

**Writing The Untold:  
A New Historicist Study of Sharankumarlimbale's *shindu***

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**Abstract:**

Marathi Dalit writer, SharankumarLimbale, in his novel, *Hindu*, presents a powerful portrayal of India's social upheavals during the last decade and a half from a Dalit perspective. Based on Dalit and Savarna [other name of representing Caste Hindus] conflict in a village in Maharashtra, Laimbale's *Hindu* takes a measure of India's success and failures as a Nation in terms of the situation of Dalits in contemporary India. The proposition of the paper is to discuss how the pathetic situation endured by Dalit women and that of women of caste Hindus [the sufferings being felt by the wife of the murdered and that of the murderer] is portrayed and further depicted. The paper deals with the pain and trauma faced by those women due to turn of fateful event of murder of a Dalit.

**Key Words:** oppression, gender, humiliation, power relations, liberation.

Pramod K. Nayar in his polemical book entitled *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* addresses that New Historicism deals with 'a textualisation of history' and SharankumarLimabale's *Hindu* is not an exemption from Nayar's remarks as it pertinently depicts the untold story of the two women characters:

the wife of the murdered and the wife of the murderer. The novel *Hindu* deals with the key concepts of New Historicism. Pramod K. Nayar draws our attention by proliferating the essentialities of New Historicism. In his opinion:

New Historicism paid attention to the historical, social, economic contexts of a literary text, while also assuming that literary themes often reflected, refracted, reinforced or subverted historical contexts. In short, New Historicism is a mode of critical analysis that focuses on the text as a site of power relations (Pramod K. Nayar, 201).

Reflecting contemporary conflicts in India in resonance of power relations, Sharankumar Limbale's *Hindu* (2010), translated from the Marathi into English, is set in a village in Maharashtra where Panchayat elections are due where the power relations play a significant role. Roused by the new Ambedkarite jalsa, a folk theatre, of Tatyakamble, an illiterate Dalit; that graphically portrays the Dalits' role in their own enslavement, Dalits stand up for their self-respect and turn to political participation. Under the rules of reservation of seats in politics, the post of the village sarpanch falls to their share, and a Dalit candidate is successfully fielded by his upper caste employers, leaving the upper castes frustrated and angry. What happens to caste relations, the new political consensus that emerges slowly, if violently, are delineated perceptively.

Limbale's *Hindu* is not based on excavations of Milind Kamble and his past memories, family conflict, growing -up pains, romance that are the usual plotting devices of a novel. *Hindu's* propelling event is the murder of a Dalit activist, Tatyakamble by a group of higher

caste villagers because had become too big for his boots in their eyes and through his Ambedkarite theater was threatening the established order by inciting the members of his community, Mahars to convert.

“These days Achalapur has become famous for Tatyakamble’s jalsa. Many people now know it as JalsakarTatyakamble’s village, which has raised many eyebrows. The villagers found it hard to accept that their village was now known by a Mahar’s name” (11)

The people were waiting to murder Tatyakamble at the village square. PrabhakarKavale, GunvantPatil, JagannathPandit, Balshetwar were hiding and they came running out with weapons in their hands and pounced upon Tatyakamble. But somehow he got out of their clutches but Shankar Pujari grabbed him as he started to scream the village doors began to close one after the other, Prabhakar had a sword, Gunvant had a spear, JagannathPandit an axe and others had a knife. Sonalis heart sank as she saw the massacre. At that precise moment, Manikchand and Gopichand car arrived on the scene and the violent crowd dispersed. Tatyakamble fell on the ground.

“Suddenly, Gopichand screamed loudly, his voice sounding like shattering glass: ‘Bloody hell!’ The headlights of the car showed an agitated crowd running helter skelter and within seconds the road was emptied of people. ‘Murder!’ shouted Manikchand. Tatyakamble’s blood-soaked body was twitching by the roadside” (11)

TatyaKamble's murder is carried out on 14 October, an important day in Dalit history as it was on 14 October 1956 that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism to fulfil his vows that although he was born a Hindu, he would not die as one. TatyaKamble is beckoned by his murderers to the village square from the DhammachakraParivartan celebrations where the Mahar community is gathered together to listen to speeches exhorting them to convert to escape the curse of untouchability.

“A meeting was in progress and someone declaimed loudly. The speaker invoked Babasaheb's name repeatedly and loud applause could be heard. They were celebrating the anniversary of Babasaheb's conversion” (11)

Milind seated in the car with Gopichand and Manikchand was on the way to enjoy the night .The car crossed Bhimnagar decorated with bunting and banner. Suddenly the headlight of the car showed the agitated crowd and TatyaKamble's blood soaked body was twitching by the roadside. And car speeded up to RambhauKavale's house. Miland said to him that there has been a Murder. And asked where was his son Prabhakar? For which patil told that he has gone to Pune to visit his brother Madhukar. Then he said to Kavale that he saw him in the crowd. Kavale's face turned pale. Behind him stood his eldest son Sudhakar making odd gestures. He was mentally retarded. But hiding his emotions Kavale called them to dine with him tonight because they were his guest. For which Miland got shocked his eyes filled with tears and thought of TatyaKamble. He was like a lion. The killers have erased the identity of the village as JalsakarTatyaKamble's village" forever. He felt that “This was an attempt to teach a lesson to ordinary dalits by killing a dalit. Who was respected for his talents and had made a name for

himself? It was the disfigured face of social terrorism. Dalits have been murdered for thousands of years.”(12).

Although, SharankumarLimbale’s *Hindu* is based on the murder of Tatyakamble and political fiasco interwoven around it, one cannot ignore the gender oppression depicted in the novel. SharankumarLimbale lucidly depicts the pathetic condition of women through women characters. *Hindu* not only deals about the murder, political scenario of the village Achalapur, revenge, government machinery etc but it also portrays the position of women in the society. When we see the story through the eyes of Sonali it let us know about the ordeal that a woman has to undergo. Sonali is a victim of gender oppression. We see her witnessing the murder from the bara’s roof, seeing her husband and his friends butchering Tatyakamble. The shattered Sonali is later ordered by her husband to wash his blood-stained clothes in the bathroom. Tatyakamble’s blood begins to flow on the bathroom floor, making her very uncomfortable.

“Rambhau took off the bloodied clothes from Sudhakar’s body. Sonali took the clothes in the bathroom and, using a bucket, started to pour water on them. Tatyakamble’s blood began to flow like a stream on the bathroom floor. Sonali was overwhelmed with horror.” (56)

The incidents in the novel tells us that the woman was not free to move in the village and had to confine themselves in the house. Human Beings’ innate nature is to roam free, to think freely and exercise all kinds of comforts which are accessible. On the contrary, it has been observed since ages that women are not treated like a human being. She has been devoid of freedom and this could be easily traced in the lives of women who resides in the village. Sonali

liked to be free as she was coming from the different background where she was sent to the college. After getting married to PrabhakarKavale her life was put behind the cage.

“The bara seemed like a jail to her. It's high walls made her feel claustrophobic. She felt she had been cut off from the world. She remembered the Hangman's Hill, the ghosts lurking there.” (46).

Our society doesn't allow women to have their own voice or opinions . Their voices are suppressed and freedom of expression is caged behind the loud sound of male chauvinism. One can observe aforementioned remarks through different instances from Sonali's life. Sonali is not allowed to marry a boy from lower caste. This jolted her fro within. She started to live in tension.

“Sonali and Rohit did not know each other before the performance. They met each other at the rehearsals. Sonali had given no thought to the fact that Rohit was a dalit... The savarna boys sent photographs showing Rohit and Sonali dancing together to her home. Sonali's father, BaliramPatil, was very perturbed by the photographs. The idea of a Dalit boy having danced with his daughter riled him....He put an end to Sonali's education. Now, like a kite whose string has snapped, she lived under the weight of terrible mental tension. Sonali, a city girl, came to the village after her marriage.” (40)

Another incident which highlights the pathetic condition of women in our society is when Sonali was not allowed to watch the jalsa performed by the Mahars of the village Achalapur. Women are not even allowed to entertain themselves by doing things which they like. We expect them to fulfil all the duties towards our male dominated society but in return are not given

consent to exercise their freedom. Through the portrayal of Sonali's character author tries to narrate the pain and tribulation that women has to undergo in their life. The following excerpt depicts the above mentioned trauma endured by women in their own backyard.

“Sonali was completely engrossed in the jalsa. Sudhakar was trying to repeat the dialogues he heard. Suddenly, PrabhakarKavale came up on the roof and burst out angrily at Sonali: ‘Watching the Mahars dance! Are you a Mahar too?’ Frightened, Sudhakar went down running. Sonali was on the verge of tears. She felt like one of the trapped wild Partridges” (49)

A bird is free only when she is flying without any restrictions. The moment she is caged it tries hard to set herself free but in vain. Since time immemorial we have witnessed the life of women who are bound follows the rules of the society without question the same. And if they try to raise their voice against such atrocities they are immobilized at the hands of the society. Their feathers are cut down and are left stranded to lead their lives in utmost pain and horrific conditions. SharankumarLimbale depicts the same trauma through the portrayal of Sonali's helpless condition when she dared to spread her wings against the set rules of patriarchal system which doesn't allow women to exercise their liberty. The following passage depicts why and what Sonali feels after she tried to violate such restrictions which were imposed on her.

“Sonali could still remember the night she went out to meet Rohit, in the grip of intense emotions.... Harsh restrictions were imposed on her thereafter. She had fallen low in everyone's esteem. RambhauKaqvale didn't even accept water from her hands. Holding up the honour of both her natal and marital homes became an intolerable burden for her.” (119)

SharankumarLimbale's, *Hindu*, does not only highlights Sonali's miseries but also focuses on other females who were facing the curse of being a Dalit. The stigma of untouchability has not spared anyone especially women. After the murder of Tatyakamble, the Dalits were scattered in different places because of fear they were hidden in the fields to save their life. Manikchand and Gopichand with Milind went to their farm house and they were least bothered about the murder. Even though the murder of the Dalit pricked Milind as they belong to the same caste he was not able to react to the situation as he was in company with the upper caste men of the night. Gopichand and Manikchand got a Dalit girl hidden in the fields and they wanted to rape her. Milind opened the latch of the restroom and he heard the sound of women's anklet. Both of them were dragging her resisting body. They disrobed her and she pleaded them to leave her.

"I heard the sounds of a woman's anklet and saw Gopichand dragging her in. Manikchand locked the gate and now both of them were dragging her resisting body. They managed to bring her inside ... Gopichand lifted her and went into the bedroom. The woman was crying. 'Take off your clothes'. 'I fall at your feet. Don't do that'. 'Take off your clothes, or else I will take them off'. 'I fall at your feet. Spare me.' 'If you don't listen to us, we will rape you and kill you later. Do you understand.' 'O please don't kill me!' (19-20)

Another instance which portrayed the heinous crime inflicted on women was when a grand pooja was performed in the temple. Dalit lady, Draupadi, reached the temple after sweeping the village streets. Vishnu Pujari had his eyes on her. She asked for Prasad and Vishnu

Pujari told her to come inside the temple to get it she told that her place is near the steps how can a Mahra come into the temple. But still he asked her to get into the temple and when she entered into the temple he grabbed her she tried to release herself from his grip by shouting and later on Sudhakar entered the temple and she ran away and Vishnu Pujari face fell for the deed he has committed.

“Draupadi reached the temple after sweeping the village streets. Vishnu Pujari had had his eyes on her for a long time. He called out for her. ‘Ji...’ Draupadi responded. ‘Do you want prasad? Come inside’. ‘How can I come in? My place is at the bottom of the steps.’ ‘Nobody is looking. Come on, come inside.’ ‘God will be defiled.’ ... ‘But I am a Mang, an untouchable.’ ‘I am asking you, don’t worry. I will give you prasad.’ Draupadi put her broom near the steps, covered her head with her sari, touched the step devoutly, and began climbing up the temple steps with devotion.

“how scared you are! Come, come,’ Vishnu Pujari grabbed her hand and started dragging her towards the back of the temple. Draupadi tried to free her hand but Vishnu Pujari’s grip was stronger. ‘Let go of my hand.’...‘I won’t.” (129-130).

This portrays the picture of lust and sex which has enveloped Vishnu Pujari. He saw the opportunity and pounced on Draupadi just like a lion pounces on his bait. The horrific picture encompasses the fateful plight of the women in our society who are still subjugated, dominated and crushed under the heels of the patriarchal system. For a Dalit women it turns out to be even worse as they are doubly marginalised on the grounds of being a female and another their belongingness from the lower caste.

Vishnu Pujari in order to take revenge on Draupadi he told Sadashiv that he has doubt on Draupadi as she doesn't come to the temple and she never gets Prasad too. And later in the afternoon, he collected some stones and he went on the roof and himcast the stones on some houses. Everyone in the village came out and Sadashiv More told people that it was Draupadi who did the black art and they went straight to her house she was stripped naked and she was taken around the village naked. The Draupadi in Mahabharata was not stripped naked. But Draupadi in independent India was as she was a Dalit.

“Come, I will take you to the witch,’ Sadashiv More led the crowd towards the Mangwada. It was as if the men were going on a haunt. They were very agitated... They grabbed Draupadi by the hair and dragged her outside. She shouted and screamed. A crowd was assembled outside her hut. ‘let us take her to the village,’ someone in the crowd shouted. Draupadi began to weep. She fell at people’s feet but no one listened to her. The crowd roared. Blows and kicks rained down on Draupadi. Her sari came off. Sadashiv More ripped her blouse. She was stripped naked.” (146)

The precarious situations faced by women in the novel gives the readers a thorough picture of the women’s situation in our society. Dalit movement is to bring about a positive change in everyone’s life regardless of their gender. But the motive of having an egalitarian society for both the gender is dwindling. Dalit movement will not achieve its aim of freedom till a woman doesn’t attain her equal position in the society.

As Pramod K. Nayar argues that New Historicism locates texts within contexts while showing how literary and other texts produce contexts, Limbale's *Hindu* amplifies the power relations signifying the need for understanding women of both the communities who are under subjugation and also in great pressure due to an unwanted quarrel in the name of existing power relations in India.

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