



**Reflection of A Subaltern's Lacerated Identity and Sentiments: Sharan Kumar Limbale's
Akkarmashi (The Outcaste) and Other Works**

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Abstract:

Sharankumar Limbale, a stalwart and robust signature of Marathi Dalit literature occupies a significant space in post – colonial subaltern literature, in India. Limbale's protagonists and characters are the pictograms of struggle and revolt. Through his works the voice of the marginalized is 'not just heard but even shared and empathized'. Dalit literature 'rejects both the Western and Eastern theoretical conceptions like Freud's Psychoanalysis, Barthe's Structuralism and Derrida's Deconstruction together with the Indian theories of Rasa and Dhawni. The very foundations of Indian Mythology are questioned and de-constructed by the Dalit writers. They consider the legendary figure Ekalavya as their forefather and Shambooka - another Dalit in Ramayana who was killed by Rama at the behest of Vasishta, is worshipped by the Dalits. These

writers express their experiences in stark realistic manner by using their native speech. Their language as well as images comes from their experiences instead of their observation of life.’ (Mini Babu) Limbale’s pen revolts against the caste system via his short – stories, novels, theory of aesthetics of dalit literature and his autobiography. The paper is an attempt to probe into the dark recesses of Dalit literature of Sharankumar Limbale with a keen and penetrating psychological insight.

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.

(The Wheel Will Turn. P 46)

Sharankumar Limbale, a stalwart and robust signature of Marathi Dalit literature occupies a significant space in post – colonial subaltern literature, in India. Limbale’s protagonists and characters are the pictograms of struggle and revolt. Through his works the voice of the marginalized is ‘not just heard but even shared and empathized’. Dalit literature ‘rejects both the Western and Eastern theoretical conceptions like Freud’s Psychoanalysis, Barthe’s Structuralism

and Derrida's Deconstruction together with the Indian theories of Rasa and Dhawni. The very foundations of Indian Mythology are questioned and de-constructed by the Dalit writers. They consider the legendary figure Ekalavya as their forefather and Shambooka - another Dalit in Ramayana who was killed by Rama at the behest of Vasishta, is worshipped by the Dalits. These writers express their experiences in stark realistic manner by using their native speech. Their language as well as images comes from their experiences instead of their observation of life.' (Mini Babu) Limbale's pen revolts against the caste system via his short – stories, novels, theory of aesthetics of dalit literature and his autobiography. The paper is an attempt to probe into the dark recesses of Dalit literature of Sharankumar Limbale with a keen and penetrating psychological insight.

‘In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Whenever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us in to a frenzy.’ (Bama pg. 23)

Indian society is the specimen or rather amalgam of various encouraging and off-putting shades of human life. It's age old tradition, spiritual wisdom, religious pluralism, diversity of cultures and philosophy allures the attention of the entire world.

‘Despite its glorious spiritual and cultural heritage Indian society has been a caste- oriented society for several centuries. The Aryans who practiced the religion of Hinduism introduced the caste system in India. The Aryan scriptures such as the Vedas (Upnishads, Samhitas , Smritis), epics and puranas vehemently

supported the caste system... Manu, the codifier of Hinduism, legitimized the hierarchical system of castes in his book, Manusmriti'. (S.John Peter Joseph, Dialogue.pg.90)

Contemporary socio-political scenario of India has dalits in its core rather than at margin. Limble's production of dalit literature is undoubtedly an affirmative action in direction of protest and revolt. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay raises one very important question that 'Can A Subaltern Speak?' She took this term from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. In words of N D Dani: 'If we concur with the extension of the term, as the Subaltern Studies Collective- a group of revisionary historians in South Asian Studies- has done to include "all oppressed groups such as the peasantry, millworkers, women, tribal people"(Hawley 425) the list will continue to discover and include more marginalized groups.' (Dialogue pg. 68).

'Limbale's rejection of the hegemony of the caste-based universal challenges the neat binary world of postcolonial literary theory by calling attention to the internal contradictions of Indian society'. (Alok Mukherjee, TADL pg IX.) Dalits help in maintaining the purity of the upper caste Hindus. While performing this very task they pollute themselves. Limbale belongs to 'Mahar' community. Limbale himself writes: "My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India... Father is a landlord; mother landless. I am an akkarmashi (half – caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate.' (Akkarmashi, pg. IX). As a Mahar child he faced the hostile treatment and antagonistic attitude of his upper – caste classmates and friends. Even the teachers asked him to 'smear the floor and walls with crowding paste' (pg. 09) on Saturdays. Such innocent kids suffer from the pangs of alienation. They are

treated as ‘garbage the village throws out. (pg.05). Alienation is a painful state of one’s mind where one feels oneself cut – off from the surroundings. In an interview, Nissim Ezekiel discussed the phenomenon of alienation at some length. In an answer to the question: "How would you react to the charge that most Indian writers in English are alienated. ? "Ezekiel said,

However undesirable from moral, social & other points of view, it has been aesthetically very productive, provided it is genuine. You can't pretend, you can't play the game of alienation. If you are genuinely alienated... and feel you are hostile towards others and they are hostile to you, you hate their guts and they hate yours ; this can produce great literature.

Limbalé’s expression of this feeling needs the special attention of readers when he writes “We had grown up like aliens since our infancy. This sense of alienation increased over the years and to this day my awful childhood haunts me.” Whenever his school was held in Marwari’s mansion, mahar boys of his community ‘had to sit on the floor whereas the other boys sat on a raised platform.’ About his friends he writes: ‘Heaps of garbage, tin shades, dogs, and pigs were our only companions.’ The callous attitude of his school- mates was intolerable. He had many brothers and sisters. Sharing the same mother they all had different fathers. At times Nagi (his sister) used to say that ‘You have no connection with us. Nobody knows where you come from’. Such words pierced his heart. He himself writes that ‘The feeling of alienation weighed heavily on my mind’. (63). He wants to go to Baslegaon in search of his roots. ‘Sharan, the protagonist, is haunted by his fractured identity – ‘Am I an upper caste or an ‘untouchable?’ Providing rare

insights on the question of identity, *The Outcaste* is considered a milestone in Indian literature in translation that helped publicize the Dalit cause.’ (Blurb. *The Outcaste*).

Limbale writes: ‘ During the short interval the other boys threw stones at me and teased me calling aloud ‘Mahar’!’ They also practised violent attacks on him. Dr Arvind M Nawale very aptly writes that; ‘Sharankumar suffered from the high – caste domination from his childhood. He experienced everything which a dalit boy had to suffer. He never experienced love, care and affection in his life. He suffered the burns of caste politics at different places.’

Traude Pillai – Vetschera, teacher of Anthropology at the University of Vienna, Austria did important field studies among the Adivasis of Rajasthan and among Mahars in Maharashtra. Her chief publication includes *The Mahars: A Study of Their Culture, Religion and Socio – Economic Life*. She also conducted a study of mahar women in Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra. Although the mahars of Ahmednagar district are in better position than those of Marathwada . But projecting some light on these mahar women she writes:

“At any rate, the fact of a stricter control of women has also a positive aspect, for even Dalits agree that in this area sexual molestation of Dalit women by high castes has somewhat decreased during the last twenty years. It still happens that Dalit women work for, rich men, that they are sometimes raped and do not dare to speak up, or they are given money and everything is hushed up.’ (See also Pillai – Vetschera, 1994: 43)

But the reality is that the situation has not changed completely. Limbale gives all the credit to Dalit literature for providing him a deep insight and a new perspective when he writes: “It is

through the Dalit movement and Dalit literature that I understood that my mother was not an adulterous but the victim of a social system. I grow restless whenever I read about a rape in the news paper. A violation anywhere in the country, I feel, is a violation of my mother.” He as a child and as a grown up man had gone through various such incidents and events. About the victimization of these Dalit women, in the preface to the first print of Akkarmashi he writes:

“Every time the dominant classes attack and exploit the weak, they violate their women. The sexual exploits of the men among the wicked exploiters draw legitimacy from their authority, wealth, society, culture and religion. But what of the exploited woman? She has to carry the rape in her womb. That rape has to be borne, fed and reared. And this rape acquires and lives a life. My autobiography holds in it the agony of such a life. My experiences are my words.”

Dalit women are exploited in the name of caste, class and gender ‘they have succumbed to brutalities by casteist groups and have undergone traumas at different levels.’ (Monika Gupta – pg. 101). Elsthain also writes that the role of woman ‘in the process of humanization, have either been taken for granted or assigned a lesser order of significance and honour compared to the public, political activities of males.’ Elsthain further goes on writing that these women are silenced in part ‘because that which defines them and to which they are inescapably linked- sexuality, natality, the human body (images of uncleanness and taboo, visions of dependency, helplessness, vulnerability)- was omitted from political speech.’ In his novel Hindu he narrates the incident of public disrobing of a dalit woman by upper caste people.

“Draupadi was not disrobed in Mahabharata. But she has been in the independent India, since she was dalit. The crowd was watching her in a circle....

She was naked.... Everywhere there was terrible silence.” (Hindu. Pg. 141, Translation mine).

Limbale’s style of writing has its own personal features like interrogative sentence structures. Here he asks some very pinching, piercing and prickling questions. Hindustan Times defines Akkarmasi as ‘...experiential classic due to its graphic and enraged recall of deprivation spanning over 20 years. ...; Limbale’s experience is portrayed in a matter- of –fact tone laced with numerous reflective questions which lends the book its evocative appeal.’ These questions are directed and aimed at upper – caste Hindu society and its hypocrisy. Such questions contain a lot of agony, displeasure and protest in them. In the Outcaste he presents a string of such questions:

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which bought 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? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I really? (pg- 37)

He compares himself to Karna and his mother to Kunti. Patils of every village make ‘whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers.’ Dalit families survive by serving these Patils sexually. ‘A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There

is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils.’ (pg38) He seems to suffer from identity crisis when he asks the question ‘Who am I?’ (pg. 39). Again in his favourite interrogative style he writes:

How can I be high caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am untouchable, What about my father who is high caste? I am like Jarasandh.... To whom my umbilical cord connected?’ (pg-38-39) His dilemma is the lack of his ‘inherited identity’. ‘But a Man is recognized in this world by his religion , caste or his father.’ He had ‘neither a father’s name, nor any religion, nor a caste.’ He ‘had no inherited identity at all’. (pg. 59) His identity crisis keeps on increasing sometimes he finds himself as an alien. The concept of identity crisis was propounded by an eminent psychologist, Erikson. According to Erikson, ‘an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself.’ Erikson described identity as:

"...a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unself-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given--that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals--with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters." (Erikson, 1970.)

His father was not mahar by caste. But in Maharwada he felt humiliated as he was considered a bastard; they called him akkarmashi. Yet in the village he was treated as Mahar and ‘teased as the offspring of one.’ His quest for identity and search for roots gets voice in following lines:

‘My father lives in a mansion, my mother in a hut , and I on the street. Where will I die? Where are my roots exactly?’ As per Mini Babu, ‘The narrator-protagonist is someone more inferior to a Dalit. It is surprising to note that he is an untouchable among the untouchables. His identity is that of an “Akkarmashi” and this is what the narrator tries to present through the many episodes of his life. “Akkarmashi” in Marathi means eleven it needs another one to complete itself, to become twelve, a dozen which signifies completeness.’

In his short story collection entitled ‘Chauchut’ (Hindi), he shows mirror to hypocritical Indian society. On the one hand he cuts the rotten flesh of ‘Savarna samaj’ and on the other stops the poison by spreading into the blood of entire society. Swarup Chandra Buddha calls him the narrator of social revolution.’ (Chauchut pg.11) In his story ‘Samadhi’ , Ambadas Sabde , a dalit Kotwal, enters into the temple , and receives death in form of punishment. Victim of hunger Trimukh sells the bones of his mother and deposits the money in the collection box fixed for the Idol of B. R. Ambedkar, because it was Ambedkar jayanti mahotsav’ where he got food for his hungry stomach. He discards the polluted system with a burning heart in ‘Devta Aadmi’. Failure of love and closure of intimate relationships becomes the outcome of caste – differences. Inability of a low caste lover to marry a high caste girl or vice – versa is the theme of many of his stories. Neelu and his lover are separated because of caste inequality. Again Sujata, and Rajni are high caste girls and victim of such social discrimination. Pain, anger, revolt, and frustration of a dalit get fierce and often soft expression in Limbale’s works. Hindu is an important novel by Limbale which presents the dextrous portrayal of exploitation and struggle of dalits. About Hindu Arun Prabha Mukherjee writes that; ‘This is not a ‘universal’ story of the ‘human condition’ that I was trained to look for in a literary text by my literary education. Dalit writing

as a whole, and Hindu in particular, challenges the claims of universality made by mainstream high caste writers and its critics by pointing out that they either ignore dalits altogether or misrepresent them.’

These muted unidentified subalterns in the process of searching their own identity created a crop of dalit literature that had ‘its own distinct identity.’ Impact of caste discrimination and social injustice on the mind of a young child and other character has been portrayed by Limbale in very dextrous yet in plain manner. Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* writes: ‘Dalits have voiced their dissatisfaction against unequal Hindu caste system.’ He narrates ‘not only what is happening to him in savarna society but what is happening inside him, in a psychological sense.’ (pg.136 TADL) About the terrible, humiliating and dreadful experiences of these marginalized people R. G. Jadhav aptly remarks that; ‘Dalit writers are doing the difficult task of portraying this life, through personal experiences and empathy, absorbing it from all sides in their sensibility. To live this life is painful enough; it can be equally painful to recreate it on the mental level’. Limbale’s capability to express his anger and frustration with a vivid and stark vision makes him sturdy voice of the voiceless.

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