

4. The Literary Aesthetics of The Outcaste : A Quest for 'Self-Consciousness'

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Abstract

Literature has an impact and helps us comprehend people from all walks of life. It's a doorway into other people that enables us to embrace new cultures and fosters closeness with others. Not only do we experience and establish unmatched emotional relationships, but we also begin to look within ourselves for self-awareness and identity. Dalit literature is literature written by Dalits and about their lives that first surfaced in the 1960s through the narratives such as poetry, short stories, and autobiographies, that stood out owing to their frank depictions of reality known as Dalit consciousness. Through *The Outcaste* Sharan Kumar Limbale reveals his inner conflicts of being a Dalit.

Keywords: *Literature, Aesthetics, Dalit, Caste, Consciousness, Reality*

Introduction

This paper seeks to identify the self-consciousness of the Dalit writers along with history of suppression, condition of suppressed and the origin of the writers particularly Sharan Kumar Limbale's '*The Outcaste*'. The word 'Dalit' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'oppressed' and 'downtrodden' which is appropriated by the writers who are considered as outcasts and isolated. In fact, they are concerned with their present and historical contexts. Dalit aesthetics is unique because it is chiefly dependent on and modified to cultural and social aspects of their own. The literature mainly reflects a common situation of everyday life. As the Dalits are branded by their low status and the members of this section are socially forbidden to other four main castes of Hindu society. Usually, the writers are in quest of dignity in general.

With a number of social, political, religious, and even technological forces working as catalysts, contemporary Indian writing can be considered as a record of the changing Indian society. However,

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there have always been a few problems in every society, including our own, that were never addressed or even brought up in the popular literature. The issue of expressing the "unrepresentable" in society has led to an increase in popularity and interest in Dalit literature. Writers and activists are starting to engage in public discussions about caste, identity, and the politics of Dalitness, as well as how it manifests and is depicted in literature and public life.

As globalization took hold in India, Dalits were able to bring up caste-based prejudice in public forums. In their appearances at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa from 31st August to 7th September, Dalit campaigners and intellectuals argued that caste-based prejudice in India is comparable to racial discrimination in the west. With the establishment of non-governmental organizations and the Dalit Diaspora as advocates of Dalits in India, the discussions on caste and Dalit rights at the global level gave the fight against caste a new dimension. Dalits and their writings have gained new interest as a result of Dalits' increased visibility and the global caste discussion.

Sharankumar Limbale is a Marathi novelist, poet, critic, and short story writer. To the world of literature Sharan Kumar has contributed more than 40 books. In fact, he is well-known for his autobiographical novel *Akkarmashi* published in 1984. *Akkarmashi* got translated into numerous Indian languages including Malayalam, Tamil, and Hindi. Apart from this he has contributed towards Dalit life in his critical work 'Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature'. He was born to an outcast landless mother and an upper-caste father. Therefore, he describes himself as an 'Akkarmashi'. Self-awareness is the precursor to self-consciousness. We can understand how we fit into society by using the feelings that result from them. Guiltiness, embarrassment, and humiliation result from breaking a group's social norms which is the significant part of the novel.

Sharan, the main character, is defined by his split identity. The Outcaste, which offers uncommon insights on the identity debate, is regarded as a turning point in translated Indian literature and contributed to the public awareness of the Dalit cause. In fact, The Outcaste reaches at the huge number of readers for its societal issue of growing up in a community life. Moreover, it connected the anger and suffering at the mercy of members of the society.



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As a masterpiece, it highlights the hidden reality of Indian social system. It picturizes the intensely vicious accounts of a half-caste boy growing up in the Mahar society and the agony he experiences as a result of not fully belonging to it. It is a first-person description of a community's shocking experience at the hands of an uncaring affluent class. Students and academics interested in different areas of translation studies, comparative literature, cultural studies, and general readers will find the novel, a masterpiece in its own way.

Sharan struggles with the question, "Am I an upper caste or an untouchable?" The Outcaste, which offers uncommon insights on the identity debate, is regarded as a turning point in translated Indian literature and contributed to the public awareness of the Dalit cause. The account of Limbale's upbringing and development as an outcaste is told in an unsettlingly honest manner in 'The Outcaste'. It is a heartbreaking sight to witness Limbale's gruesome portrayal of the plight and suffering of a downtrodden child and then his pious forbearance, concern, and impartiality. Sharan was compelled to suffer because of the duplicities and the dominant societies of the higher caste Patil. The author of this book struggles with an identity issue. This autobiographical book depicts the oppressive side of India, where the Dalits live. He explores his own pain and search for identity through metaphor, idioms, and images. While a student, he experienced discrimination at the school. The guys from the Mahar caste sat at the door's entry while the students from upper castes like the Brahmin and Wani sat in class. He was referred to by the schoolteacher as the witch's son.

India is renowned for having a unique caste structure. It has divided people into high castes and lower castes, stratifying society. Sociologists explain terms like "purity" and "defilement" based on the religious constraints that this distinction entails. Even though the caste system has been questioned over time, these sanctions aid in restoring its credibility. The untouchables, now known as the Dalits, are at the bottom of the social hierarchy and have long been subjected to organized exclusion and neglect in Indian society. The Dalits are now aware of their rights thanks to the development of Dalit literature, which is a component of the Dalit liberation movement (Dalit Panther, 1972). The Dalits are prepared to question and encounter the dominion of the upper castes and classes now that they are aware of who they are.

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A significant portion of Dalit literature is autobiographical stories. The Outcaste by Sharankumar Limbale, etc. The majority of these memoirs are accounts of the Dalit authors' personal experiences along with their personal reactions and the group feelings they encounter in a Hindu society. The Outcaste by Limbale is a startlingly frank account of the author's upbringing and development as an outcaste. It is a heartbreaking sight to witness Limbale's gruesome portrayal of a Dalit child's need and suffering, followed by his saintly forbearance, compassion, and detachment. The Outcaste is a disturbing life narrative because of this distance and the ability to ignore the personal. Limbale abruptly adopts the tone of a philosophical sceptic who is attempting to dissect the cosmos in the middle of the story of shame and hunger.

Sharankumar is made aware of his status as a Dalit or untouchable because he is a member of the Mahar community. He unknowingly accepts the disparity between the pupils from higher castes and him (a member of the Mahar community) due of forced divergence in every area, including clothing code and participation in athletic activities. Limbale observes that '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. (2)

In addition to drinking tea and water, Rambaap also had to wash the tumblers before putting them back where they belonged. Because it was improper for a Mahar or Mang to give money directly to anyone, he had to either place the cash for the tea on the ground or drop it from a great height into the owner's hands. The author writes "the spade and shovels of Mahars were used to dig the well. The Mahar gave their sweat for it... They the Mahars, are the reason why there is water in the well. But now the same Mahars are not allowed to draw water from it, not even drinking water." (80-81).

Kind of treatment in the caste system is the burning problem by the then society that could bring disaster for large number of lower-class people. Dalit women were neglected to a significant extent. The higher caste people regard the Dalit women inferior to them. Their widespread treatment of the class and caste discrimination was visible to even the higher-class people. The try to keep these lower-class people at bay in order to utilize and exploit them. Instead of paying respect to Dalit women they



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used to satisfy their lust. In the name of charity, individuals force Dalit women to satisfy them and sexually exploit them.

The Dalits of this country have been exploited by those who have access to high caste privileges, authority that is recognised by religion, and inherited wealth. The women of Dalit farmworkers have been turned into whores by the Patils in every village. Once a Dalit girl reaches adolescence, she is almost always the victim of their lust. Whole breeds have been produced by adulterous Patils. Some Dalit households make a living by seducing Patil men and women. Such a home is regarded by the entire hamlet as belonging to Patil's whore. Even the children she has with her spouse are regarded as Patil children.

By portraying his mother Masamai, Limbale has given Dalit women a really appalling picture. Hanmanta Limbale, a Patil, devastated Masamai's life by forcing her to divorce her husband Ithal Kamble and then turning her into a Hanmanta kept so that she would be unable to remarry in the manner of a man. According to Sharankumar Limbale, who discusses the tyranny of sex from the viewpoint of his mother, Ithal Kamble remarried. Women are not allowed to consume paan or spit, although men are free to do it whenever they like. When a woman does something, it is considered improper. Once lost, her chastity can never be gained back.

Not all examples are Masamai and Satamai. They traded themselves for someone else's love and attention. To state their lust, they hadn't sold their bodies. Do we live solely to satisfy our hunger? There is a rich life beyond hunger. Bread is not the end of life. The most important aspect of *The Outcaste* is still the quest for identity. Identity, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is 'the emotion or state of being very similar to and capable of comprehending someone or something' (771).

The Identity of a Dalit is the subject of Limbale's *The Outcaste's* following section. A Dalit is typically recognized by the social responsibilities that have been allocated to him; in this case, the positions represent performing menial tasks for higher castes without payment. An upper caste person can treat a Dalit like a slave and give him or her orders, which the Dalit must carry out without complaining.



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Furthermore, the identity is defined in relation to four key characteristics in the critical analysis of Limbale's *The Outcaste*. First by birth, then by the name of the father, and finally by the caste to which he belongs. Limbale exhibits identity issues throughout his story and perpetually appears perplexed about his existence. Birth establishes a person's identity in the very beginning, but Limbale feels that his birth is a curse on him because he was produced as a result of his mother's illicit relationship with Hanmanta.

Limbale highlights how a person's father's name shapes their identity. It is strange that Hanmanta Limbale of the upper caste treated Masamai "like a pet dove" (36) yet refused to adopt her offspring. He refused to accept Sharankumar as his child. Later, Hanumanta abandoned Masami, and Sharan grew up without knowing who his father was. Instead of recognizing someone as a human being, society views them in relation to their father. Sharankumar Limbale once asked the Sarpanch for a certificate, and the Sarpanch inquired about Limbale's identity:

With all these references, the question of why Sharankumar Limbale is struggling so much with his identity is raised. Why did he have to endure being without an identity? It's because his mother is a member of the Dalit community. She has been sexually abused and oppressed because she is a Dalit, which has further damaged the life of her own child (Sharan), who has endured the abuse and insults of higher caste individuals for being an untouchable (outcaste) of the community.

In a nutshell, Limbale intends to highlight the Dalits' plight in the humiliating and painful post-independent India of the 1960s by challenging society. He also further explains that due to lack of material prosperity and financial status, they mostly suffer in social and political existence. Their social and political existence matter a lot in spite of their minor in the contemporary socio-political world. This has occurred despite safeguards in the Indian constitution. It brought to light the hypocrisies and mentalities of those who identify as belonging to higher castes.

However, thanks to reservation regulations, the Dalits' circumstances have improved over time. The question of how long they will stay socially degraded and rejected even though they are now becoming economically independent and professionally strengthening their position under government



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sponsorship remains the same. When will society finally move past the Dalit people's stigmatized identity? Even yet, these inquiries remain unaddressed.

Being aware of one's own personality traits, values, and strengths, as well as being able to be mindful self-observers, are all examples of being conscious of oneself. It also entails being conscious of how one's actions affect every part of the environment. It's crucial to understand that self-consciousness is not awareness of oneself. Several anti-discrimination protest movements have resurrected Dalit awareness. India's laws affirm equality, but actual implementation lags far behind. The word "Dalit" is now used with pride and an attitude of self-assertion, and its movement refers to a concerted effort by all classes to achieve equality. The question of humanity and the dignity of hum beings seem to be at the core of *The Outcaste*. While summing up all the aspects of this book it is quite clear to assume that the author's prime concern is to reflect on the misery and plight of the segregated community in relation to others.

The concerns of the author were the burning issue to attract the large numbers of readers and the Dalit consciousness make conscious of their slavery which is the root of Dalit literature. Limbale articulates his literature through the representation of the reality of the Dalit life with the awakening of Dalit consciousness who were brutally humiliated and oppressed by others. Denial to accessibility was the major problem which instigated the writer to present their sufferings. The rotten politics of the upper class led these people exploited to a great extent. Limbale has portrayed the miserable life as a half caste and impoverished man. Awareness of self refers to people's responsiveness of their own personality personalities, morals, assets; as well as ability to be mindful self-observers; knowing all characteristics of our personality.

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