

**Suppression to Assertion: A Critical Study of the Selected Poems of
Namdeo Dhasal and N.D. Rajkumar**

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With Reference to:

A Current of Blood

Give Us This Day a Feast of Flesh

Abstract

This research paper deals with Dalit poetry in reference to the two collections of poems, namely, *A Current of Blood* by Namdeo Dhasal and *Give Us This Day a Feast of Flesh* by N.D. Rajkumar. The selected poems from these collections are critically analysed with the objective of seeking for the picture of Dalits' life as created by the poets in their poems as well as analysing the poems as the critique of the caste hierarchy. Dhasal who is one of the significant poets of Marathi Literature and Rajkumar who has contributed immensely to Tamil literature spew out their anger and vehemence to castigate the upper-classes of the Indian society which

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have always acted as the oppressors of the Dalit caste. The poems of these two poets become the voice of the caste which had been silenced for long and thus their poetry has led to assertion of Dalit identity in the mainstream society.

Keywords: Dalits, Dalit Poetry, Silence, Assertion, Caste System, Upper-Caste, Suppression, Ambedkar, Bold Diction, Sarcasm, Gods, Goddesses, Inequality, Folktales.

Dalit literature came into existence with the aim of breaking the silence and asserting Dalit identity as an equal and independent caste identity in the Indian society. Namdeo Dhasal and N.D. Rajkumar took to poetry as a powerful means to bring to light the plight of those who have been subjugated for a long period of time and have a grief-stricken past. Dhasal's collection of poems *A Current of Blood* and Rajkumar's collection of poems *Give Us This Day a Feast of Flesh* are the significant works in the domain of Dalit poetry. These collections of poems are purely the voices of these two poets who try to make the readers aware of the agony and misery suffered by the Dalits and cater a new aesthetics and a new genre to Indian English Literature.

In the first poem of the collection *A Current of Blood*, entitled "Man, You Should Explode", Dhasal sings the song of equality and unity among Hindu folk who are split into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The poet asks men to adopt all sorts of sinful activities which may destruct humanity and good from the society by providing suggestions such as smoking hash, chewing opium, carrying knives and weapons, adopting abusive language, indulging in rapes and murders, carrying acid bulbs, destroying the police stations and educational institutions etc. Furthermore, these men should continue to wage caste wars and communal riots to turn themselves wholly into savages and evil men who could go beyond the activities expected by humans. Dhasal refers to violent activities to satirize the on-going human actions in the Indian society. Caste wars, violence in the name of caste and community,

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hatred and jealousy generated among individuals due to caste etc. are the aspects which are heavily disapproved by the poet. Following the concept of living as one united family could keep humanity alive, Dhasal writes:

One should regard the sky as one's grandpa, the earth as one's grandma
And cuddled by them everybody should bask in mutual love
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, man should sing only the song of man.

(“Man, You Should Explode”)

Indian society is characterized by caste hierarchy in which Dalits have always been assigned the lowest position. Dhasal, being a politically active member of the Dalit Panthers was known to the facts in relation to the landlords and feudal lords whom he accuses of being a reason behind the agony of Dalits. In the poem, “Their Orthodox Pity”, Dhasal brings the feudal lords in front who have consumed every good of life and left darkness in the part of Dalits who are expected to live under suppression. Justice has always been in the hold of the powerful and the suppressed class becomes merely a class to be pitied on. Thus, poet expresses his fury against the powerful class in the following lines:

In this lowered life imposed on us, not even a pavement belongs to us
They've made us so helpless; being human's become nauseating to us
We can't find even dust to fill up our scorched bowels
The rising day of justice, like a bribed person, favours only the
While we are being slaughtered, not even a sigh for us escapes their generous
hands. (“Their Orthodox Pity”)

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Dhasal in another poem “I Slew the Horses of the Chariot of the Sun”, personifies the Sun who is the witness to all the ruthlessness suffered by Dalits, but allows it. The poet addresses the Sun who permitted the tyrannical powers to hold their power over the depressed, who allowed the upper class to molest them, who made the depressed class victims of injustice and no liberty by not burning the powerful class with its fire. In the literal sense, Dhasal spells out his anguish against all the odds his community encountered and curses the powerful class, landlords and the feudal lords who deprived them of everything from social status to economic stability. Dhasal refers to the Sun using various metaphors such as ‘the beguiling spy’, ‘heartless rock in heaven’, ‘illustrator of the peopled world’, ‘distortion of fire’, ‘devil’, ‘wretched one’ etc. Addressing the Sun, Dhasal writes:

Nullify the fraudulent change of hands
That robbed us of our hands
Punish the landowners and the feudal lords;
Whom caste and money have made powerful and arrogant
Return to us the rain that belongs to us
And irrigates our crops. (“I Slew the Horses of the Chariot of the Sun”)

Many poems written by Dhasal are a critique of the social system of India and the established hierarchy of the powerful and the powerless. A strong metaphor of a tree has been employed for violence by the poet in the poem “The Tree of Violence”, in which Dhasal exposes the actual people in whom violence is rooted. The poet weaves a tale in which a tree turns ferocious by taking away the lives of those who come in close contact with it. The tree i.e. the metaphor for violence here is strongly rooted as Dhasal puts: “ The tree couldn’t be broken / The tree couldn’t be sawed off, / Not even a chip of its bark would come off, / Why doesn’t the tree break? ” The roots of the tree i.e. the sole reason behind violence lie in the houses of Zamindars, capitalists and the powerful class who provide nourishment to the tree of

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violence which ultimately traps the people of the ghettos and the Dalits. Dalits many a times become the victims of violence due to their helplessness and powerlessness. Dhasal in this poem points out at the Dalits been victimized during the process of formation of a new nation as he writes:

Really, the tree cannot die

But multiply it will- by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the millions, and by
the billions

The public will kill it in broad daylight

It will overflow into rice-fields, and foul up Parliament, it will run

Over the ghettos of the untouchables, the mangs and the mehtars,

The mahars, and the chambhars, into the fields and into the factories.

(“The Tree of Violence”)

Dhasal’s poetry is definitely a strong voice raised against the injustice suffered by the Dalits. This class has always been ostracized by the upper class which aroused consciousness among them and literature became the tool to assert their equal importance in the society. Dhasal said: “Both my individual and collective life have been through such tremendous upheavals that if my personal life did not have poetry to fall back on I would not have reached thus far. I would have become a top gangster, the owner of a brothel, or a smuggler.” (Maitreya, Yogesh. “Namdeo Dhasal’s Poetry”. 28 Oct. 2017, 11:53:08 IST). This journey from suppression to assertion of the poets like Dhasal resulted in such poetry where the atrocities suffered by the Dalit community in general can be reflected in order to bring about the change in the society. Poems such as “Hunger” and “Sweet Baby Poverty” are the reflection of the depressed classes whose permanent companions are hunger and poverty.

In the poem “Hunger”, Dhasal has personified hunger which is a constant feature in the lives of the people of the depressed classes regardless of their immense hard work. The poet

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asks hunger to forgive him and his people as they are weak and cannot dare to suffer the tricks played by it as he puts: “To what market can we take a voiceless heart? / Where can we put it on auction? / where every day sweeps life away, / Who’ll buy a crushed heart? ” Poet feels defeated by hunger and asks it to leave his people, as if they accept and preserve it, everything will turn dark in their lives.

Similarly, in the poem “Sweet Baby Poverty”, Dhasal has personified poverty as a small child who has taken birth into a lower-class family. No lavish dinner can be organized at the birth of the baby and the birth cannot be celebrated. Dhasal through a pitiful image of a new born child and a poor family picturizes the lives of the depressed classes who despite their hard labour have to face immense poverty and live the life of penury and anguish. He writes:

Look at the sly little one in its baby clothes, so sweet,
It may droop before it can bloom,
Put a dark spot of blood on its forehead to protect it from evil eyes,
Sell your hardships cheap so this baby can snuggle and play into your arms
Your eyes couldn’t light it up, nor could you swing it in the cradle of your arms.

(“Sweet Baby Poverty”)

The poet does not seem to give an expression to his fury but refers to poverty as a sweet baby who has to be given care, which marks a unique style of Dhasal. Gently presenting various heart wrenching pictures of Dalit’s life in his poem hails Dhasal as a mature poet. In this poem, he warns his people that this child will pee on them but he has to be handled with immense care which literally points out at the fact that poverty will always hit them, strike pain in their hearts but it has always been expected of the lower classes to live with it.

Dhasal has been influenced tremendously by Babasaheb Ambedkar’s political and literary interests. Dhasal became an ardent follower of Dr. Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia and Acharya Narendra Dev. His fondness for Dr. Ambedkar can be observed through his

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words: “ Once you develop a taste for knowledge, you begin to grow fast. If you do not have a vision, you become a problem unto yourself. I never became a socialist: but as soon as I saw the hollowness of it, I turned to communism. However, whatever I did, my foundation was Ambedkar’s vision.” (Maitreya, Yogesh. ‘Namdeo Dhasal’s poetry’, Oct 28,2017, 11:53:08 IST).

Dhasal has dedicated two long and one short poem to Dr. Ambedkar entitled “Ode to Dr. Ambedkar”, “Ode to Dr. Ambedkar:1978” and “Dedication. Ode to Dr. Ambedkar” is an emotional address to Babasaheb Ambedkar who exhorted his community to break away the cages of religion, caste, gender and race. He is regarded as a Heavenly stream which moistens the parched skin of the untouchables and who has given a blow to the God who gave rise to partial society. The poet pays his tribute to Ambedkar who instilled strength in him to walk through a crowd and to uproot the biased society. Death of Ambedkar was lamented by the large masses but the poet could smell his fragrance and tried to follow his teachings. Dhasal compares Dr. Ambedkar to the Sun, the Sun which emits light, spreads brightness and which is the ultimate source of energy, power, enthusiasm and happiness, as he says:

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. (“Dedication. Ode to Dr. Ambedkar”)

Comparing Ambedkar to the Sun, Dhasal expresses the agony of the untouchables. He compares Ambedkar to the Sun as it protects everyone and everything including cactus, it does not differentiate between human and a beast, it becomes the colour of the life, cures certain diseases and does not sit on the door mats as untouchables are made to do. Unlike the Sun, the

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upper castes, especially the upper-class Hindus perform every sort of activity which creates a differentiation among humans thus causing darkness in the lives of the suppressed classes unlike the Sun which always seeks to illuminate their lives.

As the title of the poem suggests, "Dedication" is an address to Babasaheb Ambedkar and his teachings such as avoidance of idolatry. Dhasal asks for Ambedkar's forgiveness as he followed idolatry by praising Ambedkar in his poetry. He asks for any kind of punishment for himself for not following the words of his hero/ his God, as he writes: "By suffering the punishment given by you/ My life shall become pristine again." Such a dedication to Babasaheb Ambedkar by Dhasal reflects his dedication towards the principles and philosophy laid down by Ambedkar.

Namdeo Dhasal, being a poet as well as a political and social activist, made efforts to bring about equality among all caste groups and the reformation of the caste-ridden society. His poem "Ode to Dr. Ambedkar:1978" begins with an epigraph, 'EQUALITY FOR ALL OR DEATH TO INDIA' through which he asserts his idea of choosing between equality or the destruction of the nation. In this poem, Dhasal turns into a harsh critic of the powerful class or the upper caste who took to violence, slaughtering, bloodshed, riots in the name of their separate part of the nation. In the words of the poet, they have turned into Oedipus and want the mankind to lose its humanity, satirizing the aspect of inequality embedded in the Indian society. Dhasal writes:

Are they the only ones who've come forth from a human mother's womb?

Are the rest of us the progeny of cats and dogs?

What sort of an illusion is it in which they live?

How many vices have they become the slaves of ?

("Ode to Dr. Ambedkar:1978")

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After the long period of suppression experienced by Dalits, Dhasal breaks the silence and becomes the voice of his community. He wants the upper castes to stop engaging in discriminatory practices and resists the actions taken by them against Dalits. He emphasizes on the need to bring about a change in the mindset of the upper-caste who must mend their own ways before pinpointing others.

Dalits express their gratitude towards Dr. Ambedkar who is hailed as a messiah who brought about a change in their lives, and is considered as a source of solace and assurance by the Dalit community. Dhasal admires Ambedkar in his poem by highlighting the strength, patience, intelligence, tolerance, boldness and affirmative nature of Ambedkar who awakened the country with his belief and firm faith. Dhasal expresses his love and gratitude towards Dr. Ambedkar in the following lines:

O inheritor of conflict!

You feed us things both in the short term as well as in the long:

You've made the human being transparent to us.

We can see through every human being.

Dilip Chitre in his essay (*Namdeo's Mumbai*) on Namdeo Dhasal, defines what Dhasal was taught in regard to being a Dalit. For Dhasal, 'to be Dalit is to be a human being denied free access to water and to be made aware that Dalit's are a product of a different experiences of a different soil, an infertile patch of land that others do not wish to till.' He always questioned the nature of democracy in India and a number of poems dealing with the political aspect. Dhasal wrote various poems during a phase when his organization (Dalit Panthers) was in full form. In his words, " My so-called political poems belong to that rich period of my life when Dalit Panthers was on the right track. That is where the force in these poems comes from." (Dhasal 116)

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Artificiality and hypocrisy which have been deep rooted in the contemporary society , also become the subject matter of Dhasal's poetry. He wonders how can a country where a certain group of society has always been subjugated and has witnessed a number of atrocities present itself as a highly sophisticated, independent and developed country. The poet picturizes India Gate and over there, the Rashtrapati Bhawan on the occasion of Independence Day where all sorts of artificial manners of the powerful people could be observed. Gates decorated with white elephants, structures of beautiful peacocks, magnificent architecture, armed regiment, huge markets, number of tourists, guests witnessing parading cavalry , forms of dances, representation of the power of the nation through its show of missiles, aircrafts etc. and the President and the Prime Minister accepting salutes and shaking hands are the artificial ways of the country. Dhasal could not accept the fact that where on one hand, India celebrates its independence, on the other hand it does not provide independence to all its citizens. This hypocritical aspect rooted in the powerful classes of India is satirized by the poet through the lines:

The President accepting a salute from those hanging between the sky and the
earth,

The Prime Minister shaking hands

With the glorified blemished.

Bravo!

What a spectacular festival. ("New Delhi 1985")

Various poems of Dhasal are a lamentation of the life of the poet in this world which encompasses the lamentation of the whole community of Dalits. The poem "Concomitantly: December 6" is the lamentation in regard to the country which does not seem to be the poet's own country. The poet remembers Ambedkar on his death anniversary who told him to regard this country as his own, where he could not feel safe, where the people play 'the politics of

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chastisement'. The pain of alienation in his own country, isolation from his own countrymen turns into aggression which makes the poet undertake the weapon of violence to safeguard himself as well as his people. He writes:

Death is a better alternative to fear
Rather than get buggered, butcher them back
Then bring them back to life, and then kill them again
I too would like to be martyred
For my people's sake. ("Concomitantly: December 6")

A few poems have been written by Dhasal which are the expression of his unwillingness to live in this world. Poems such as "Alchemy" and "Punishment" express the poet's dire hatred to be born in such a place where he could not avail anything good. In the words of Dilip Chitre, Dhasal's living area which was assigned for the depressed communities is, "Its leaky drainage gives a stink that blends the smell of human urine and faeces, stale food and garbage, sweat, smoke, and many other subtler aromas." (Dhasal 101). Such unfavourable conditions pushed the poet towards a life which then did not allow him to live more. He could feel a wound in his heart which aches, which can't be sewn nor can be kept open, as he puts:

Its fiery sting strikes my every bone
And I am watching all this in a mirror
The tree of sensual gratification rocks with laughter
From what great heights did you push me? ("Punishment")

Some poems of Dhasal lead a reader to feel him and the people of his caste, such powerful poetry of him holds the capability to touch the hearts of the readers. In the poem "Miracle", within few lines, he summarizes his life being a Dalit who has always been treated as an outsider. Nothing but the infinitely wide sky could welcome him with pity as he says: "

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This soil treated me as an outsider;/ This air turned its back on me;/ What took pity on me in the end was the sky that has no limits.”

Poetry has become the source and a medium for Dhasal to assert the facts which were then unknown to the majority of people, regarding the life of the depressed classes. Dhasal's earlier poems seem more violent, bold and harsh critique of the social hierarchy prevalent in Indian society and of the dominating assertion of the powerful over the powerless groups. On the other hand, his later poems seem to turn from bold to a sort of lamentation, i.e. lamenting the injustice bared by his caste, all sorts of odds through which his community went through and of the position to which the poet himself fell due to various circumstances in his life which are wholly connected to his birth in such a community. However, Dhasal never lost hope and continued to write numerous poems to become the voice of Dalits in the 20th century which could not be silenced.

N.D. Rajkumar's collection of poems *Give Us This Day a Feast of Flesh*, is another volume which has been written to provide a counter-narrative, in the words of Rajkumar, to the powerful Hindutva forces that were taking over local temples in his region in the name of a militant organization. Rajkumar has incorporated a lot of references to the Hindu gods and goddesses and the regional gods and goddesses, in his poems such as goddess *Kaali*, goddess *Isakki*, *Kollangottu Amman* etc. His goddesses are powerful who take rebirth to appease themselves either through human sacrifice or in any other way. Rajkumar's portrayal of the wronged Dalit girls is not meant to gain sympathy of the readers but definitely to highlight that these wronged souls take rebirth in the form of a powerful goddess. Anushiya Ramasamy, the translator of this poetry collection writes:

”The goddesses in the Rajkumar's poems appear not so much as divine dispensers of justice but as figures beyond human definitions of order and moral calculation. They are similar

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to the Greek Furies in the way they hound the humans, but unlike the Furies who had a sense of tit-for-tat, Rajkumar's goddesses have no morally defined agenda." (Rajkumar 90)

Rajkumar narrates several tales of the birth of the furious goddesses who were once humans but were led towards death due to the cultural forces and caste hierarchy rooted in Indian society. They took birth in the form of violent goddesses in the search of human sacrifice. In the poem, "The family, to regain religious merit", the poet narrates the tale of a *kollathi* girl, a Dalit girl who was raped by a Brahmin. She committed suicide and was reborn as the goddess shrieking for the human sacrifice. Another tale of a Dalit dancer who was stoned to death by the same Brahmin, is narrated, who died among the cactus thorns and took a birth as Goddess *Isakki* as the poet writes:

The Dark Blue Goddess of the Cactus Fields

Demands blood-soaked rice

Transformed into the dark forest

Goddess Isakki. ("The family, to regain religious merit")

Furthermore, Rajkumar questions the purity of the non-Dalit castes in his poem, "Hey, sister, you can't enter the house". The subdued class which is subjected to poverty and servitude is highlighted by the poet, which is not permitted to enter the house of the upper caste through the front door. They are provided with the left-over food, moreover, they are not allowed to stand close to the members of that family. The condition under which this subjugated class live is described by the poet through the lines:

Shrugging,

The mistress pours water into

The half-eaten rice and dumps it

Into the top half of the sari

Held open:

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The water drains out;

We wash the rice and eat it.

Even to wash our dishes

We go in by the back door-

It is the way we survive. (“Hey, sister, you can’t enter the house”)

The poet raises the question regarding the purity and morality of the mistress and the master who indulge in an extramarital affair, thus questions: “Is this not a sin? Is this not a curse, / A curse forever?” Regardless of the untouchable caste, the depressed caste is stereotyped with all sorts of sins and impurity. Rajkumar through his poem asserts the fact that a person cannot be wholly judged by the caste and the class in which he is born.

There lies a uniqueness in the poetry of Rajkumar that his several poems are not the harsh critique of the higher castes but focus on the equal status of depressed classes in the Indian society, by including references from his community and by acceptance of certain differences between the Dalit caste and the non-Dalit castes. It could be observed in his poem entitled “As the kaniyan sings”, in which the poet refers to the Gods of the caste groups who are ranked lower in the society. They could not experience *Brahmam* i.e. the God Brahma but worship the Jungle god. Through his poem, Rajkumar does not want these lower groups to mingle with the mainstream society but asserts that these communities too have their own gods which are different from the center of the society but unlike the Hindu gods, their gods stay and help their people. Rajkumar writes:

We who cannot experience

The Brahmam

Link hands and walk

With our Jungle Gods. (“As the kaniyan sings”)

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Some of his poems reflect his bold and violent attitude where the poet boldly curses the gods of the higher castes and does not hesitate in referring to himself as the child of Satan, dogs and devils. In his poem “I am the child of Satan”, the poet praises his jungle God and affirms his strength and superiority through the lines- “My lord is darkly handsome/ The king of the jungle.”

The poet takes pride in differentiating the Gods of the Dalits and the non- Dalits. He expresses how the gods of his community do not speak in the language known to the few, thereby satirizing the Hindu gods who are told to be speaking in no other language but Sanskrit. The poem, “Our Gods do not hide”, is wholly a sarcasm on the Hindu gods who spoke in a particular language, could not be seen through eyes by every Hindu, nor did they come with their people to live in poverty and slums. With the sense of gratification, the poet puts forth the way in which the gods of his community speak in the language of their people by possessing a person and showing signs in the language known to their people. Moreover, their gods eat pork, smoke cigar and indulge in all various activities which are adopted by his own people, including living in the ghettos under dire poverty. Rajkumar in regard to his God writes:

Eat pig flesh

Drink arrack

Smoke a cigar

And settle down amongst us

In the ghettos

Next to sewer ditches

In the no-man’s land. (“Our Gods do not hide”)

Rajkumar’s poems are very deep in their meaning, sometimes, he inverses all the activities or norms and the social code which is accepted and followed in the Indian culture. Through the poems which are unique from the discourse of poetry as well as the discourse of

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Indian traditional society, he exposes readers to the history and the present lives of Dalit . In his poem, “She satisfied my hunger”, the poet promises to kill his mother with the poisoned rice on the words of his beloved. Murdering one’s own mother on the words of the beloved is regarded as impure and a great sin in the Indian mainstream society. On the other hand, the violence caused to Dalits is never mentioned as a sin by the upper- caste but has satiated the anger spurred in the higher castes against the depressed castes.

In the words of Anushiya Ramaswamy, “Rajkumar’s poems are the counter-regimes of truth-his presentation of an alternative to the theological certainties of high cultural Hinduism could be characterized as a critique, an act of dissent.” (Rajkumar 98). Rajkumar himself confesses that his poetry is much unique to the discourse of poetry, also unique to the language of the mainstream society. He in his poem “If anyone not our own kind”, writes:

If anyone not our own kind

Happens to read this manuscript

Heads will roll

Hearts will burst

Brains will curdle. (“If anyone not our own kind”)

Violence in the poems of a Dalit poet is the recurrent theme which is either the violence undertaken by the higher classes against Dalits or the violence which has to be adopted by the depressed classes against the higher classes in order to gain justice or to safeguard themselves. Similarly, the poet in his poem, “Right now, right this minute”, asks the people of his community to take to violence in order to live with peace in their nation. He criticizes his fellow countrymen belonging to the non-Dalit classes who will not be permitting this class to live in this nation peacefully. If given a chance, they will probably throw away the depressed castes in the name of a nameless corpse or would squeeze out the life from them. The poet feels that

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his people needs to turn to murderers and should take to the violent methods to live peacefully as the other methods have already been adopted by them to maintain peace. He says:

We need to change

Into a most terrible

Murderer

Because

We have dared

Everything

To live

In peace

In this nation. (“Right now, right this minute”)

Rajkumar also incorporates Tamil folktales into his poems which give his poetry an authentic sense of literature from South India. His poem “Dancing cobra eyes” is regarded as Rajkumar’s most allegorical poem and is referred as a Tamil allegory. In the poem, a snake has been characterized as one who can converse with its natural predator, the kite. According to the folktale, the kite replies that “if folks stay in their appropriate places, all is well.” In the poem, the snake represents the depressed castes and the kite represents the higher castes. The snake ironically asks the kite if she is well and assures that he would take number of births as a devil, a ghost, goddess Kaali, goddess Isakki or the vengeful furies. Here, the poet in the literal sense, states that Dalits who have always been assigned a fixed position i.e. outside the caste system will take various births to seek revenge from the castes which like kite have ostracized them from the mainstream society. The poet writes:

I will be born

As a devil,

A ghost,

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As Kaali,

And Isakki

As the vengeful furies

I will terrorize you and follow you. (“Dancing cobra eyes”)

Rajkumar strikes hard at the hypocrisy of the higher castes again through the tales narrated in his poems. In the poem “The fishmonger wading into the sea”, in which the fishmonger is caught between the waves and is seeking to save his life. People in the boat who belong to the non-Dalit castes hesitate to save the fishmonger due to the Dalit caste to which he belongs. According to Rajkumar, such struggles have become old and Dalits have faced these struggles throughout their lives. On one hand, where the upper castes Hindus have always chanted of helping the needy, on the other hand resist themselves from following it for the sake of maintaining their purity by not allowing a needy to come close to them. Not only the instance of the fishmonger is narrated but of a Dalit labour who damped in sweat arrives at the house of an upper-class family to fetch water. To quench his thirst, he is asked to cup his hands to take water instead of touching a vessel of that family. The poet highlights the fact that where on one hand the mistress of the house allows that man for an intimate touch but does not permit him to touch the vessels of her house.

Not only the Brahmins or the upper-class Hindus become the target of Rajkumar but also the other non- Dalit communities including the Shudras. In the poem “When the pulayan turned into a dragon”, the poet accuses Shudras who burn the huts of the Dalits and break the water pots in their areas. Rajkumar considers all forms of violence waged by the all sorts of castes groups including shudras against Dalits. He writes:

But when in time

The altars fell

To rise up as the temple Altar

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During the harvest festival

The other sudras

Burn our huts

And break the water pots

In our cheris. (“When the pulayan turned into a dragon”)

Such poems of Rajkumar, where the supernatural, the haunting figures, reference to black magic, revengeful goddesses and furies appear recurrently make Ramaswamy remark: “Where the word becomes flesh, where reason is dazzled and magic reigns supreme: in that world delves Rajkumar.” Poems of Rajkumar are the critique of the inequality in social structure of India, and though is the literature of the marginalized people but offers a very different experience to the readers. His poems are highly suggestive where no straight forward comments are passed against the opposite castes but hit at these castes through the words born out of the mind of a complex artist.

It is Dalit consciousness which lies behind the writing of such poetry by the Dalit poets such as Dhasal and Rajkumar. The traumatic history of the Dalits and the depressed classes have remained rooted in the minds of these poets which led them towards writing the poems which are a bitter sarcasm on the inequality embedded in the social structure of India, especially the practice of untouchability.

Poems of Dhasal and Rajkumar are the reaction towards the pitiable history of the Dalits in India. Dhasal wrote that, “I have a mission in life that is to oppose all forms of exploitation-economic, social and cultural. My poetry is a product of my spontaneous commitment to my mission. What I write is spontaneous, natural. I make no compromise there.” (Dhasal 117). His poetry is one of the significant forms or the sources he adopted to fight for the Dalits and to be a voice of Dalits in Maharashtra by following the ideals of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Similarly, Rajkumar takes to the mission of providing an identity to the Dalit caste by highlighting the

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ills of the higher castes. Moreover, he through his poetry challenges and warns the opposite castes. Ramaswamy in regard to Rajkumar writes: “Rather than be tempted into reading Rajkumar as dalit poet, we owe him the respect of reading him as a poet capable of showing us our deeply unequal world as a fabulous construction.” (Rajkumar 98)

Poetry of these two poets, though take the Dalits of their regions into account but ultimately encompasses the condition of whole Dalit community. No more reading of the narratives of Dalits through the writings of non- Dalit writers has been made possible due to the works which have come up by these Dalit writers.

Not only for the sake of asserting themselves through literature, Dhasal and Rajkumar have written numerous poems but to revolutionize the Indian society and its structure. Thus, to abolish the caste hierarchy prevalent in the Indian society or to provide an equal status to the Dalits i.e. free from all sorts of exploitation, they took to poetry. Their poetry has definitely created an awareness in the society and has inspired number of readers as well as the writers through the realistic portrayal of a certain subjugated section of society. Dalit literature has always been written for the emancipation of Dalits and the growth of Dalit writers in India and the growth in the readers of this literature is itself the proof of the growing consciousness in regard to the flaws of the Indian caste system. Thus, Dalit literature has definitely established itself as the means of assertion for those who had been silenced for the long period of time.

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