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“SUFFERING OF THE PROSTITUTES AT MUMBAI IN MAHARASHTRA, INDIA: ESPECIALLY FOCUSING ON THE POEM, 'KAMATHIPURA' BY THE GREAT LITERARY MAN- PADMASHRI NAMDEV DHASAL”

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Abstract:

who would like to enter in disgraceful profession? Who would like to be the centre of hatred? Who would like to be undressed before numerous unknown customers? Who would like to welcome 'rape' at every moment? Who would like to live a feeling less life? The answer of such questions will be – no one. The women those who become prostitute; it is not by a choice but it has many reasons behind. Some of the parents sell their girl child due to poverty or too many girls. Some small girls are kidnapped and when they become teenager they are brought to the profession. Some young girls are misguided. Failure in love marriage or arrange marriage makes them to enter this profession. Reasons were many but aim behind is to gain money to live the life and financially supporting family. Now the profession has got new name like call girls, escort services and so on. The new trend of the profession is to become rich in a short period of time. Some of the high class ladies have accepted the profession as their 'career'. High class and rich class ladies are doing it for several reasons- to satisfy their thirst of sex, to become richer, to gain the highest comfort and luxury of life. Some of the girls come to Mumbai to make their career in T.V. serials and film industry and this profession is the beginning point of many stars. While hunting the luxury and comfort of life they are losing the pleasure and peace of mind. Comfort and luxury of life is related with body and pleasure and peace is related with mind.

In past, the customers use to knock the door of prostitutes now in a single call prostitute will come in short period of time at called place and will knock the door of customer. This tremendous change is been possible in the business because of information technology. There is a chain of marketing and service providers. Government, police department is aware of all blacklisted businesses in and around city. The advertisement says- part time earn minimum Rs.10, 000 to 20,000 per day. At one point common middle class boys and girls are seeking for employment but they are unable to get Rs.10, 000/- p.m. salaried job. While scanning through such advertisements in frustration many of them make a phone call to make their career but that one phone call breaks their career. Then the question arise in the mind of common man- is government and police department in a position, capable and ready to help such boys and girls those who are dragged to the profession? Will they stop such type of sexual cheating of young generation? Will they close such type of shops once and forever? People see various loot advertisements in newspaper then also police department does not take any action. Why? The open reality is blacklisted business people run the government and they are the tools in the hands of ministers and police people get good funding (HAPTA) for the luxury of their family. Who cares for other especially common man? Here, Mr. Dhasal has focused on the true life of the prostitutes those who are at Kamathipura through the poem Kamathipura.

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KEY WORDS:

militant organization , political activism , poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Awards and honors- Soviet Land Nehru Award (1974) for Golpitha, Maharashtra State Award for Literature in 1973,1974,1982 and 1983, Padma Shri Award for Literature from GOI in 1999 and Sahitya Akademi's 'Golden Life Time Achievement Award in 2004.

Past and Present Sufferings of Dalits in India-through the Literature of Namdev Dhasal:

In 1973 he published his first volume of poetry, Golpitha, which caused uproar in literary circles. It was followed by further poetry collections, among them, Moorkh Mhataryane (The Foolish Old Man), inspired by Maoian thought, the volume, Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi? (How educated are you?) Dasal's writings represented the anger and reflected the untouchable protest, the erotic poems, Khel and Priya Darshin about the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Apart from two novels he also published pamphlets such as 'Aandhale Shatak', (Century of Blindness) and Ambedkari Chalwal, a reflection on the socialist and communist concepts of B.R.Ambedkar the founder of the Dalit Movement.

Prose- Hadki Hadavala, Negative Space and Ujedaachi Kali Dunia' etc. He is inspired by the writings of Dr. Baburao Bagul and the area he use to stay was known as Red-Bati and several underworld use to stay in that area so one of his close friends Dilip Chitre translated a selection of Dasal's poems into English under the title 'Namdev Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld'. Because the language he has used in his writing is very open and it seems vulgar. But Dhasal has brought the true picture of exploited in front of the reader. When his book Golpitha published the middle class crowd has got disturb by the language he has used. The Golpitha occupies a position equal to that of T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' not only in Marathi but in pan-Indian poetry.



Namdev Dhasal- the poet of under world with his friends.

In General the life of prostitutes with certain experiences-

Moiratha a sex worker says, "The "beemari" (HIV/AIDS) has spread everywhere. She needs money. Mumbai has become expensive. The trade is dead, she says. "Ye sabkhatam hua (All this is over)," she says, gesturing with her comb outside her door.

Unlike an overnight sale which clears out the area, the current redevelopment in Kamathipura is a process. Individual units are being bought and leased to small industries for 11 months. The new industrial units are noisy and spew fumes well into the night. This disturbs the sex workers, business dips, and they too eventually look to sell and leave.

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Year 2009 photo of sex workers waiting for clients

Kamathipura—with its gutters spewing into the streets, rows upon rows of cots, women too tired to walk by mid-morning, a Konkani-speaking Tina with a black eye emerging from a 30 sq. ft room beneath the stairs occupied by three others like her, Sushila, with her pink sari and matching flowers in her hair; pimps smoking beedis—is humbled against the towers encroaching the skyline around.

It was not always like this, Sushila says, sitting on her cot. “Paise vaale aate the (The moneyed used to come here).” Now there is no money flowing into the system. Migrant workers with a few rupees to spare drop by. It costs Rs. 150 for a session with a woman. “Low-budget, savings-wallah...” Sushila laughs. It barely buys them a living.

A woman with a past

The most expensive brothel at Kamathipura's peak in the 1960s cost Rs. 13 and 80 annas for a sex act. Pathans guarded the foyers of the brothels, and rights of an admission were reserved.

Ashwini Tambe, in her paper Hierarchies of Subalternity: Managed Stratification in Bombay Brothels 1914-1930, documents: “Police ranked European brothels into three tiers according to how well conducted they were: The first class consisted solely of European women living in private houses; the second, of women who solicited in streets; and the third, of women who were grouped along with Japanese and Baghdadi women in Kamathipura. Indian women figure implicitly as the bottom rung in this hierarchy, although they are not named as such.”

There were distinct lanes for dance bar girls, mujrewalis and sex workers. No. 38 Foras Road was once a sprawling bungalow known as Spy House, on the radar of foreign intelligence agencies during the world wars. “It is said men of the calibre of national statesmen came here. It was a hotbed of espionage,” Entry was reserved for men who descended from horse-drawn carriages, wore shoes and, preferably, a tie. In the 1950s, when the then chief minister of the erstwhile state of Bombay, Morarji Desai, began his crackdown on social vices, he was reportedly advised that Kamathipura's undisturbed existence was essential to the sanity of society. A “tolerated area”, it escaped the crackdown. References to the district abound in Hindi cinema, from Amar Prem (1972) to Chameli (2003) to the forthcoming Talaash by Reema Kagti, starring Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor. So far, only Mira Nair's Salaam Bombay! (1988) and Namdeo Dhasal's poetry have captured the streets in their raw, stark reality.

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A paan-beedi shop at the start of Gully 12.

Romanticizing the red-light area in popular culture has done it no favours. It has only embedded the onus of social immorality within this district. Svati Shah, assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, US, documents in her 2006 paper *Producing the Spectacle of Kamathipura: The Politics of Red Light Visibility in Mumbai*: “Although everyone living in Kamathipura does not sell sex, almost anyone who lives, works or passes through Kamathipura is subject to the stigmas associated with prostitution.”



Red Signal: 2008 a photo of two sex workers preparing for a night of work, KAMATHIPURA

A bankrupt district

Kamathipura is today teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Its symbiotic economy has unraveled. Feeding off the sex district was a chain of supply to the brothel houses.

Kamathipura then is merely a forgotten vestige of colonial rule falling off; a scab on a wound that has taken an unduly long time to heal.

Historically, Kamathipura was never an Indian construct. Yet, its physical demise is not its existential end. The issues Kamathipura came to symbolize have always existed. Tambe, in her paper, says: “Indian brothel workers were far more dispersed across the city, and met with less public revulsion. There were no furious debates between police and residents over where to locate Indian prostitutes. The census figures for both 1864 and 1871 show high concentrations of prostitutes in parts of Bombay other than Kamathipura, and notably in neighbourhoods populated by working-class Indians, such as Market, Oomburkharee, Phunuswaree and Girgaon. Census figures for 1901 and 1921 also indicate that there were areas other than Kamathipura, such as Khetwadi, Phunuswaree, Girgaon and Tardeo, also working-class areas, in which larger numbers of prostitutes lived. Yet none of these other areas were defined as red light zones. Kamathipura was not the only area with a concentration of prostitutes, but it was significantly the area where European prostitutes first resided, and then were allocated. It was on the strength of this European dimension that Kamathipura was termed the 'prostitutes' zone' by the administration (home department 1920, Police-A).”

Placed in that context, the imminent dissolution of Kamathipura is merely a city redirecting its sexual energies elsewhere.

The newer sex

“The arranger” meets you at the McDonald's opposite Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus station. She produces an album; two girls to a page. You only have to pay her Rs. 100 each way for the commute. The girl will contact you. The rate is Rs. 1,500 onwards for a session. She cannot be arrested, she says, because she has only asked you to reimburse her travel. There has been no money transaction through her. If a man and woman choose to sleep together and he happens to give her money, who is she, or the law, to interfere in a

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personal transaction that she knows nothing about? This is the nature of the new Mumbai sex trade.

These are the fault lines upon which Kamathipura is disintegrating.

“Some sex workers seek work in new districts, others have love marriages and go,” says Akhilesh Pandey, a Congress worker who has lived in the non-sex-district part of Kamathipura all his life. The next generation—the children of the sex workers, pimps and landlords—have put their collective foot down. Rashid Multani, who has run a hotel here for the last 35 years, says: “The NGOs take away the children, send them to boarding schools, so when the children grow up, they don't want to come back.” He points to a woman standing in Gully 10. “Her daughter is a nurse. She won't have anything to do with her now. There is no next generation of anything.”

Ansari Muhammad Asif, a dry-cleaner with a shop on Kamathipura Main Street and also a reporter for the area's daily newspaper, the *Tirchi Aankh*, says: “We are blacklisted for loans, credit cards, our children in colleges are told 'Kamathipura? No admission'.” Kamathipura is dying from within.

Shah, in her paper, explains what Asif and Rashid attempt to in their own street lingo: “The criminalization of prostitution through the Itpa (The Immoral Traffic [Prevention] Act, 1956) and the local Police Acts is experienced by residents of Kamathipura as routine raids, police sweeps, and extortion by representatives of the state for personal gain. Residents of Kamathipura are targeted because the sexual commerce there has been produced as a visible, factual, and therefore 'known' activity...the generalized sense throughout Mumbai that the district exists for the sole purpose of prostitution, residents have alternately experienced severe state-sponsored regulation, multiple levels of extortion, generalized indifference, and eroticized consumer interest.”

It is assumed that Kamathipura is Mumbai's only sex district because it has been its most visible one.

Perhaps, when Kamathipura is physically destroyed, those who fight a daily battle against its roots hope, the real onslaught against sex trafficking, as opposed to the raid-prone criminalization of sex workers under Itpa, can begin.

Perhaps this is what taxi-driver Dalit activist and Marathi poet Namdeo Dhasal, court poet of the area once known as Golpitha, meant when he wrote:

A very famous poem of him is “KAMATIPURA”, a poem with visual imaginary, along with a personal interpretation. A very disturbing poem about the world of Mumbai's whoreland filled with intense pathos, the poem does not even try to underplay the emotions but rather plays up the ugliness and squalor of the lives of the unfortunate women perhaps, carried away by the horror of the scene. The imaginary is extremely evocative. “As the night gets ready for its bridegroom, wounds begin to blossom. “Perhaps a reference to the flowers the women wear to deck themselves up for the night's customers. This is pain wearing a dancer's anklet recalls the horrors of the *mujra* dance with which the customers are entertained.

“Kamatipura” -By Namdeo Dhasal

By nisheedhi on December 5, 2007

(Translated from the Marathi by Dilip Chitre)

*The nocturnal porcupine reclines here
Like an alluring grey bouquet
Wearing the syphilitic sores of centuries
Pushing the calendar away
Forever lost in its own dreams*

*Man's lost his speech
His god's a shitting skeleton
Will this void ever find a voice, become a voice?*

*If you wish, keep an iron eye on it to watch
If there's a tear in it, freeze it and save it too
Just looking at its alluring form, one goes berserk
The porcupine wakes up with a start
Attacks you with its sharp aroused bristles
Wounds you all over, through and through
As the night gets ready for its bridegroom, wounds begin to blossom*

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*Unending oceans of flowers roll out
Peacocks continually dance and mate*

*This is hell
This is a swirling vortex
This is an ugly agony
This is pain wearing a dancer's anklets*

*Shed your skin, shed your skin from its very roots
Skin yourself
Let these poisoned everlasting wombs become disembodied.
Let not this numbed ball of flesh sprout limbs
Taste this
Potassium cyanide!
As you die at the infinitesimal fraction of a second,
Write down the small 's' that's being forever lowered.*

*Here queue up they who want to taste
Poison's sweet or salt flavour
Death gathers here, as do words,
In just a minute, it will start pouring here.*

*O Kamatipura,
Tucking all seasons under your armpit
You squat in the mud here
I go beyond all the pleasures and pains of whoring and wait
For your lotus to bloom.
— A lotus in the mud.*

*“Let these poisoned everlasting wombs become disembodied.
Let not this numbed ball of flesh sprout limbs”
We may recall the “sprout” image used by T.S.Eliot in the Waste Land:*

*Stetson, you who were with me in Mylae,
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Did it sprout? Will it bloom this year?*

The horror continues with the death of the unborn kids, who are forever being lowered into holes in the earth:

*As you die at the infinitesimal fraction of a second,
Write down the small 's' that's being forever lowered
The poem's end is surprisingly tender and on a note of hope.*

*O Kamatipura,
Tucking all seasons under your armpit
You squat in the mud here
I go beyond all the pleasures and pains of whoring and wait
For your lotus to bloom.*

The whole literature of Dhasal focuses on the life of weaker section of society like women, suffering and life standard of prostitutes, and humiliation in all corners of life. This writing focuses all aspects of life and the sufferings of the prostitutes. The writing of Dhasal is very meaningful, worthwhile and focused but as poet he has not brought in focus and he has not given that much status as he deserved for.

Conclusion- After 60 years of independence, India shines, for whom? The Indian economy of our country is very strong but each one of us needs to ask a question to self- Has India succeeded in making weaker section strong? Of course not, it is because to make very decorative policies for the uplifting of weaker sections like women, (poor, dalits and adivashi) is the policy of many governments. The provision in budget made for weaker section is for name sake. After six decades of independence, we are not seeing

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the actually change in life of these weaker sections of the society. Prostitute's numbers are not decreased but it is increasing rapidly day by day. Many of them are not coming in this trade by their choice. Some of them could be in need of money, force; misguidance, cheating and reasons could be in ample number.

Instead we hate sex workers; we need to understand them from human angle, you will appreciate their great courage. They are women made of steel, suffer everything on the way, yet take care of their family (staying somewhere in the countryside) and their children. They are like most of us, stuck to a job and unable to come out of it. Therefore, it becomes our prior duty to understand the problems of the women those who are prostitutes and guide them properly and needed to help them with government/NGO aid to bring them to right path. If desired they can start their life once again. The poet Dhasal has depicted the whole trade of prostitute's realistic picture in an organized manner with uses of symbols and images.

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