

DILEMMA OF IDENTITY IN SARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *THE OUTCASTE*

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ABSTRACT

*It is said that literature is the reflection of life and the society that surrounds human life. Dalit literature is a genre which represents issues like humiliation, exploitation, marginalization and retaliation of a community commonly known as Dalits in Indian society. The powerful portrayal and expressions of the sufferings of the community bring revolutionary changes in the caste dominated Indian society. In this way dalit literature has become a powerful weapon to express their pain and their traumatic condition and to fight for their rights in the society. The paper attempts to expose the condition of dalits in the society with special reference to Saran Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*. The novel gives voice to the bitter experiences of caste dominated society. It presents acute picture of the cultural, social and economic issues exist in the society. The *Outcaste* not only highlights the biased behaviour of the society but it also own the power to bring revolutionary changes in the society that society actually needs since a long time.*

KEYWORDS: *Identity Crisis, Discrimination, Dalit perspective, Self-assertion, Autobiography*

INTRODUCTION

Religion, culture, tradition, economy, caste, class, colour, gender, sexuality, etc. are some of the important factors, drag some particular depressed communities to the margin of the social circle which are known as subaltern or Dalit. In course of time dalits start speaking and raising questioning to the mainstream of the society. They challenged the supremacy of upper class through all the possible ways in which they were neglected and among which the literature occupies a major role.

Earlier the literature was dominated by upper class people and dalits were at the margins. Before that nobody was interested to read about their painful agony of life. By crushing the pre-compiled, pre-existing, traditional literary history, the depressed community embraces the identity and exposes the forbidding, profound real world. In this way *The Outcaste* is one of the most powerful representation of the agony of the community.

The expressions of dalit writings come from their bitter life experiences instead of their observation. In this respect C.B. Bharti claims:

“The aim of Dalit Literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit literature, an aesthetics based on the real experiences of life”.

Dalit writers express their thoughts and experiences in a realistic manner majorly by using their native/ regional language. Since Manohar Biswas states;

I'm a Communist, by birth a communist I'm a Dalit in this country and by my humble origin, a Proletariat I have one straight thought to knock at the door of equality... With angst I dream of breaking the rigid codes of authority.

Sharankumar Limbale (1956) is one of the emerging figures of dalit literature. He is an eminent dalit Marathi writer, poet and literary critic. He has composed more than forty books. Apart from all these he is well known for his autobiography *Akkarmashi*. The autobiography is translated into many Indian languages like Hindi, Malayalam and English. It is translated into English language by Santosh Bhoomkar with the title *The Outcaste* in the year 2003. Literally the title means half-caste which itself describes the condition of a person living in suppressed community. Limbale born in Mahar caste and he was an illegitimate son of a higher caste Patil father and a poor, landless, untouchable mother. He was considered as an untouchable, a half caste and a deprived man by the upper caste society. The opening pages of *The Outcaste* describe the early school education of the author. His primary school days certainly realises him the bitter discriminated truth of caste system of Indian society as he belongs to a poor Mahar community.

Limbale himself unknowingly accepts the difference of higher caste and low caste students. Limbale came to know the fact because of segregation and imposed differentiation in every aspect like, schooling, eating habits, dressing style and in the games of children. There were different games for low caste poor students and they were not allowed to play the games of upper caste students like Kabaddi.

The Wani and Brahmin boys played kabbadi. Being marked as Mahar we couldn't join them. So Mallya, Umbrya, Parshya, all from my caste, began to play touch and go. 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 has portrayed various incidents to describe the caste discrimination prevailing in the society.

Like the tea stall incident where there were different glasses for low caste students. This was not enough as they have to wash their glasses after having tea and could not touch the money they gave to the tea stall owner. *The Outcaste* is a distressing life narrative which attracts us upon the condition of the Dalits in India after independence.

The autobiography highlights some major issues of dalit community which they have to face in their day to life like identity crisis, discrimination on the basis of caste, class, and economic disparity. *The Outcaste* is an affright story of childhood and growing age of a person living in an outcaste. Therefore it becomes a shivering and shattering experience of author which reflects author's graphic depiction of a poor Dalit child and later his saintly forgiveness, compassion and detachment. Humiliation and hunger becomes two desperate questions of the book.

As Limbale writes that the lower caste are only born to feed their stomach and they cannot do anything else in their life. He claims,

“Bhakaari is as large as man. It is as vast as the sky, and bright like the sun. Hunger is bigger than man. Hunger is more vast than the seven circles of hell. Man is only as big as a bhakari, and only as big as his hunger. Hunger is more powerful than man. A single stomach is like the whole earth. Hunger seems no bigger than your open palm, but it can swallow the whole world and let out a belch. There would have been no wars if there was no hunger. What about stealing and fighting/ if there was no hunger what would happened to sin and virtue, heaven and hell, this creation of God/ if there was no hunger how could a country, its borders, citizens, parliament,

Constitution come into being? The world is born from a stomach, so also the links between mother and father, sister and brother". (Limbale. 50-51)

Identity of a person is concerned with the self- esteem self- image of a whole community either it is real or imaginary which deals with the existence and role, because here author is very much confused about his identity being a poor, illegitimate dalit child. "How are we related to others?" Nothing 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" (17). Over all these questions are related with every person being a member of dalit community.

The dilemma of the identity of the author started right from his birth Limbale was anguished firstly by the bad luck of birth in such community. The title *Akkarmashi* itself announces the identity crisis of the writer as he belongs two different class and castes. His mother Masamai, belonged to Mahar community but she marries with a high caste person of Mahar community named Ithal Kamble.

That was not a life- long relationship for her mother later she started living with a high class person, Hanmantha Limbale. Therefore his birth itself ended up being a shame. This was the first reason of his anguish to his life. His mother was Mahar, but Limbale's father was not a Mahar by caste.

Therefore Mahar people saw him as a charlatan, half caste (akkarmashi) he was a downtrodden for the people of the village. To be an untouchable is a curse in Indian society, and to be an illegitimate child in a dalit community is a double curse which limbale have faced specially in his childhood days. Certainly he writes, "my first breath more likely than not debilitated the profound quality of the world" (36).

Being a half caste person of a low caste, he was declared as an untouchable by upper caste Mahars and he was treated like an animal or a person does not have emotions. He faced dual set of problems in his life, not only through caste system, but also being an illegitimate child of that community. Generally in Indian caste system one is identified by his/her father's name, class, caste or religion.

But in the lack of author's inherited identity he suffered for his real identity. He was ashamed of his past and was extremely sad about his birth in such a low caste. Limbale has also compared himself with the Indian mythological low caste characters like Jarasandha' and 'Kara'. He claims, "In the family, he was not free from anguish. He had a divided self even in his own family. His father lived in a mansion, mother in a hut and he on streets. His father tried to avoid him and he could not acknowledge Saran kumar as his offspring. This made him to call his autobiography "the chronicle of a fatherless being" (27).

Saran Kumar always feels ashamed of the destiny to bear the fault for the sin of his parents and for not having pure blood in terms of religion. He was insulted by people even by his own siblings because his father was an another man. His grandfather was a Muslim by caste and his grandmother was a Mahar even his parents (father was upper caste and mother was low caste Mahar) were also from different castes and class. So he was unable to make out his real identity from his own pedigree or family tree.

These voiceless unidentified dalit in the process of searching their identity created a new crop commonly known as dalit literature that had its own distinct identity. This horrible effect of caste discrimination and social injustice on the mind of a small child and other low caste characters has been narrated impact fully yet in a simple manner.

Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* claims about the un-satisfaction of dalits against discriminated unequal Indian Hindu caste system.? He writes,, not only what is happening to him in savarna society but what is happening inside him, in a psychological sense (4). These Dalit authors are doing such a difficult task of narrating their life through their personal experiences and sufferings not by observations.

To live this kind of life is traumatic enough yet it is even more difficult to represent it in front of others. Limbale's capability to express his anguish and frustration with an intense and bleak vision makes him sturdy voice of the muffled community. Dealing with the multiple questions related to the identity of Dalits and their discrimination, humiliation, their anguish, frustration and compassion, all these elements gives the autobiography an immense vitality. So the autobiography becomes a moving, pathetic, social document on discriminated picture of Indian caste system.

Hence dalit literature is not just a piece of writing but it is certainly associated with a revolutionary movement to bring a change especially in the thinking of society, so that the condition of dalits could uplift. Dalits are masses exploited and suppressed economically, physically, mentally, socially, culturally, in the name of caste, class, religion and other factors set by the upper caste of the society. Dalit writers like Sarankumar Limbale hopes that this oppressed group can bring a socio-cultural revolution.

The Outcaste, as an autobiography is packed with powerful emotions and pain of a particular community. But the relevance of the book is beyond the boundaries of an autobiography since it stands as a symbol for struggle to survival for Dalit community. Limbale's struggle portrayed so graphically is symptomatic of the extent of the challenges it reclaims dignity and identity for himself and for his community as well.

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