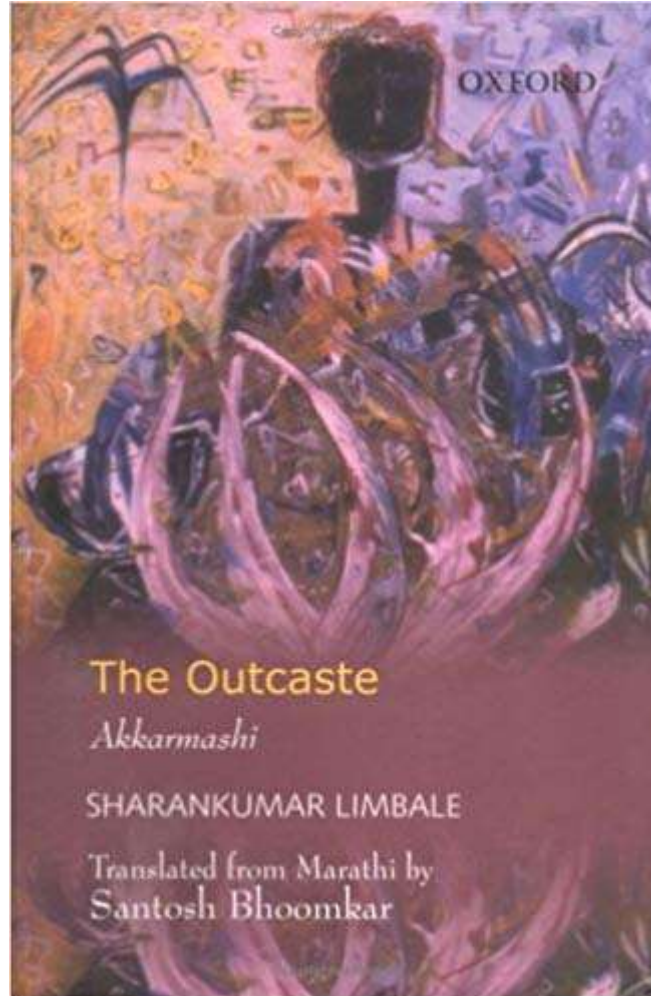


**Excruciating Reparation and Justice: A Study of
Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste***

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Abstract

Dalit literature is a representation of life which is both individual and society oriented. It is based on life experience. Authenticity and liveliness have become the hallmark of Dalit literature. *The Outcaste* describes the anguish and charade of the cultural tumult that opened up Marathi literature to Dalit writing. Sharankumar neither belongs to Mahar community nor Mahar caste, he is outcaste. Due to his identity, the narrator suffers his entire life and at the same time he has no identity, no home or place of belonging. The clouds of doubt and identity fall over his entire life.

Keywords: Sharankumar Limbale, Dalit Literature, Autobiography, Testimonial, Caste, Community, Trauma

Dalit Literature

“The anguish of Dalit literature is not that of an individual but of the entire outcast society” (*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* 31). Dalit literature is the forum and the medium of expression of the experiences of the communities that have been ostracized, marginalised, exploited and humiliated for ages in the Indian caste-ridden Hindu society. In many ways, it is a protest literature which faithfully mirrors the stark realities of the Dalit situation and becomes an important weapon to strengthen the Dalit movement.

Sharankumar Limbale

Limbale has argued that Dalit writing must be rooted in the material suffering of the Dalits. He certainly writes, “Dalit literature is life-affirming literature. All the strands of this literature are tied to life. It is the clear assumption of the Dalit writer that: ‘My literature is my life, and I write for humanity’” (*TADL* 105). Testimonial is a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history of those lives realities that could otherwise be erased. Autobiographies have been critical in offering an artistic form and methodology to create politicised understandings of identity and community.

Dalit Autobiography

Indian Dalit autobiographies bear witness and testify life experiences. The Dalit autobiographies draw theory in live experiences and foreground the geographical, historical, and especially racial and class differences between and amongst them. Their personal testimonies bring about the points of resistance and recovery and begin the healing process. Though autobiographies are a record of trauma and survival, within the frame of rhetorical listening and an ethics of reading, it is a programme for future action. Once truth has been established through autobiographies, it entails, indeed demands, reparation and justice.

Autobiographies demand an ethical engagement on the part of the reader and spectator and seek a reconfiguration of social spaces. Nicholas B. Dirks argues that, “it was during the colonial period that caste becomes a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all systematizing India’s diverse forms of social identity, community and organization” (qtd. in *Self and Society* 105).

Dalit and Dalit Writers

The terms Dalit and Dalit writers are a new phenomenon in the life, literature and history of India. Dalit as a matter of fact, have no literary history of their own and they have produced no literature till the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Eminent writers like Daya Pawar, Namdev Dhasal and Sharankumar Limbale are recognized at the national level for their works in the Dalit genre. His auto-biographical work *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* was published when he was twenty-five. Limbale examines two voices of oppression which are perceptible in his autobiography. One is the united tone of the Dalit people who communicate for their right and the second is about Limbale himself who reveals his interior troubles of his life. Limbale is the ostracised child of the Dalit community called Mahar. In Limbale’s words, *The Outcaste* brings to spotlight “the woes of the son of a whore” (*The Outcaste* IX).

The Outcaste

In *The Outcaste*, Limbale openly remarks that, “Dalit writers believe that Dalit literature is a movement. They see their literature as a vehicle for their pain, sorrow, questions and problems” (*TADL* 105). Dalits have started expressing and publishing their agonies, hardships and inhuman treatment given to them by the Brahmins and the upper caste people in their society.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:7 July 2018

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Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations

In *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, Limbale includes the power of Dalit movement which gives the Dalit people to live with basic rights. He says, “Dalit Literature is not simply Literature . . . Dalit Literature is associated with a movement to bring about change. . . At the first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them; instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view” (2). It is the emotionally violent autobiography of a half-caste growing up in the Mahar community and the anguish he suffers from not belonging completely into it. The social stratification and injustice arising out of the concept of caste attached to the accident of birth is the crux of the autobiography.

Vandana Pathak says in her article “Dialectics of Tropes in Sharan Kumar Limbale *Outcaste*”:

My history is my mother’s life, at the most my grandmother’s. My ancestry does not go back any further. My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father in a mansion. Father is a landlord; mother, landless. I am an *Akkarmashi*. I am condemned, branded illegitimate.” (31)

Unenviable Life of the Poor and Oppressed

Limbale describes the pitiable life of the protagonist who suffers from not belonging to neither the upper caste nor to the Mahar community. Thereby his life becomes pathetic and submissive and turns out to be an *Akkarmashi – Love-child*.

He also portrays poignantly the pathetic and unenviable life of a poor and oppressed community. He raises some pertinent question to be answered by people who consider themselves as upper caste and lower caste. How is a person born with his caste? How does he become an untouchable as soon as he is born? How can he be a criminal? The condition of the untouchables is such that they steal, beg, fetch skin animals and eat them, in order to appease their hunger.

Hanmanta Limbale raped Masamai, who is an untouchable caste of the society. Masamai is not adulterous but a victim of the social system. Limbale’s psyche is chaotic and is unable to answer ‘who am I?’. He says, “I regard the immortality of my father and mother as a metaphor for rape. . . I grow restless whenever I read about a rape in the Newspaper. A violation anywhere in the country, I feel, is a violation of my mother” (IX).

Love-child - *Akkarmashi*

In Marathi, meaning of *Akkarmashi* is love-child or illicit child, an offspring born out of socially unacceptable relationship, an offspring born out of a relationship in which a woman has been made a mistress by a well-to-do and inhuman person, by exploiting her helplessness. Masamai is initially married to a poor man named Ithal Kamble. They both worked as grass mower and there suffered famine. After the mowing, they carried the bundles to the town which is very far. Their gain and loss depend on their hard work. There is no transport facility in the village. It is hard to carry the load eight miles away from the place. In the landlord’s house, Kamble is a like beast which toils on the farm. His poverty is his disadvantage, like the “yoke-inflamed shoulder of an ox” (*The Outcaste* 35). He always worries for his food. Limbale ponders on how the Dalits slog like a beast in the field. Dalit people rebel not to enjoy the royalty but to eat in order to survive in the world as human beings.

Limbale's Birth and Life

Limbale recollects the thought of his Akkarmashi birth which made him suffer throughout his life. Limbale says,

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? . . . Did anyone admire me distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? . . . which family would claim me as its descendent? Whose son am I, Really? (*The Outcaste* 37)

Limbale is disappointed in his life from his early childhood. He feels that Masamai was unfaithful towards herself and her kids. Limbale accuses Masamai for being so heartless. Being mentally agonised of his accusations and tortured of atrocities, Masamai returns to her mother Santamai with Limbale.

Limbale's family has no place or house to live like other villagers. They mostly spend their days in the bus stand in Hooner. Limbale points out "to us the bus stand was like home . . . we lay like discarded bus tickets. We had to get up in the morning or risk annoying the driver and conductor. Once they actually threw our sheets and rugs out on the road?" (42). He feels ashamed to be living in such shambles. This corroborates the pitiable state of Dalits in India.

Limbale grabs the opportunity and eat the food vivaciously. He expresses that, "God endowed man with a stomach. So, man began to enjoy eating and drinking" (*The Outcaste* 8). Limbale considers that God made a mistake by creating a man with only one stomach.

Limbale shares the conversation with God that, "Man then went to God and said, 'oh God, you made a mistake by giving me just one stomach. I want to eat and drink a great deal; it will be a blessing if you give me two stomachs.' God replied, go away first try filling this one stomach and then come back to me. I will certainly give you one more" (*The Outcaste* 8). But a man is not able to fill the stomach. He fills only the half of it and lives by swallowing his own saliva. Limbale points out that in their community, "A Women becomes a whore and a Man a thief" (*The Outcaste* 8). The Maharwada people wait for the time and venue of the wedding functions in their neighbourhood to have some food.

Pitiable Condition of Dalit Women

Dalit women submit to the physical lust of upper caste Hindus, as womanhood is their only property they could survive with. He says, "A man can eatpaan and spit as many times as he likes, but the same is not possible for woman" (36). Once a woman's chastity is lost it can never be restored. Under such circumstances, they are forced to live a sub-human existence. They find nowhere to take refuge but in their own self. This is the quest that every Dalit writer shares with the others.

Life in Maharwada

In the Maharwada, if any Ox dies, the people drag it away, skin it and sell it. For doing the work and selling the skin, the landlord pays them eight measures of Jowar which provides them a small way to utilise the money to make their hunger less. During the nights, Maharwada get together and old people share their stories. The old men intoxicate themselves with bidies and tobacco. When an animal die in the village, the owner orders the Maharwada people to dispose them from their house. But if it is cow, the owner becomes worried of it, because cow is considered sacred for

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:7 July 2018

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Hindus. In a month, if many animals die, they will have enough food to eat and satisfy their hunger. On the contrary, if no animal dies, Mahars' condition becomes very worst as they will hardly get anything to eat. Hence, Mankunna and Pralhadbaap search for buffaloes and steal them. Limbale and friends spend the whole night slaughtering and slashing up the animals. And the very next day they distribute to the entire household. These are the situations that they encounter to survive in the world where no one is ready to help them by giving education or work. The Mahars are considered to be animals' buffaloes and they are willing to steal and kill the animal in order to satisfy their hunger.

To Conclude

Thus, *The Outcaste* describes the pain of the cultural turmoil that opens Dalit writing in Marathi literature. It is a novel written for a universal purpose as it is woven around chaos and traumas underwent by both men and women of the Dalit community. Due to the fractured identity of the narrator, he has to suffer his entire life without a proper home or place of belonging. The cloud of doubt and identity hangs over the entire life of the poor outcaste boy.

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