

**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MULTIPLE EXPLOITATION AND  
ABUSE OF DALIT FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHARAN KUMAR  
LIMBALE'S THE OUTCASTE**

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**Abstract**

*Various intersecting genderized and racialized oppressive social constructs have subjected Dalit women to multiple exploitation in the name of their caste, gender and class in Indian society. The present paper critically explores the problematization of the multiple exploitations of Dalit women in the inner circle of their family and the outer social set up, which is legitimized by the hegemonic socio-cultural dogmatic dictums. It has been observed that there is a lot of contradiction and hypocrisy in the perception of status of woman and the treatment meted out to them in Indian society. Generally, Indian women have been glorified and treated as Goddesses for worshipping on one hand, and on the other hand they have been exploited, raped, killed, humiliated and sidelined in their real lives. They are least preferred for the mainstream work within the family structure and always given biased treatment in the outer circle of the society. In such situations, it is found that Dalit Women occupy a unique doubly subordinated place wherein their caste and gender turn them in to sexual objects which are to be possessed, controlled and manipulated as and when required by men. The present paper critically analyzes a well-known autobiography of Dalit writer: the Outcaste (Akkarmashi) by Sharan Kumar Limbale (translated from Marathi by Santosh Bhoomkar in 2003) which primarily recounts the painful memories of inhuman treatment given to Dalit women.*

**Key words: Otherness, Dalit, Multiple Exploitation, Social Constructs, Gender etc.**

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**Introduction:**

“One is not born, rather becomes, a woman...It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine.”

-Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*. 1989)

In *The Second Sex* (1989), Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent French feminist made the above famous statement which is significant in terms of understanding the identity of 'woman' and the politics of making woman inferior to man in all societies across the world. Beauvoir's statement is indicative of the fact that the foundation of gender discrimination lies in woman's derogatory and inferior status created in the hierarchical order of most of the societies. But, in India, it has been referred that the status of woman was on a par with man in Indian society during Vedic period. In those days, women not only enjoyed liberty, equality and cooperation in all walks of their life but they were also the main force in the development of society. However, the social evils like dowry system and polygamy were prevalent in the rich and royal families of that time. In the post-Vedic time, Manu, the author of the ancient Sanskrit code of law, '*Manu Smriti*' (which was the summary of a discourse given to several rishis) restricted the freedom of women and Dalits in which he made derogatory comments against them and gave codes of conduct which eventually gave them a subservient place in all spheres of their life in the society. Later, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar and his followers burned a copy of the *Manu Smriti*, on 25 December 1927 in Mahadsatyagraha as a symbolic protest against the brahminic slavery to unshackle all the downtrodden and voiceless subalterns.

In spite of that, today, all women irrespective of their caste, gender and class, share a common space of 'otherness' in Indian society. However, the 'otherness' of Dalit women has turned their life into hell. Dalit women have always been victims of multiple exploitation. It has been observed that the Dalit women are in double jeopardy. Their life has been worsened for being Dalit and being female in Indian society. Being Dalit, they suffer from casteism and being female they are victims of the non-Dalit as well as their own Dalit males. The present study aims at exploring the deplorable conditions of Dalit women in the select autobiographies: : *the*

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*Outcaste* (Akkarmashi) by Sharan Kumar Limbale (translated from Marathi by SantoshBhoomkar in 2003) which primarily recounts the painful memories of inhuman treatment given to the Dalit women.

The issues of women's multiple oppression have been addressed in the works of many sociologist, historians, political scientists, literary writers, literary critics or theorists, essayists, poets and visual artists, etc. who either identified themselves as feminists or argued "advocated" feminist problems through their writing or other mediums. The stalwarts like Raja Ram Manohar Roy, Mahatma JyotiraoPhule, IshwarchandraVidyaSagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, MaharshiKarve, Agarkar, Ranade, and a few others championed the cause of women's suffering and brought a great transformation in the lives of women in the society. But still women have been exploited, raped, killed, humiliated and sidelined in their lives. They are least preferred for the mainstream work within the family structure and always given biased treatment in the outer circle of the society. The Indian feminist writers like KamlaMarkandaya, Narayan Sahgal, Anita Desai, GeethaHariharan, ShashiDeshpande, Shobha De, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and ManjuKapur and many more others have tried to depict the wretched conditions of women in Indian English writing. But these writers' approach has been limited to the non-Dalit woman's suffering and the upper-caste women's problems in the society. In this context, the issues of Dalit women have not been addressed adequately. Dalit women have a peculiar predicament of being at '*the lowest ladder of brahmanical hierarchical social order*' and bearer of the '*tortures and invisibilities which our patriarchal social order imposes upon the supposedly 'fair sex'*'.(Yadav, 2009) Discussing further on the unique space of 'otherness' of Dalit women, Gopal Guru asserts that Dalit women experience '*two distinct patriarchal structures / situations: a brahmanical form of patriarchy that deeply stigmatized Dalit women because of their caste status, as well as the more intimate forms of control by dalit men over the sexual and economic labour of 'their' women.*'(Rao, 2003) In that way, Dalit women share a common space with their male counterpart and get condemned to the endless suffering and to the horrors of slavery at the hands of upper caste Hindus under the influence of hegemonic Brahmanic ideology of Varnashramdharma. Realizing the non-Dalit feminist or literary writers' exclusive and partial approach to the multiple dimensions of exploitations of Dalit women, Dalit feminists and other Dalit writers have started voicing the concerns of Dalit women through their own literary writing.

To address the issues of Dalits, Dalit literature, one of the major literary forces emerged in the post-colonial period which exclusively gave an authentic account of excruciating pain, suffering, exploitation, social injustice, poverty, hunger, marginalization and victimization of the downtrodden Dalits. SharankumarLimbale a prolific Dalit writer describes the nature of Dalit literature in these words: "*Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice....*"(Limbale, 2010) In Dalit literature, initially the term 'Dalit' was used in a limited sense for the untouchables, SC and ST people who are placed at the bottom in the social hierarchy of

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brahmanic Varnashram system. But later on, the term 'Dalit' has been used for a broader meaning: 'oppressed' and 'broken'. While discussing the broader connotations of the term 'Dalit', M.N.Wankhade rightly mentions the word 'Dalit' does not refer to only Buddhist and Backward class people but to 'all those who toil and are exploited and oppressed.' (Wankhade, 2009) Later the multiple problems of Dalits have been authentically portrayed in the newly emerged Dalit autobiographies in Indian Dalit Literature. The genesis and growth of Dalit autobiographies is mostly attributed to the positive influence of social activism of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule. In the words of Nimbalkar, one of the major Dalit writers, 'the immense potential of Dr. Ambedkar and his philosophy was not restricted to himself or any one particular individual. He handed over to them the flares of his philosophy for development... His thoughts contained a graph of the progress of the people at the grass roots of the society. For this, Dr. Ambedkar's life itself had become a revolution. This revolution had changed the consciousness of the Dalits... That is why, Dr. Ambedkar and his philosophy is the source of Dalit literature.' (Nimbalkar, 2006) With this awakened consciousness, Dalit writers used autobiography as a medium for expressing their turbulent self stories to expose the hypocritical brahmanic social values which segregated society and given inhuman treatment to Dalits and women in the name of religion. It also helped Dalits to bond themselves with their community history and voice their experience of discrimination to re-establish their assertive identity in the modern society. The autobiography writers like Sharan Kumar Limbale ( *The Outcaste* ,2003), Narendhrajadav ( *Outcaste*, 2003), Omprakash Valmiki ( *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* 2003), Baby Kamble ( *The Prisons We Broke*, 2008) , Urmila Pawar ( *The Weave of My Life*), Kishor Shantabai Kale ( *Against All Odds*, 2000) and a few others depicted the problems of the of Dalits, their poor conditions, social deprivation, marginalization, and multiple exploitation at the hands of upper caste Hindus.

The present study critically evaluates a major self-narrative : *the Outcaste* (Akkarmashi) by Sharan Kumar Limbale (translated from Marathi by Santosh Bhoomkar in 2003 in the light of various social-cultural factors which have conditioned the Dalit women's life and forced them into sexual work and other exploitative work. The women characters, in the select autobiography, are shown to have internalized the dichotomy of sexist and casteist oppressive values. Further, in order to unravel the intricacy in the personal and social relationship of women characters, the study will try to scrutinize the social constructions of Dalit womanhood which are invariably connected with the caste system, brahmanic social hierarchy and the institutionalized gender percepts.

### **Research Methodology**

The study uses a systematic approach to the research to bring clarity in the critical analysis of the select auto-narratives. In order to holistically interpret and describe the Dalit women's identity and their experience, the study uses self-narrative methods and feminist narrative analysis techniques within the framework of research that devolve into the sensitive questions of jeopardy of multiple marginalization of Dalit women and the responsible socio-cultural

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factors that lead to cultural alienation and incongruity in the formation of their fragmented psyche and personhood. During the study, the key hegemonic cultural precepts and the personal displacement of Dalit women in the society has been underscored to understand their predicament. Grounded in Dalit feminist epistemology which manifests the reality of Dalit women's lives as informed by the socio-cultural histories and personal experiences recounted by the select author in his literary narrative, the focus of this study encompasses the intersections of the issues of caste, gender and social class of Dalit women to bring a comprehensive view and understanding of their multiple problems.

**Multiple Exploitation and Abuse of Dalit Women in Sharan Kumar Limbale's *the Outcaste* (Akkarmashi)**

The select self-narrative is the testimony of the deteriorated conditions of Dalit women in the modern time. It shows that the caste and gender identities are still systematically used for the perpetuation of degenerated social values for the multiple exploitations and retention of socio-political power by the opportunist and hypocrite upper caste Hindus in modern India. Both authors of the select autobiographies are born out of sexual abuse of Dalit women by the debased phallogocentric social structure. In most of the cases of sexual exploitation of Dalit women in the texts, the powerful landlords, upper caste Patils and rich Hindus involved, forced and exploited Dalit women in the sexual act by using the advantage of their age, gender, physical strength and abject poverty or other resources to quench their lust and carnal desires. These Dalit women have been positioned in a peculiar socio-cultural milieu that has worsened their conditions and stigmatized them for their lower caste and being the 'fair sex' in the society. These self-narratives not only recount the personal painful experiences of Dalit women's suffering but also offer the historiographic account of Dalit communities. Most of these Dalit women in these narratives are shown to be either capitalizing on their precarious position of being female for developing sexual liaisons with the upper caste rich Patils and landlords to cross the line of caste to get the protection and the social status in the society and achieve economic and social status or getting forcefully involved in concubine relationships with the upper caste Hindus.

*The Outcaste*, Sharan Kumar Limbale's an ultra-photographic auto-narrative, gives the horrendous reality of raped destiny of the Dalit mother of writer, Masamai, who mortgages her body to different males from the upper caste to get minimum access to the resources necessary to meet the ends in her life and keep the members of her family alive. The writer ponders over the concubinage of his mother with Yashwantrao Sidramappa Patil, affectionately known as 'Kaka', a Lingayat head of a village named Hanoor, after being deserted by her former owner, Hanmanta Limbale Patil, a rich landlord from Baslegaon who ruined the married life of his mother. The narrator expresses his mother's predicament in these words: 'now Masamai kept by another Patil. What sort of life had she been living, mortgaging herself to one owner after another and being used as commodity? Her lot has been nothing but the tyranny of sex.' (Limbale, 2003). The narrator recounts the painful account of his family and his Dalit community in which

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women are subjected to the multiple laborious and exploitative works for the survival of their family. Limbale's mother, Masamai was married to Ithalkamble , a poor farm worker who used to work laboriously like an ox on a yearly contract. He is portrayed like a typical Dalit man who does not have any space in the mainstream society whose wife is looked at as 'a loose and promiscuous woman' by the established landlords. The narrator rightly presents the powerless and miserable state of his mother's lawful husband and a Dalit man: *'Ithalkamble was a farm worker on a yearly contract to a landlord. It was a job worth seven or eight hundred rupees. He worked hard, day and night, on the fields as well as in the house of the landlord. He was one of the beasts that toiled on the farm. The animals in the sheds he looked after were no different from this bonded laborer. Ithalkamble's poverty was his sad lot, like the yoke inflamed shoulder of an ox.'*(Limbale, 2003) The narrator depicts the 'muffed and oppressed voice' of the Dalit males through Ithalkamble who is emasculated by the demeaning practices of the dominant hegemonic culture that not only condition his exclusion from the mainstream society but subject him to the most menial form of service and destroy self-esteem. Such type of economic disenfranchisement and internalized of brahmanic social ideology develops the fragmented psyche of Dalit man and create irreparable damage in his personal and social life. This is what happens in the life of Ithalkamble when his owner HanmantLimbale takes full arbitrage and develops his physical liaison with Ithal's wife under the pretext of helping him during his hard times. As a result of that, the caste council forces Masamai to divorce Ithalkamble. Being deserted by her husband, Masamai prefers to accept the concubinage with HanmantLimbale and gets a son from him. That son is none other than the author himself. The narrator expresses his excruciating anguish for being a bastard child in the most painful way: *'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?'*(Limbale, 2003).This shows the brazen hypocrisy on the part of upper class caste Hindus who don't even prefer a simple touch with untouchables on the account of getting contaminated or defiled . But, here, in spite of being an upper class Patil, Hanmant developed his illegitimate relationship with a Dalit woman and ruined her life. After knowing that she got impregnated from him, he blatantly refuses his responsibility towards her and he disowns his own son. Moreover, he abandons her to avoid any blame from the society. Knowing that she has been cheated by her partner in her relationship, she decides to live with her mother, Santamai. It has been rightly said by the narrator that beauty is a curse for a Dalit woman for it attracts all the lustful glances from the landlords and other upper caste people. As a result of that, they become wanton creatures for the instant sexual gratification for the Patils and other upper caste Hindus: *'The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. There are whole breeds born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually.'*(Limbale, 2003) Being deserted by HanmantPatil, Masamai takes shelter with another Patil and becomes a keep of YaswantSidramappaPatil and begets eight children from him. In the absence of a regular source of income, the economic situation of her big family worsens and it becomes difficult for her to run the regular chores of the family. In order to meet those needs, she starts a business of selling liquor with the help of her mother, Santamai.

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Like Masamai, other Dalit women like Santamai, narrator's grandmother and Chandamai, great grandmother, are placed in the most vulnerable situation wherein they have been burdened by acute poverty, child care responsibilities and humiliating social responsibilities allotted by the head of the village or caste council without ensuring them any access to education, source of earning and regular employment.

There are some glaring cases narrated by the narrator in which a father who is supposed to protect his daughter, turns out to be a rapist. Limbale describes a shameful incident of Dhanavva, a Dalit girl who becomes a prey to the lust of her own father, Shankar and gets pregnant. The most disgracing thing is her father who is responsible for the tragic fate of his own poor daughter, justifies his own disgraceful act using an excuse of being a creator: 'I have sown the seed from which she has grown as a plant. Why should not I eat the fruits of this plant?' (Limbale, 2003) This type of objectification of Dalit women in the inner circle of their family and in outer circle of society shows the degeneration of human values for which, most of the scholars say, the socio-cultural constructions are responsible.

### **Conclusion**

From the above critical analysis of the select autobiography of Sharan Kumar Limbale, the trajectory of Dalit women's suffering can be seen in the displacement of Dalit women in the hegemonic patriarchal and brahmanic socio-cultural set up which push them in the worst sexually exploitative work and make them 'others' in human society. So the term 'being female' or the concept of 'being Dalit female' is just not confined to the biological entity of Dalit women in our society. But this is something created by the society or the evil forces of society to suppress them and use them as sexual objects. In the study, the self-narrative techniques, used by authors, and the other supporting historical references have been carefully employed to validate the fact that the hegemonic socio-cultural forces are largely responsible for the subjugation, subordination, cultural alienation and jeopardy of multiple exploitation and abuse of Dalit women in Indian Society.

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