/How many days to tolerate this horrid blockade?

In the above lines, it seems as if, the poet compares his countless cells in blood with that of the sun. Or it can also be said otherwise that the poet's sensitive mind, being caused injustice by the established system, has become so furious evoking an intense reaction of anger and protest. That reaction seems to be represented by the image of the sun. This sun is not used as a singular image; rather it has been used in its plural form. In fact, there is only one sun in our solar system that illuminates all the planets around it. But the perception of Dalits newly acquired awareness is like the radiance of many suns in the universe. In this way, we can infer the meaning from the above imagery.

In the line 'I will witness the primordial sun crying' from the poem called, 'Who has Sheared and Enclosed People in a Glass Paperweight' (Golpitha, P. 20), the poet expresses his desire to see the sun to be crying. In fact, he expects the revolutionary change which will be brighter than the radiance of the actual sun so that the real sun will also cry looking at that revolutionary change.

In the phrase 'a leaking sun' (Golpitha, P. 53) the image of the sun appears in the form of a 'betraying' and 'alluring' one. In the line 'the sun bhulkandtoy (cries) holding the wall' from the poem entitled 'On Your Occasion' (Golpitha, P. 64) the poet wants to suggest the weakness of the divine soul of the entire world.

In the poem 'Now, Now' (Golpitha, P. 30), Dhasal addresses to Ambedkar as the 'sunflower giving fakir'. In this poem the poet wants to convey the message of Ambedkar to his people who look like the sunflowers – who always grow facing towards the sun – the Dalits must eradicate the darkness of injustice from their way and live with dignity.

Due to Ambedkar's struggle, Dalits have acquired a new sense of existence and dignity which enabled them to fight against the injustice. In the poem called 'Going through Our Colony' (Golpitha, P. 25), through the metaphor of 'the whole sun illuminating from every hut' the poet compares Dalits' strong reaction against injustice in the image of the 'whole sun'.

Likewise, there are many more such sun images which appear in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry: 'When the darkness saw the sun' (Golpitha, P. 24), 'The sun of comprehensive salvation' (Murkh Mhataryane..., P. 63), 'The setting sun' (Golpitha, P. 68), 'Everyone is, as a matter of fact, as complete as the Sun' (Golpitha, P. 73), 'Celebration of the sun' (Khel, P. 56), 'Face of the residual sun' (Khel, P. 56), 'Phosphorous of sun' (Khel, P. 13), 'one-fourth of the sun' (Khel, P. 67), 'Virgin shattering sun' (Tuze Bot Dharun..., P. 12) etc. Many such sun images appear in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry with different meanings, connotations and context. Thus, Namdeo Dhasal's application of the sun image with its various and multi-dimensional form does not become repetitive in his poetry. Each image of the 'sun' in his poetry thus turns out to be his new experiment.

Use of Imagery as Dalit protest:

Protest is the permanent sentiment of Dalit poetry. However, in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry it is different from that of the other Dalit poetry. The nature of his protest is comprehensive, broad and intense. His protest is darker and powerful which is expressed through strong anger, resentment and hatred against the established social order. Following examples will help us understand them: 'Mad fire' (Golpitha, P. 29), 'Creeper of volcano' ('Ambedkar 1986' Tuze Bot Dharun..., P. 20), 'Dead corpse of civilization', 'A doubtful giant Labia' (Golpitha, P. 90), 'Vulgar god' (Khel, P. 7), 'Mumbai my prostitute' (Khel, P. 56), 'Ignited fire in the blood' (Priyadarshini:..., P. 27), 'Locking up light in those vaults' (Golpitha, P. 19), 'Gutter of the misfortune' (Golpitha, P. 24), 'Infidelity pitchers of sin' (Golpitha, P. 24) etc. Thus, the exact form of Namdeo Dhasal's protest is reached to his readers by means of his varied and innovative application of imagery.

The capitalists and the rich landlords acquire all the happiness, knowledge, money and prestige. They have locked their wealth in their strong rooms and moreover they claim that it is their solemn right. The poor class has been suffering in the darkness of the injustice. Thus, the metaphor of light 'locking up light in those vaults' represents the sentiment of protest.

The image of the 'Mad fire' is related to the thoughts of Ambedkar. 'Mad' means someone who has gone wild or has become insane and furious. The poet wants to express through his poetry the strong nature of Ambedkarite thought. Therefore, he uses the word 'fire' to represent the combustible and inflammatory nature of Ambedkarite thought. Moreover, he strongly wants to suggest that the 'fire' of Ambedkarite thought will dispel the darkness in their life. With the help of this image the poet has expressed the exact nature of his disgusting state of life and

that of his community. He also wants to show the protest and power of Ambedkarite thought.

The image of the 'Creeper of volcano' also appears to represent the Ambedkarite thought or it can also be said that the term 'volcano' represents the strong protest that exists in the poet's mind. That the protest in Dalit literature is inspired by Ambedkarite thought. The volcano emanates massive amount of heat and establishes its empire by spreading across the large part of the surrounding land. Similarly, the Ambedkarite thought is also the volcano of enormous radiance or that the protest in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry is also similar to the volcano. His poetry is born to spread Ambedkarite thought like the creeper that gets catch hold of any twig of the tree and grows fast upward. And therefore in order to achieve the exact effect of the Ambedkarite thought his poetry too grows rapidly like the creeper. Perhaps, that is why, while addressing to Ambedkar the poet says: 'now, where should I sow this creeper of the volcano further'.

Through 'vulgar god', the poet has expressed his protest against the traditional concept of god. The 'vulgar god' means the god who is backward and rustic. The god, who believed to be the omniscient and mighty one, is in fact very backward, primitive, rustic and orthodox. And therefore, perhaps the poet wants to expose the emptiness of god before the world. According to him there is no need to believe in the existence of the so called mighty god who could not even dispel the injustice incurred on the Dalits. Why to call him mighty and omniscient when he could not even see the truth that has been so crystal clear.

The symbol of fire in 'Ignited fire in the blood' is also a representative of the intense protest. While addressing to Priyadarshini, the poet expresses his anger against the injustice incurred on his people. The intensity of that anger does not diminish even after he represents it through his poetry. So, he describes it as the 'ignited fire in the blood'.

In 'Mumbai my prostitute', the dream city called Mumbai stands as a symbol of capitalism. The city has charmed every Indian by its hopes and aspirations. Mumbai with its many manifestations gave rise to the place like the third world called Golpitha. The shiny manifestation of Mumbai is perceived by everyone but nobody notices the world of Golpitha. The poet, who is from this third world called Golpitha, wants to subjugate and rule over this Mumbai city which constantly keeps its life moving. The poet desires to take revenge on this city which is engrossed in its own happiness disregarding the agony of Golpitha. That revenge is against the total existing established social system. Therefore, Mumbai is not just like the other cities in India. It manifests the existing established social order. In other words, it can be said that to poet this city is like a whore who cannot give her a respectful place in the society. The poet develops this attitude towards the city called Mumbai in order to debunk the established system.

In 'A doubtful giant Labia' the poet wants to explain the exact nature of emptiness of the term 'independence'. Every year, '15 August' is celebrated as the day of independence all over the country. The day of independence ended the political slavery of the people in India but in fact, for the poet, the Independence of India is a very fraudulent and deceitful event. To him the idea of independence is yet to

born. Therefore, he is suspicious about the day of the independence and explains its emptiness.

In 'Infidelity pitchers of sin' the poet registers his protest against established social order in India. In Indian mythology, the term 'pitcher' is usually used to denote the container of the 'ambrosia' or the container of the 'sin'. In this context the word 'sin' does not merely used in an ordinary sense but it is used to indicate something very disgusting. With the help of this image the poet wants to inform that the existing established system has denied humanity to Dalit which is a very heinous act of sin.

In 'Gutter of the misfortune' the poet wants to depict the exact state of his life and wants to represent his protest against it. This protest image appears in the poem entitled 'When the Darkness Saw the Sun' in the following manner: 'until now, we were kept rotten like worms in the gutter of misfortune'. The poet says that the inhuman state of Dalits' life is not merely their misfortune but it is the 'gutter of their misfortune'. In other words the poet wants to inform that the state of their existence is worse than that of the state of their life made by their misfortune.

Thus, many such symbols and images of strong protest appear in Dhasal's poetry. Likewise, many more such protesting images appear in his poetry such as: 'Ignited fire pit in the mind', 'Countless burning Suns in the blood', 'Angry utterance of the sun', 'Hiroshimi ichhancha surung (a mine of desires of Hiroshima)', 'Each new just day supports them as if bribed' etc. With the help of these images, we can understand the extreme form of protest expressed in his poetry. We can also understand the reasons behind the birth of his strong protest. Therefore, images of protest in his poetry play a significant role in conveying his poetic experience as well as his sensibility. These images seem to be neither employed deliberately nor did they appear irrelevant. Instead of creating unnecessary burden on the poetry, these images bring a new height and density to the poetic experience.

Dhasal's poetry is very inexplicable and multi- dimensional in nature. It involves a different nature of his world of experience and sensibility. His world of experience/ sensibility is very rich and that is why his poetry has become incredibly significant in the history of Dalit literature. In order to appreciate his poetry in a proper way it is necessary to understand his world of experience and sensibility. His life was filled with varied experiences in life that resulted in multi-dimensional nature of his poetry. His outlook towards life is shaped by diverse experiences acquired from the rural world and the lowered-world of Golpitha in cosmopolitan city like Mumbai.

The study of Dalit aesthetics of imagery in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry can be a separate topic of research. His significantly unique and distinctive poetic images enrich the content of his poetry. He expresses his protest through entirely new images. His poetry is considered remarkably peculiar because every time it appears with new images and different connotations. The varied images have enriched the content of his poetry. The world of imagery in Namdeo Dhasal's poetry facilitates the proper appreciation of his poetry. His varied and distinctive images have established him as the greatest poet of his time. The succeeding chapter of the present book i.e. Importance of Namdeo Dhasal's Poetry in Dalit

literature attempts to study Namdeo Dhasal's significance as a poet and also his contribution to Dalit literature in comparison to his contemporary Dalit poets.

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8. Alakh niranjan is the term used by Nath Yogis as a synonym for the creator, and to describe the characteristics of the God and the self, known as Atman. Alakh means 'spot free'. Niranjan is another name for Lord Shiva. URL: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alakh_Niranjan.
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11. Niyoga is an ancient Hindu tradition in which a woman (whose husband is either incapable to become father or has died without having a child) would request and appoint a person for helping her bear a child. According to this Hindu tradition the man who has appointed must be or would most likely be a revered person. (Source: Wikipedia. Link-<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niyoga>).

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