

**WRITING THE OTHERNESS: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF
SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *THE OUTCASTE***

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Abstract

*It is a known factor that the issue of caste discrimination is the common story of several Dalits in India. A good number of modern, contemporary sociologists and historians have explained different (visible and invisible) forms of caste discrimination. Several Indian English writers also tried to address the issue from their nationalist and progressive point of view. Recently, Human Rights activists have extended their solidarity to the Dalits and highlighted the issue in front of all United Nations Bodies. But all these attempts have limitations and remain at periphery. In the process of emerging Dalit writings, it is an attempt to foreground the Dalits version of caste discrimination. The paper is also an attempt to study the experience, form and nature of discrimination thematically from Dalit literary perspective with reference to Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003).*

Keywords: *Dalit, outcaste, sociolinguist, discrimination, class, economic dependency*

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Introduction

Dalit literature interface Postcolonial criticism. Peter Barry in *Beginning theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2008)ⁱ points out that one significant effect of postcolonial criticism is to further undermine the universal claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanists. Similarly the effect of Dalit literature is to undermine the nationalist claims once made on behalf of Indian literature by the elitist writers like RK Narayan, Rjarao and Mulkraj Anad and their successors. As the postcolonial criticism rejects the Eurocentric universalism, the Dalit literature rejects the Brahman oriented nationalism. As a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued.ⁱⁱ Similarly the perspective of Dalit literature is to reclaim its past just not narrating the pains and sufferings but by identifying the assertion of the Dalits questioning the elitist assumptions of devaluing the Dalits. As the postcolonial writers rightly specify the polemical contribution of the theorists Frantz Fanon for his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Said for his *Orientalism* (1978), the Dalits writers specify the authentic *Dalitisation* and it is due to the democratic revolution of Ambedkar who dedicated his life time for educating, uplifting and empowering the Dalits. Especially Dr. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1944) is highly influential and instrumental. Through the augmentation of the anti-caste and non-brahman philosophical doctrines elevated by Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalit writers assert themselves and question the caste hierarchy.

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) is one among such works.

I

A closer look reveals the discrimination inherent in the allocation of jobs, land, basic resources and amenities, and even physical security. A closer look at victims of violence, bonded labour, and other severe abuses also reveals disproportionate membership in the lowest ranking in the caste order. A perpetual state of economic dependency also allows for abuses to go unpunished, while biased state machinery looks the other way, or worse, becomes complicit in the abuse.

Sukhadeo Thorat, an accomplished Dalit Scholar, Economist and Human Rights Activist, gives the critical note that "The Hindu social order, particularly its main pillars, viz., the caste system and untouchability, presents a unique case. As a system of social, economic and religious governance, it is founded not on the principle of the liberty (or freedom), equality and fraternity, the values which formed the basis of universal human rights, but on the principle of inequality in every sphere of life."ⁱⁱⁱ He further analyses that "the Hindu social order is based on three interrelated elements, namely, predetermination of social, religious and economic rights of each caste based on birth; the unequal and hierarchical (graded) division of these rights among the castes; and social stigma associated with work or occupation and provision of strong social, religious and economic ostracism."^{iv}

At the bottom the Hindu social order Dalits are treated as 'sub-human beings' or 'lesser human beings' and consequently Dalits are considered unworthy of any rights. Untouchables are treated as inferior social beings and therefore not entitled to any individual rights, i.e., civic, religious, political and economic. In fact, the disabilities are so severe that they are physically and socially isolated and excluded from the rest of the society. Isolation and exclusion of untouchables is a unique feature of the Hindu social order. To explain this so called uniqueness of Hindu social order, Dalit writers invented a new language and new discourse to counter the orthodox orientation of Hindu social order. The failure of the mainstream reforms, sociologists, historians and human rights activist is that they did not comprehend the Dalits anxiety and

their language. They are all entangled with liberal, legal and rights discourse framework which denies the space for Dalits who are generally treated as objects of filthy, illiterate and uncivilized. The greatest efforts that the modern Dalit writers brought to the academic discourse is that the living experiences written by themselves, which is the most important object of study in this paper.

II

SharanKumar Limbale's autobiography *The Outcaste* (2003) is translated from its original Marati *Akkarmashi* into English by Santosh Bhoomkar. Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) is about an untouchable family in general and the community struggles in particular. His Autobiography 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 a husband left women.

Masamai remained a keep of Hanmantha Limbale and gave birth to Sharan Kumar Limbale. Masamai was given a rented house at Akkalkot. Sharan Kumar Limbale states that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. As Masamai was beautiful, she was lured by Hanmanth. She was divorced by her husband and suffered a lot. Though Hanmanth enjoyed the beauty of Masamai, he had always in mind that Masamai was a Dalit and had been trying to avoid her. He also commented that the newly born child was looked after Bhondya, the potter. Limbale writes, "Finally my mother and I come to stay with Santamai, my grandmother. Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything?" (Limbale, 37)^v

People who enjoyed high caste privileges authority sanctioned by religion and inherit property had exploited the Dalits. The upper caste men in every village had made whores of the wives of Dalit from labourers and Masamai was one among them. After divorced from Ithal Kamble, Masamai gave birth to Sharan Kumar Limbale. After Sharan Kumar and Nagi, Masamai gave birth to so many children. Limbale writes, "We were all of one womb and blood. We shared a common mother but different fathers...I was born from her affair with Hanmantha Patil. Masamai had Nagubai, Nirmala, Vanmala, Sunanda, Pramila, Shrikant, Indira and Sidram from Kaka, whose name was Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil the head of the village named Hanoor." (38) Masamai's life like a pet dove to village Patils speaks out how the poor Dalit families were destroyed and the innocent Dalit women were exploited. Masamai neither belonged to the Patil community as she was a Mahar women nor a Mahar as she became a whore of Patils, so Masamai and her children lived in Maharwada but with out Mahar identity due to impurity in Limbale's blood. This kind of alienation experienced by Limbale is found throughout his autobiography. Limbale's *The Outcaste* depicts the most humiliated events and insults Limbale and his family members experienced in different places like Akkalkot, Hanoor, Chungi, Chapalgaon, Sholapur, Ahmedpur, Barshi and Bhimnagar in Latur.

Akkalkot is a small village where Masamai is kept in a rented house. Living in Akkalkat, Masamai lost her attachment with Maharwada and lived in hyphenated conditions. Masamai neither belonged to Maharwada nor Patil's village. Hanumantha Limbale, the Patil of Basalegaon lured Masamai but never intended to join her in his family and always kept her in Akkalkot just as she was an outsider. Hanumantha Limbale wanted Masamai's body and not her caste. Limbale writes, "Hanumantha Limbale lured Masamai. She was given a rented house at Akkalkot, which she accepted. It was a kind of revenge to live openly with the same man who had uprooted her from her family. Hanumantha Limbale possessed her like a put dove. They lived happily. Masamai became a pregnant and gave birth to a son. Who's the

father of this boy? Hanumantha didn't want any of this to happen, but who can disown a child? A child is a reality" (36)

After Limbale was born, Hanumantha had been trying to avoid them and there were quarrels everyday as he didn't acknowledge Limbale as his offspring. Leaving Akkalkot, Masamai went to Hanoor where Santamai, Masamai's mother was living with Jamadar, a Muslim Sharan Kumar Limbale calls Jamadar Dada who works as a porter in Hanoor bus stand. In Hanoor, Limbale went under caste discrimination. The untouchable children were not allowed to sit in the class and asked to sit on the platform. Dalit children sat amidst the footwear flung all around them. Limbale states "During the school interval, the other boys threw stones at me and teased me calling aloud Mahar."(6)

Limbale's experience at the Barber's shop is moving tale. The Barber was adamant and not accepted to cut Limbale's hair. Limbale states, "I was a school boy, and wanted a haircut like that of other boys in the school. So, I went to the barber for the first time (22). The barber first looked at Limbale and then at his head. He shouted, "Don't stand here I am not going to shave your head". (22) Then Limbale showed the barber the money he had but the barber commented to another customer who sympathised with Limbale that he was a Mahar so he didn't want to cut his hair. In this context, Limbale raises a question, "How could this barber, who used to shave buffaloes in the village, refuse to shave my head?" (22)

Limbale's family had not had home to live and spent most of the times inside the bus stand in Hanoor. Limbale writes, "To us the bus stand was like home...We lay like discarded bus tickets. We had to get up early in the morning or risk annoying the driver and the conductor. Once they actually thrum our sheets and rugs out on the road?" (42)

In Hanoor village school where Limbale had studied had classes only up to the seventh form, so when he finished his seventh form; he had to go to a high school in the neighbouring village Chungi. After joining the Chungi School, Limbale and other students were supposed

to apply for a freeship (Scholarship) and the freeship application was to be signed by their parents and duly forward the village Sarpanch. To Limbale, getting the signature of the Sarpanch was a problem as the Sarpanch was in favour of Patil Hanmantha Limbale and said, "I don't approve the name Masamai Hanmantha Limbale?" (59) In fact Limbale never wanted Hanmantha Limbale's name as his guardian in the official record because Hanmantha had deserted Masamai long back and she was living with the Patil of Hanoor, Yeshwantrao Sidramappa. The Sarpanch refused to sign because he was confused to decide Masamai's real husband. At this point Bhosale guruji, teacher of Hanoor School proposed Limbale's grand mother Santamai's name but the Sarpanch refused because she was living with a Muslim. Limbale writes, "The Sarpanch was in a real fix about how to identify me. But I too was a human being. What else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither a father's name, nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all." (59)

As Limbale was an unaccepted off-spring of the Patil, Hanmantha, he was not treated as a true Mahar. When ever Limbale wanted to sit in the community hall meant for Dalits, he was driven away stating that it was not his father's community hall. Limbale writes "...I did not go to the community hall for a few days. Had I gone, someone might have smacked or abused me. I am an alien ...In the Maharwada I felt humiliated as I was considered a bastard; they called me *Akkarmashi*. Yet in the village I was considered Mahar teased as the offspring of one."(62)

III

Dalits were discriminated in the schools as well as at the public places. One day when Parshya and Limbale were on their way to pluck the fruits of a toddy palm, they saw Shobhi an upper caste girl face each other in a narrow path. Shobhi asked them to stay and let her pass. She felt authoritative in voice when Parshya argued. She said, "Mahars have become bold these days. They now dare to walk straight up to you.

Can't you see I am carrying drinking water? Your touch will make it impure." (70) In this context, Shobhi's words make one understand that she worried more about the pollution of water than walking with heavy pot on her head.

Limbale completed his high school education at Chungi and joined in boarding school at Chapalgaon. Chapalgaon was four miles away from Limbale's village Hanoor. As majority of the boys in Chapalgaon were Dalits, Limbale slowly came to know about Buddhism which gave him sense of Self-Respect. One day Santamai, Limbale's grandmother walked the distance between Hanoor and Chapalgaon just to see Limbale. She also brought him a pair of old chappals of someone who had forgotten them at the Hanoor bus stand. Though the chappals were of a woman, Santamai did not give them either to Nagi or Nirmi but to Limbale. Because Limbale used to go to school without chappals. But one of the chappals that Santamai brought was to be repaired and Limbale went to the cobbler to the broken chappal repaired. But the cobbler who knew Santamai was a Mahar said that he could not repair the chappal. Limbale, unable to convince the cobbler, put the ladies chappals on his feet besides being teased by his friends at school.

Limbale is more conscious of caste as he goes on pursuing higher studies. His studies changed his thinking and get aware of caste discrimination that his people had and started hating the idea of untouchability. Limbale writes, "Casteism made us bitter. There was a small tea shop in our village owned by Mangs, where a separate cup and saucer were kept for the Mahars and Mangs. I had seen the cup and saucer many times. We also had to move aside to make way for high - caste persons while passing on the road." (76)

Dalits are excluded from social life. To them, all the provisions are denied on pretty reasons like they are intentionally killing the animals of the upper caste people. Whenever the Dalits are accused of poisoning animals, the village Patils sit together to punish the Dalit. Madduri Nagesh, a famous Dalit poet from Andhra Pradesh stated in his polemical book *Rachabanda* Mention the year of publication (a stone

made big platform) how the upper castes like Kammas, Reddies, Velmas, Kapus of Andhra Pradesh are ready to reprimand, punish and penalise the accused, especially Dalits.

Limbale also writes that the punishments that Mahars in Hanoor village had for very baseless reasons. He reminds us what his grand mother Santamai told him:

Whenever an animal in the village died, the villagers grew annoyed. They considered the Maharwada responsible for it. They tied us to a pole and beat us like animals. They accused of having poisoned the animal. Our women and children cried and shrieked. All the men in the Maharwada were very badly beaten. The village then ostracized the Maharwada for a few days. We would not get any work on the farms. We were denied any provision at the shops though we had the money and were ready to pay. We had reached a dead end. Such humiliation was agonizing. (78)

Water is under the control of the high castes. Though the village wells are dug and built by Dalits, they are not allowed to fetch water from the wells. We could also see why Dr. Ambedkar gave primary importance to set the water free from the upper castes. Kolakaluri Enoch, one of the distinguished Dalit writers in Andhra Pradesh, states in his polemical book "*Oorabaavi*" (Public Well, 1969) how a Dalit woman had thrown skin into the well to save water from the upper caste hands. The *Oorabaavi* speaks about how a dead animal into well which was under the control of upper caste Reddys. Reddys never allowed Madigas (a sect of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh) to draw water from well. Unable to face the problems, a Dalit woman threw a dead animal's skin into the well after which the upper caste Reddys left the well for no use. Later the Dalits cleaned the well and drew water from it. This is how Dalit woman succeeded in getting water.^{vi} K. Purushotham in the article *Evolution of Telugu Dalit Literature* (2010) opines, "The *Oorabaavi* by Enoch containing aspects like search for self-respect, the angst and language of Dalits."^{vii} Similarly Limbale claims, "Even the water was under the control of the high castes...What is so

peculiar about our touch is that it pollutes water, food, houses, clothes, graveyards, teashops, god, religion, and even man." (81) As Limbale is more conscious about humiliation, discrimination that Dalits experienced. "I was growing amidst a conflagration. The roots of the moment were settling more firmly. Injustice towards us was assuming a new meaning. We were awakening under a new consciousness which was becoming more pervasive day by day." (83)

Conclusion

Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) mainly deals with how he did the war against the injustice in the name of caste. It talks about how Dalits are ill treated and discriminated in villages as well as in cities. How great a Dalit in terms of qualification and knowledge, he/she is not spared from experiencing the caste discrimination. Limbale describes his life filled with sufferings not only through this caste system but also through the pain of not even being allowed into the caste system. He presents many events which show us he was treated as an outcaste, below everyone else. He not only suffered from his deep, insatiable hunger, also led his life under the curse of not having pure blood. His battle with hunger and war against the caste system are the major issues of his narrative. More than these issues, he poses, through out his work, numerous questions which emphasize his struggle for identity whether a half-breed and a Dalit. Limbale, through his autobiography, makes us understand that he was highly influenced by Ambedkar and also believes that education brings awareness among Dalits and allows them to question the hegemony of the caste-hindus.

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- ^v Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outcaste*, New Delhi, OUP, 2003, 37. (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).
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