

Double Marginalised Dalit Self in Sharankumar Limbale's
The Outcaste

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ABSTRACT

Dalit Literature began as a protest against the unjust social order.
Akkarmashi

or *The Outcaste*, a landmark in Marathi Dalit Literature is an emotionally
numbing autobiography written by Sharankumar Limbale in the Mahar
dialect

of Maharashtra in 1984. He portrays the humiliation Dalit community faced
at

the hands of an unthinking privileged class. Limbale describes the miserable
life he lived as an outcaste ,not having an identity or home. In his

autobiography he shows the inequality, discrimination and indifference

suffered by Dalits. The present paper brings out the double marginalised self

of a Dalit in the post independence India, the discrimination he suffered on
the basis of caste, identity crisis and economic disparity. It sheds light on
how a man who is within a marginalised community is susceptible to even

more marginalisation.

FULL PAPER

The Double Marginalised Dalit Self in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*

Dalit literature is a medium to express the experiences of the exploited, marginalised and humiliated sector of the caste-ridden Indian society. It reflects the Dalit sensibility and experience and often considered as a protest literature and a weapon to strengthen the Dalit movement. The renowned scholar Dr. C. B. Bharati in his book, *Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* states:

The aim of the Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit literature, an aesthetics based on the real experiences of life.(2)

Dalit literature was considered to be a creative literary expression of social realities in various literary genres. In general, Dalit literature depicts the sufferings of people who had been socially and economically exploited by the upper caste people in India for hundreds of years. The principle intention of Dalit literature is to make the society to rethink about religion, justice, dignity and social relationship. Sharankumar Limbale in his *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* says that,

Unlike classical literature, Dalit literature needs to be studied from sociological perspective. If we look for classics in Dalit literature today, we can't find any. This literature deals with social problems,

social order and social movement. And today, instead of teaching our youth classics, it is more important to teach them what is a social movement, what the social order is and what our social problems are.

(146)

The Dalit writings as a distinct literary phenomenon emerged initially in Marathi in the 1960s and 1970s and in other Indian languages in the 1980s and 1990s. The Marathi Dalit writers gave vent to their struggle against the caste system in their autobiographical writings. Writers like Laxman Mane, Siddalingaiah, Bama, Omprakash Valmiki, Narendra Jadhav are few who received awards for their life story novels.

Sharankumar Limbale, born in Maharashtra is one of the famous Dalit writers in India. His autobiography *Akkarmashi* or *The Outcaste* was published in Marathi in 1984 and later it was translated into Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi and Malayalam. Santosh Bhoomkar translated it into English as *The Outcaste* in 2003.

The word ‘Akkarmashi’ is a Marathi word which means a person who is born as illegitimate or impure or incomplete. The Mahar community calls Sharan as ‘Akkarmashi’ because he was born to a high caste father and a low caste mother through an illegal affair.

The Outcast is an autobiographical novel by Sharankumar Limbale. He wrote this novel with the hope of disclosing the injustice and exploitation forced by himself as well as his Dalit community. The novel took place in the village called Hannoar in Maharashtra. The novel began with a school picnic of the narrator, Sharan. At the

picnic the higher caste classmates brought delicious foods and they shared their food with the teacher. The teacher asked the Dalit boys to collect the leftover food.

The next day teacher asked them to write about their experience in the school picnic. Sharan was not able to write as his experiences were only humiliations from his classmates and from his teacher. When the teacher noticed him simply seated, he grew annoyed and shouted:

You, son of a bitch, come on,

Start writing!

You like eating an Ox,

Don't you? (*The Outcaste*, 3)

Limbale portrays the poignant and cursed life of the oppressed Dalit community who were only identified by their hunger and poverty. The Dalits were deserved to eat garbage food to appease their hunger. Sharankumar says,

Bhakari is as large as man. It is as vast as the sky, and bright like the sun, hunger is bigger than man. Hunger is more vast than seven circles of hell. Man is only as big as a bhakari and only as big as his hunger. Hunger is more powerful than man. A single stomach is like the whole earth. (*The Outcaste*, 50)

Sharankumar has portrayed the pathetic image of a Dalit woman by depicting the life of his own mother, Masamai. She was ruined by a patil, Hanmanta Limbale. Masamai was married to Ithal Kamble who worked in the farm of Limbale, She was made to divorce and was made a whore to Hanmanta . Out of this relationship

Masamai gave birth to a baby boy, Sharankumar Limbale. Sharankumar was disowned by his father, Hanmanta and he abandoned both mother and child, as a result Sharankumar was identified as ‘outcaste’ by the society. Throughout his life he lived in inferiority, but his identity gets voice in the lines:

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put yes with the fruit of its illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus?... How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her as a whore? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I really? (*The Outcaste*, 37).

To be a Dalit in the caste-ridden society is a curse but to be an illegitimate within the Dalit community is a redoubled curse. The renowned scholar Mini Babu in the work *The Dalit Vision and Voice* says that,

The narrator- protagonist is someone more inferior to a Dalit. It is surprising to note that he is an untouchable among the untouchables, His identity is that of an “Akkarmashi” all this is what the narrator tries to present through the many episodes of his life..... (42-43)

Sharankumar describes his pathetic situation of not having an identity, a home or place of his belonging throughout his life. When the name of Hanmanta Limbale was added to Sharankumar’s name in the school record, Hanmanta threatened the Headmaster, Bhosale for not to include his name with a Dalit boy’s name. Hanmanta simply disown his son and rejects the claims of his off-spring. His lack of identity

forces him to terminate his love for Shewanta, a girl whom he was crazy about at his school days. Sharankumar inherited neither of the identity of his father's caste nor of his mother's caste. In the house of Shewanta, his lacking identity seemed to be a humiliating one and this put an end to their love. Sharankumar found it difficult to get a wife as he could not even get married to an outcaste girl because the entire society including the Dalit community considered him as an outcaste among the outcaste and his blood was impure.

Sharankumar was alienated within the family itself, even though he had many sisters and brothers who had different fathers sharing the same mother. This shows the extent of exploitation towards the Dalit women. Even the siblings humiliate each other by questioning their blood relation:

We did quarrel but that was only while we were playing. Sometimes when Nagi got annoyed with me, she abused me; you have no connection with us. Nobody knows where you come from. Our fathers are not the same....(*The Outcaste*, 63)

Thus Sharankumar's *The Outcaste* is a powerful voice of the author to fight for Dalit's identity in the society that has been refused for them since age old time by the non-dalits who adamantly follow the principle of caste-system which was devised by them. It is about the journey of a Dalit family struggling hard for survival and attains a respectful status in the society. By presenting his own life story, he portrays the entire Dalit community's craving for securing dignity and identity.

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