

**Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste:
A Narration of the Complexities of Caste System**

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Abstract:

This present paper "Sharankumar Limbale: The Outcaste: A Narration of the Complexities of Caste System" demonstrates the sufferings of Dalit community in every field of life. Sharankumar Limbale, who is a Mahar is one among the most renowned Dalit writers. Here, we will discuss about his autobiography The Outcaste (2004), which is written in Marathi language and translated into Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Tamil and Malayalam languages. This book caught the attention of readers on its English version by Santhosh Bhoomkar. He got many awards and won the wider acclaim from the public for his literary talents. Limbale describes the problems faced by Dalit children in getting education under psychological disturbances. For them, Caste discrimination is an everyday experience. School and education system is no exception of this kind of discrimination.

Introduction:

In the views of Roy Pascal, "The value of an Autobiography depends ultimately on the quality of spirit of the writer." Sharankumar Limbale, who was born on 01 June 1956 speaks and writes in Marathi, Hindi and English. In 1978, he got his B.A. degree, M.A. in Marathi in 1990 and Ph.D. degree in 1996 from Shivaji University. Being a good academician, he is also a writer and he occupied many positions in YCM Open University and presently he is the Regional Director of YCM Open University, Nashik. As an illustrious writer, he mostly writes on the Dalit struggle and identity. He is well known for poetry, short stories and his autobiography *The Outcaste*. For his critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Studies* (2004), he is popular. Many scholars did research on his writings and he is a member of many academic and cultural organizations.

Caste system which emerged many centuries ago from Hinduism is the most characteristics feature of the tradition Indian society. Today, it occupies an important place among all religious groups in South Asia. In India, Caste system is built in the standard of purity and impurity. Purity means rich and white and impurity means poor and dark. Caste is social groups which is defined by birth and does not permit social mobility to its members whatever he belong to a good job or a low rank. There have been numerous writings on the caste system by authors from different parts in India and outside the country.

The origin of the caste system is found in *Rigved* and *Purasukta* hymn. In the *Bhagavat Gita* it is said that caste system is justified on the idea of Karma (deed) and Dharma (moral obligations). In the age of Simritis and Sutras, there were various castes and rules in a society regarding occupation, education, marriage, temple and food conduct. Due to such diversification and with the passing of time, people of these castes could not meet together. Gradually among those people grew a feeling of superior or inferior which latter known as untouchables.

The social distance between the caste groups varies from state to state, but there is well established hierarchy of castes that can be considered fewer than four broad classifications that is: *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Shudras*. *Brahmins* received the highest social status or prestige in the society, second comes the *Kshatriyas*, who had the greatest power. Thirdly, *Vaisyas* held the largest share of wealth. On the pedestal come the remaining sections of the society, broadly termed as *Shudras*. *Shudras* were the occupational Castes, were engaged in growing food and in manufacturing articles of necessity and comfort. They were also known as serving class. Though religion provided the basis for this social stratification, gradually inequality became a structural feature of the traditional Hindu Varna system. In this way they have been assigned their duties as well.

The Outcaste narrates the complexities of caste system and the most shocking experience which he suffered during his all life as an illegitimate son whose mother is Mahar and father is Lingayat, an upper caste, who denies accepting Limbale his son. In this illegitimate relationship, Limbale's educational journey is disturbed. In his autobiography, many questions are raised such as the role of caste system, teacher and father figure. By participating in a picnic program, he begins his school experience. Living in Mahar colony, he got excited at the thought of being out of school. He narrated the kind of discrimination that Mahar boys are subjected to both by the upper caste students and teachers. He writes:

“We played one kind of game while the high-caste village boys played another. The two games were played separately like two separate whirlwinds. (Limbale, 2)”

To create an amicable atmosphere with fellow student's community, the teachers in the class room never took any measures. The girls sat close to the teachers. They all were chatting and the Dalit students both girls and boys sat like owls only watching them. High-caste boys and girls collect the leftovers on a piece of paper and give it to Dalit students. Limbale Parshya carried the bundle of leftover food on the way back. They were always humiliated but Limbale's all attention was on bundle. He says, “Mallya carried a bundle of bhakari on his head and we, the Mahar boys followed him excitedly like hungry vultures. We squatted in a circle and stuffed our selves greedily. We had never tasted food like that before. Our stomachs were as greedy as a beggar's sack.” (3)

In this stanza, Limbale narrates the pathetic conditions of his family and community life. He states, “When I got home, I told my mother all this. Like the victim of a famine she said why didn’t you get at least a small portion of it for me? (3)” The major problem in school with the teachers is that they arrange different rows for different communities. It seems that the teachers never initiated to mix different caste background students into one row. On Saturdays, the teacher asked us to clear the walls and floor with cow dung. Being a Dalit student, we were all forced to do all menial work. He knows that a man from Dalit community had to carry out such duties in the village for the high-caste people.

Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* is about an untouchable family in general and community struggles in particular. The narrator narrates here an innocent Dalit couple Kamble and Masamai, who are discriminated and exploited at the hands of landlord Hanmantha Limbale for whom the poor couple used to work day and night. Masamai’s Husband, Ithal Kamble, is a farm worker on a yearly contract to Hanmantha Limbale. His salary was only seven or eight hundred rupees. Ithal worked hard on the farm of Hanmantha and was helped by him only hard times. Hanmatha Patil ruined the poor family and this led to the separation of both. After divorcing with Masami, Kamble left the place with two sons Surya Kanth and Dharma and remained a woman, who is also a widow. But Masami remained a keep of Hanmantha and gave birth to Sharankumar Limbale. She was given a rented house at Akkalkot. Limbale writes, “After my birth, the mansion of the Patil community must have become tensed. My first breath must have threatened the morality of the world. With my first cry at birth, milk must have splashed from the breasts of every Kunti (36). He remained like Karna in the epic, *Mahabharatha*. Limbale says that it is a curse among Dalits to be born beautiful. As Masami was beautiful and was attracted by Hanmatha. Due to which she was made separate from her husband and lived in misery in her post-widowed life. Hanmatha enjoyed the beauty of Masamai. In every village, the upper-caste men had made whores of the wives of Dalit from laborers and Masamai was one of them. Life of Masamai speaks out how the poor Dalit families were destroyed and the innocent Dalits women were exploited by upper caste person.

Masamai became a whore of Patil of different villages, so she neither belongs to the Patil community nor to the Mahar community. She, with her children, lived in Maharwada but without Mahar identity due to impurity in Limbale’s blood. Throughout his autobiography, he described this kind of alienation. He states that the influence of Ambedkar and his involvement in the Dalit panther movement totally changed his life. Tromila Wheat writes:

“Limbale’s autobiography is a good quick read that would interest any student taking a course on modern India. It is an objective work that shows little bitterness or remorse. The author includes an excellent introduction that introduces the caste system to the western readers. We can experience the humiliation of Dalit community at the hands of an unthinking privileged class and the hopelessness of the situation of people born in lower castes.”

The most significant characteristic of the Dalit autobiographies is that the Dalit writers never find themselves away from their community. They identify themselves within their community. Regarding this Ghanshyam Shaw writes:

“Identity is concerned with the self-esteem, self-image of a community, real or imaginary dealings with the existence and role: ‘Who are we’? ‘What position do we have in society vis-à-vis other communities.’ ‘How are we related to others’? No standing differences in the nature of Dalit movements and the meaning of identity. There has been a common quest-the quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of untouchability.”

The models of diversity raise many questions. Moffatt argues that according to outcaste image “the Dalits do not have a culture of their own. When we look at the detailed moorings and deeper aspects of Dalit culture, we find that Dalit culture is totally different from Brahminical culture”. (Moffatt 1979: 13) There are many differences between the religion of untouchables and Hindu religious system, Hierarchical temple structure, authoritarianism of priestly class. In other words, a Brahmin priest works as a middleman between God and devotees in the Hindu religious system, but this middleman is clearly absent in Dalit religion. Some of the early descriptions of the Dalits portray them as a cultureless people possessing more negative qualities such as drunkenness and lack of thrift that positive value. Brahminical texts of dominant Hindus always referred to Dalits with hatred castigated them for possessing uncultured and unclean habits.

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