

Struggle for Identity in Sharankumar Limbale's "Akkarmashi": A Dalit Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Sharan Kumar Limbale's work, *Akkarmashi*, to re-examine the Dalit discourse and the dialectics of oppression and emancipation of dalits who have been subjected to the scourge of untouchability. Initially considered merely a protest, Dalit discourse has acquired a recognizable identity with its content, form and style. The study finds that Sharan Kumar Limbale, a prolific writer, depicts the annals of suffering, humiliation, mental anguish, self-realization, rebellion, retaliation, and rehabilitation that are the life spirits of Dalit literature. In his work, *Akkarmashi*, the individual identity gets assimilated into the larger social milieu, however later to be seen as reincarnated and rehabilitated with the access of self, identity and assertion.

Keywords: Identity, community, self, untouchable, caste.

Introduction

It is generally believed that the term "Dalit literature" was initially coined in 1958 during the first-ever conference of Dalit literature held in Mumbai. Though, as an identity marker, the name "Dalit first appeared in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writer-activists formed an organization called Dalit Panthers" (Mukherjee xviii). Dalit literally means the suppressed and the oppressed, i.e., the poor, scheduled tribes, females and all those beings that are exploited economically and politically. The Dalit literature often tries to give voice to these important concerns.

In India, Dalits are a group of people who are historically acknowledged as untouchables, separated from a society based on the caste-system. The term Dalit has been derived from the Sanskrit word "dal which means cracked, downtrodden, suppressed, underprivileged, crushed, broken, and destroyed". It is a Marathi and Hindi translation of the depressed class and was used in 1930s. During Dalit panther movement in 1970 in Maharashtra, this word was invigorated. In the nineteenth century, "Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, used this word to depict outcastes and untouchables as downtrodden, shattered, and victims of the Indian caste structure". B. R. Ambedkar used 'broken people' for Dalits in *The Untouchables*. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called them "Harijans which means Children of God". Britishers named these socially imprisoned people 'the depressed class' which was later used as Scheduled castes.

Akkarmashi the title itself is descriptive of its inherent intimation of dynamics of caste system. The author is embarked on the impossible mission of self quest which is simultaneously true to community. This work also focused on the brutal social system and culture which do speed up the biased social beliefs. One of the most important aspects of this work is the truthful portrayal of prevailed discrimination among the discriminated.

Most of his writings are in Marathi and translated into English and other languages. He is a well-known writer and his writings mostly rest on the Dalit struggle and identity. He is known for his poetry, short stories and particularly for his master-piece, novel *Akkarmashi* (2004). His novel is written in Marathi language and translated into Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi, Gujarati, Malayalam languages. Anyhow, it trapped the attention of the world especially after translated into English as *The Outcaste* by Santhosh Bhoomkar. He bagged many awards and won the praise from the public for his literary talents. His critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Studies* is considered as a most resource book on Dalit criticism. He is a member of many academic and cultural organizations and

many scholars busy in active research on his writings. He won prestigious 14 awards for his literary and social contributions. His other books include *Udrek* [poetry collection], *Bahujan*, *Zund*, *Hindu*, *Upalya*, [novels] *Dalit Brahman*, [short stories] *Dalit Sahityache Saundarya Shastra* [criticism] and others.

Discussion

Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* authoring at an age of twenty-five depicts the realistic accounts of his life as a Dalit in particular and which can be extended to the life of any individual of *Mahar* community in general. The very title of the novel '*Akkarmashi*' is symbolic of his plight.

Limbale describes the life of a man who suffered not only through this caste system but also through the pain of not even being allowed into the caste system: he was an outcaste, below everyone else. The *Outcaste* clearly shows how the lives of India's lower caste people are completely controlled by the society around them.

The aim of Dalit writings is to rebel against the conventional system which is based on injustice and to depict the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes and its system. There is an instant requirement to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit writings, an aesthetics based on the authentic experiences of life.

Sharankumar Limbale's novel *The Outcaste* is translated version of original Marathi *Akkarmashi* into English by Santosh Bhoomkar. Limbale's *The Outcaste* is about an untouchable family in general and the community struggles in particular. His novel speaks about how an innocent Dalit couple Kamble and Masamai are discriminated and exploited by an upper caste landlord Hanmantha Limbale for whom the poor couple used to work day and night. Ithal Kamble, Masamai's husband is a farm worker on a yearly contract to a landlord. It was a job worth seven or eight hundred rupees. Ithal Kamble toiled on the farm owned by Hanmantha Limbale, a Patil and helped by him during hard times. Hanmantha Patil intentionally ruined the poor family and it led to their separation forever. After the divorce with Masamai, Kamble left the place with two sons Surya Kanth and Dharma and remarried. Masamai remained a keep of Hanmantha Limbale and gave birth to Sharankumar Limbale. Masamai was given a rented house at Akkalkot. Sharankumar Limbale states that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. As Masamai was beautiful, she was lured by Hanmantha. She was divorced by her husband and suffered a lot. Though Hanmantha enjoyed the beauty of Masamai, he had always in mind that Masamai was a Dalit and had been trying to avoid her.

The narrator-protagonist is someone less important to a Dalit. It is surprising to note that he is an untouchable among the untouchables. His identity is that of an "*Akkarmashi*" and this is what the narrator tries to present through the many episodes of his life. "*Akkarmashi*" in Marathi means eleven it needs another one to complete itself, to become twelve, a dozen which signifies completeness. With a government job and education to support him, Limbale still finds it difficult to get a life partner. Limbale never enjoyed the option of selecting beloved of his choice. A single attempt at bride-viewing ends in disaster. At one point the reader suspects Limbale to be satisfied with any woman as a wife. He does not make a choice. Maryappa Kambale was a peon in the *Zilla Parishad* at Barshi. He had four sons Arun, Hari, Rahul, Sunil and a daughter Kusum. Under the influence of liquor he promised Sharankumar to give his daughter to him. Before that Sharankumar tried lot to arrange his marriage but everywhere he heard the same tone that he is an '*Akkarmashi*'. When Sharankumar was in Sholapur for his further education in Dayanand College on the road he came across Maryappa Kambale lay on the road under the influence of liquor. Every time Maryappa came at Sholapur for his own work and demanded money at Sharankumar to go back at his place Barshi. Sharankumar had sympathy for Maryappa. So he gave money to him and reminded that he promised about his daughter and Sharan's marriage. When Maryappa told him about his daughter Kusum that she is matured Sharan was very happy to hear about Kusum. Then Sharankumar got married with Kusum and his sister Nirmi got married with Maryappa's son Hari. Maryappa's other family members were against

this marriage. But instead of all these Maryappa Kambale arranged two marriages. Sharankumar wanted his wedding ceremony conducted as per Buddhist rituals but Kaka insisted on traditional Hindu rituals. He does not make a choice. He gets a wife out of sympathy and his occasional bribing his would be father-in-law with alcohol. He notes: "The girl I married needed to be a hybrid like me to ensure a proper match. A bastard must always be matched with another bastard. No one else will marry their daughters to a bastard like me"(Limbale 98).

The text becomes the eye witness account of horrors of the lives of the particular subaltern community. The writer interrogates the significance of inferiority not merely in terms of caste but also in terms of religion and in terms of crushing poverty which has almost clear his essence and reduced his existence to less important human being. The narrative of burden, specially related to writer's identity, becomes further complicated by the fact that he was brought up by the grandfather like figure who happened to be a Muslim, namely Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar, who lives with his grandmother Santamai.

Sharankumar has highlighted issues of Dalit world through this novel. Here his mother was maltreated and remained victim forever. She and her children neither accepted nor cared by the Patils. She was exploited like a commodity. By this novel Sharankumar has tried to get human acceptance and human dignity in traditional world. He has not even thought of asking for property from his so called father, the person who is the cause of his birth.

Dalit women were frequently dishonored. Rarely any case has been filed and rest remains unregistered. As a result children were born through these relationships without identity of castes, father or class. Sharankumar has very audaciously depict the real picture of it uncovered the double standards of the powered orthodox. The children born out of these sorts of relationships are not accepted by the so called traditional Indian society. Sometimes in the cases of child adoption, caste is considered as chief factor.

Conclusion

Akkarmashi – The Outcaste is an intense narrative, pointing to the pointlessness of these questions and the agony and frustration in searching for their answers. Who am I? The question of identification raised by narrator in the novel *Akkarmashi*. Who is am I ? Caste or Outcaste ? Who am I ? Through the chain of these questions this novel has completed.

Sharankumar's Limbale's novel, in its effect on the reader's, is poignancy for the widest possible fraternity which does not get fractured by caste-community considerations. This text is a part of Dalit's struggle to realize the incompleteness of Indian society because of the exclusion experienced by them. He equalizes this condition of the Dalit exclusion to that of the Blacks and exploited workers thrown on the margin by the capitalist system of economic relationship. The inter-textual reading goes a long way in giving us a clear understanding of his views on the Dalit subjectivity. In the later part he explores the common spirit of freedom and struggle which imbues all the movements against slavery of each and every sort. Therefore, both at the level of detailing the life experiences in his novel as well as suggestions ways for an equitable society, Limbale comes out as a strongly confident Dalit writer. Dalit writers do not keep the urban readers in a pedestal while creating a work of art. Their main intention is to inform and expose the evil practice that shapes Indian society. They write in order to throw a light on the problems of society. Unlike other writers they do not have pre conceived sets of audience or readers to acknowledge their work. It is also important to note that form is something which a Dalit writer is not concern about because the context lays the foundation in their writing.

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