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Violent Words as Resistance: Marginalisation and Dalit Assertion in Namdeo Dhasal's "Man, You Should Explode."

Syed Umra Shah

Amar Singh College

Cluster University, Srinagar

Jammu & Kashmir

190008

Abstract

In "Man, You Should Explode", marginalisation is not treated as an abstract social problem but as a brutal, everyday reality. The poem reflects how caste operates as an invisible yet omnipresent force that denies Dalits dignity, humanity, and agency. Dhasal's language mirrors the chaos and cruelty of this exclusion, rejecting polished aesthetics in favour of a style that itself resists literary marginalisation.

At the heart of the poem lies the caste system, which structures Indian society through rigid hierarchies. Dhasal exposes how caste reduces Dalits to a subhuman status, denying them access to power, respect, and basic human rights. The repeated address to "man" in the poem is deeply ironic—it questions who is truly considered a 'man' in a society where humanity itself is graded.

Dhasal's aggressive tone and violent metaphors reflect this psychological damage. The poem suggests that when a person is treated as less than human for generations, rage becomes inevitable. This rage is not mindless but politically charged—it is the emotional truth of marginalised existence. The poem thus challenges the expectation that the oppressed must respond with silence, patience, or moral purity.

Dhasal's choice of obscene, shocking and abrasive language is not merely a provocation; it is a political intervention. Striving for Littérature, Meena Kandasamy elaborates that the journey finds feminist thought and critique irrelevant; we are banal and unfit to be called serious poetry. Dhasal facilitates Dalit reclamation of poetic space by comfortably employing a language that makes elite culture uneasy. Dalit suffering and anger don't need to be refined to prove their legitimacy, insists it. The poem's repetitive urge – 'Man, you must explode' – is both an emotional

outburst and a refusal of restraint. It suggests that the speaker's anger cannot be contained within the confines of the 'civilized' world.

The language itself is rebellious in "Man, You Should Explode". The refusal of lyrical polish in the poem echoes the violence of caste oppression by showing images of bodily and social degradation (like "your life is shit"). The words "you crawl like a dog" break the required decorum and metaphorical distance of the aesthetic. Dhasal indicates that humiliation stops people from enjoying the favour of refinement and softness. By emphasizing the contemptible and the indecent, he reveals how literary taste operates as a mechanism that excludes Dalit realities from cultural legitimacy.

The tear-it-up poem then uses profanity as a political tool, "explode with all the anger in your blood". If explosion is insisted, it rejects endurance and silence imposed on Dalit community historically. Dhasal's raw, visceral language makes it impossible to aestheticise pain for the upper caste. Instead, it forces the reader to confront rage. This overall design choice makes clear the poem's main argument: that marginalisation occurs not only structurally but also through language itself. Dismantling standards of poetic 'beauty,' Dhasal argues that Dalit expression must exist terms of its own, even especially when it disrupts dominant cultural ease. The repeated exhortation to "explode" in Dhasal's "Man, You Should Explode" should not be taken merely as an invitation to violence. Instead, it signifies a revolutionary rupture, a break with the enforced silence, acquiescence and internalised submission which sustain the caste system. The poem illustrates that marginalisation is maintained through fear and the habit of enduring and living with it. The images of "you crawl like a dog" and "your life is shit" foreground how the marginalised subject is reduced to one who is non-human. Thus, it is a way to compel compliance. In this sense, the explosion means not wanting to continue to live within those limits.

Dhasal's plea "Man, you should explode / with all the anger in your blood" turns anger from a moral failing into a legitimate and necessary political force. The dominant ideologies expect the oppressed to seek gradual change through patience and civility. According to critics of Dalit literature, expectations that Dalit literature should promote affirmative action actually serve to reserve comfort to the dominant groups. According to Gopal Guru, it is important to read Dalit anger as knowledge, that is, an ethical and political knowledge which emerges from actual experiences of humiliation and exclusion. The poem of Dhasal embodies this idea by turning rage into a non-sanitisable mode of resistance.

In addition, the poem dismisses reformist or ladylike protests as insufficient given the systemic violence inherent to caste – and caste hierarchies – and its erasure. The striking directness of phrases like "explode like a bomb" reflects the everyday violence visited on the bodies and lives of Dalits. In this context, the image of explosion does not refer to chaos but to transformation. It demands us to destroy

our internalised sense of inferiority along with external structures of domination. This is in agreement with the Ambedkarite view which says that we need radical social restructuring and not mere reform.

Although the poem's aggressive tone may make the reader uncomfortable, it is this discomfort that makes it political. Dhasal will not give us the comfort of reconciliation or moral reassurance but will make us bear the unbearable costs of prolonged marginalisation. As a result, "Man, You Should Explode" becomes not a celebration of violence but a stark, honest articulation of what it takes to reclaim dignity in a system built on sustained dehumanisation.

Namdeo Dhasal's poetry has, therefore, created a huge debate, especially his poem "Man, You Should Explode." His language has been termed "bastard language" by the upper-caste Marathi critics. The non-Brahmin speech, street slang, and some profanity combined together have been found obscene, chaotic, and not worth being considered literature by those who staunchly uphold the standards of classical Marathi. But this is precisely the point that reveals how literary yardsticks are linked to caste-privilege. By deviating from the chaste language of elitist poetry, Dhasal exposes how Dalit voices have been systemically excluded from what is known as 'respectable poetry'. "Your life is shit" and "you crawl like a dog" are phrases that break the expectation of refined poetry, ominously indicating that Dalit reality cannot be expressed in sanitized language.

In response, Dalit and progressive critics argue that what some call bastard language is actually a deliberate artistic and political choice, not a sign of poor craftsmanship. Eleanor Zelliot points out that Dhasal's poetry is shocking because it faces mainstream society with uncomfortable material and social truths. Eleanor Zelliot remarks: "The shock of Dhasal's poetry lies in forcing mainstream society to swaddle their eyes in the reality they resist. Dhasal rejects the refined idiom of elite Marathi poetry and substitutes their own violent idiom in poetry. The language of poetry reflects the violence of their society too. The refrain echoed through the poetry—'Explode—explode! You man! You must explode. You man, you must.'—notionally denotes a rebellion, but it also has an apotropaic significance—shattering the tradition of silence which has been inherited through generations of Dalit literature.

Arjun Dangle, a prominent Dalit writer and literary critic, further supports the use of Dhasal's vocabulary when he says that the vulgarity defined by the dominant culture actually represents the cultural expression of the wounded community. In the poetic piece "Man, You Should Explode," the aggressive tone with which the piece is written establishes the concept of Chetna (conscience) of the Dalit community with the help of anger, humiliation, and resistance that hasn't been diluted. The concepts of degradation drawn from the imagery of the mucky life one

leads with the call to explode don't encourage the very ethic that says patience and decency have been denied to the oppressed.

Therefore, the use of Bastard language in Dhasal's poetry becomes synonymous with the evolution of the Dalit consciousness. The harsh language used in the poem reflects the harsh realities of the caste system and the need for an honest portrayal of the Dalit experience to accept and confront the resultant violence head-on. In this respect, Dhasal not only recreates literary language in Marathi literature but also politicizes language by using it as a means to an end: the Dalit awakening. "Man, You Should Explode" by Dalit chetna is the awakening of this realization intertwined with the refusal to internalize it. Sourcing his philosophy robustly from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideology, Dhasal gives him his personal spin by exercising his rebirth in philosophy by relating it not merely to the endurance of pain but to some active disturbance in it too. Ambedkar always asserted that the act of becoming free starts by rejecting the imposition of inferiority in oneself, which is poignantly captured in the poetry by Dhasal's assertion that it is high time that the oppressed self-did not prefer to be silent anymore by shouting loudly in his poetry: "Man, you should explode."

This poem meets the reader with the imagery of decaying, filth, and violence—"your life is shit," "you crawl like a dog"—all conditions enforced upon Dalit communities throughout history in the form of forced segregation, stigma associated with an occupation, and thereby social ostracism. Dhasal rather foregrounds these realities than sanitises them to bring to light the material basis of caste order. Images like these serve as memento, reminding one that caste oppression works by degrading human body and space systematically. Yet, the poem does not remain imprisoned in renderings of abjection. It rather turns this very degradation into the raw material of resistance.

Lines like "you should explode / burst like a bomb" reimagine the Dalit body—the site of suffering—not just as passive but as a locus of revolutionary potential. An explosion is a metaphor for a violent rupture in the mind, which breaks all internalised boundaries of caste. It is not a call to wreak physical destruction but to annihilate caste itself, as Ambedkar wanted the Umbilical cord of the oppressive social structure torn asunder, not reformed. The Dalit subject, continuously constructed as disposable and polluted, is here turned into a force that can destabilise the very system that can destabilise the very system that dehumanised it.

In this regard, the significance of "Man, You Should Explode" can be defined with the declaration of the projection of a revolutionary awareness emanating from the roots of Dalit chetna. In the context of the above South Asian literary interpretation, it can be said that the necessary transformation of the self can only be ensured with the development of a psychological separation from the age-

long submission that was actually imposed upon the individuals pertaining to the said social group.

“Man, You Should Explode” can also often be seen through the ideological lens of the Dalit Panthers movement, which Namdeo Dhasal was heavily involved in. The Dalit Panthers were a movement that emerged in the early 1970s and were influenced by Ambedkarology and revolutionary movements across the globe. They opted for revolutionary activism over reformist activism and were highly aggressive in their ideology. When the poem is seen through the above-mentioned movement, one realizes that the poem becomes not just literary but also political.

Gopal Guru states, "Dalit literature must be judged not in aesthetically conventional parameters of 'savarna sensibility,' but in terms of its ethical-political relevance" (Guru 2009). In his view, mainstream literary studies tend to depoliticize Dalit writings insofar as they emphasize formal qualities over experiential ones. In this context, it is clear that the critical legitimacy of Dhasal's poetry lies in its very ability to reveal the structural violence of caste, its need for resistance, and not accommodation. "Man, you must explode," of course, becomes an ethical call, calling for recognition of injustice and de-civilizing humiliation and silence.

Sharmila Rege likewise argues that the very essence of the existence of the Dalit literary movement lies in the fact that it “disturbs the comfort of the savarna readership” because it does not intend to assuage the readers’ emotions (Rege 2013). The image of degradation and the highly abrasive language employed in the poem deny the reader the privilege of maintaining distance, which propels confrontation with caste violence. Rege theorizes this strategy as a "pedagogy of anger" in which rage becomes a mode of political education rather than an expression of excess emotion (Rege 2013). Dhasal's poem instantiates such pedagogy, one in which anger is transmogrified into a tool that exposes ethical inadequacy of politeness in the face of systemic injustice.

Through the prism of Dalit Panther ethos, the poem's denial of refinement and reconciliation becomes an act of principle-aesthetic discretion rather than a literary inadequacy. Dhasal's work challenges the assumption that literature must soothe or humanise oppression for elite consumption. Instead, "Man, You Should Explode" insists that true critical validation lies in the capacity of literature to confront power, unsettle dominant consciousness, and articulate a revolutionary Dalit Chetna grounded in resistance rather than compromise.

The application of “Man, You Should Explode” through the prism of “unlearning” power brings a very important aspect to the politics of this poem. “Unlearning” power can be understood as the imperatives of the dominant classes being forced to dismantle the privileges, knowledge, and morality that inform hierarchical systems like caste. Instead of seeking a role in these power structures, this poem by Dhasal asks for the breakdown of power.

The aggressive speeches to “man” thus can be seen as an invitation to the saavarna, patriarchal, and caste-privileged subject to explode, that is, to unlearn the excel-feredinus of power as the natural order of things. What needs to be exploded here is the learned superiority of the caste Self that has normalized dominance as the order of things, both by the oppressors and the oppressed. Both the oppressor and the oppressed here are equally constructed by the erasure of the lives of the Dalits.

Under these circumstances, marginalisation in the poem is made to continue not only by the act of violence but by the habit of everyday thought, words, and perception as well. Dhasal pushes the reader, particularly the saamanya reader, to learn unlearning by being shocking, obscene, and angry to break the saamnya sensibility.

“Dalit chetna,” through the lens of unlearning power, not only signifies self-awareness amongst the Dalits but a certain entitlement that society needs to realize. The poem asserts that nothing short of the unlearning of the cultural, religious, and linguistic discourses that perpetuate the caste system can enable the achievement of justice. Thus, the poem is very much in sync with the philosophy of Annihilation of Caste (AOC), propounded by B.R. Ambedkar.

The so-called bastard language of Dhasal is essential to this act of unlearning. The text resists grammatical correctness and literary elegance precisely because it challenges the cultural capital that enables the power relations that sustain the Act.

The reader must unlearn the assumption that refinement correlates with morality and that violence exists only in words. Ultimately, “Man, You Should Explode” does not plead for sympathy or reconciliation. Instead, it enacts rupture—a cognitive, ethical, and political explosion that makes unlearning power an inevitability.

Critics invariably read the poem through the prism of the Dalit Panthers movement. Gopal Guru argues that Dalit literature is to be tested not against traditional aesthetic parameters but against its ethical and political urgency. In this light, the critical validity of Dhasal's poem lies in exposing structural violence and mobilizing resistance.

In addition, Sharmila Rege asserts that Dalit writing “disturbs the comfort of savarna readership.” In “Man, You Should Explode”, discomfort becomes a literary device. The poem refuses reconciliation and instead demands confrontation, embodying what Rege calls “a pedagogy of anger.”

Using the language of the bastards and incorporating the theme of Dalit chetna, Dhasal makes “Man, You Should Explode” a text of resistance. The text rejects the hierarchy of literature as it resists the hierarchy of the world. Those who have supported Dhasal's works have argued in connection with the latter's language, imagery, and revolutionary tone that it is not aesthetically deficient but the product

of reaction to the ‘centuries of marginalization.’ Finally, the poem remains an important milestone in the Dalit literary tradition in that it makes it abundantly clear that the voices from the margins are to speak in their own language.

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