

Women: An Embodiment Of Self-Victimisation In Shankarankumar Limbale's 'The Outcaste'

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ABSTRACT

Shankarankumar Limbale's "*The Outcaste*" (Akkarmashi) is a seminal work in Dalit literature, providing an unvarnished look at the lives of the Dalit community in India. It gives every detail about the author's own experiences growing up as Dalit (mention the place). Within this narrative, the depiction of women is critical, as it highlights the dual oppression faced by Dalit women: both from the broader caste hierarchy and within the patriarchal structures of their own communities. Limbale portrays women who struggle to assert their identity and dignity within a society that devalues them on multiple fronts. Limbale's narrative highlights how caste and gender intersect to create a unique form of oppression that is distinct from what is experienced by upper-caste women or Dalit men. Dalit women are often considered impure and are excluded from mainstream society, leading to a life of humiliation and deprivation. They are paid less and often work under harsh conditions, reflecting their economic exploitation and social subordination. They are expected to adhere to patriarchal norms and gender roles. They have limited autonomy and are often denied decision-making power in their personal and family lives. In some cases, they are physically and emotionally abused, within the family itself, which is considered very common. They even fall victims of sexual violence by the upper-caste men. Dalit women are denied equal participation in religious practices and are treated as inferior within religious communities. Limbale's narrative provides a platform for the voices of Dalit women, for their rights, who are often silenced in mainstream discourses. The novel gives them a form of agency by acknowledging their suffering and resilience. The women in the novel are not mere victims; they are active participants in their struggle for survival and dignity.

Keywords: Dalit-literature, Subordination, Exploitation, Patriarchy, Resilience

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1. Introduction

Dalit literature has seen significant growth and evolution, particularly in the past few decades. This growth can be attributed to several factors, including increased access to education, the rise of social media, and a growing global interest in marginalized voices. Many new writers from Dalit communities have emerged, bringing fresh perspectives and experiences. While talking about Dalit people Jamdhade, D. S. (2014) opines

The group of Indians that has been deprived of this all is called Dalits and their writing Dalit literature. As Dalits are deprived of the rights to live, their writing is marked as a revolt against the social system, and the efforts to establish social justice. (Jamdhade, 86)

These authors often write in regional languages as well as English, broadening the reach of their stories. Dalit literature is not confined to traditional forms like poetry and prose. It now includes a variety of genres such as autobiographies, short stories, novels, essays, plays, and even graphic novels. This diversification helps in reaching different audiences and expressing complex narratives. Recent Dalit literature often explores the intersectionality of caste with other forms of social

stratification such as gender, class, and religion. This nuanced approach helps in understanding the multifaceted nature of oppression and resistance. Contemporary Dalit literature often emphasizes realism and authenticity, portraying the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and the resilience of Dalit communities. This focus helps in creating a more honest and impactful narrative. Many writers try to bring out the harsh reality about this people through their writing. Few such writers are Meena Kandasamy, Sharankumar Limbale, Yashica Dutt, Manoranjan Byapari, Bama, and Ajay Navaria. Due to recent growth in Dalit literature, these writers signifies a powerful and ongoing movement towards reclaiming identity, challenging systemic oppression, and celebrating resilience. The increasing diversity in voices, genres, and platforms ensures that Dalit literature continues to evolve and make a profound impact both within India and globally.

Sharankumar Limbale is a prominent Marathi writer, poet, and literary critic known for his contributions to Dalit literature in India. Born on June 1, 1956, in the village of Hanoor in Maharashtra, Limbale's early life was marked by poverty and social discrimination,

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experiences that profoundly influenced his literary work. Limbale has written numerous novels, short stories, essays, and poems. His works often address themes of social justice, inequality, and the fight against oppression. He has been a vocal advocate for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities in India.

Limbale's most famous work is his autobiography, "*Akkarmashi*" (*The Outcaste*), published in 1984. This book provides a harrowing account of his life as an untouchable in Indian society, exposing the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination. In addition to it, Limbale has also made significant contributions to literary criticism, analyzing the works of other Dalit writers and situating Dalit literature within the broader context of Indian and world literature. Over the years, Limbale has received several awards and honors for his literary contributions, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2019 for his Marathi novel "*Sanvidhan*."

His novel "*Hindu*" explores the complexities of caste and religion in Indian society, delving into the lives of Dalit characters who navigate through systemic oppression and discrimination. A collection of short stories "*Nirvana*" that depict the harsh realities of Dalit life, addressing themes such as poverty, discrimination, and resistance. Limbale's poetry often reflects his personal experiences and the collective struggle of Dalits, expressing pain, anger, and a quest for dignity. Apart from this he has done various critical works which offered a theoretical framework for understanding Dalit literature. It addresses the unique aesthetic and political dimensions of Dalit writing.

Limbale's works are essential readings for anyone interested in understanding the socio-political landscape of India, especially from the perspective of marginalized communities. His writings not only provide a voice to the voiceless but also challenge the dominant narratives in Indian literature.

Sharankumar Limbale's "*The Outcaste*" (*Akkarmashi*), an autobiographical novel, sheds light on the pervasive oppression faced by Dalit women in India. The book narrates Limbale's own experiences growing up as a Dalit and offers a poignant examination of the intersectional discrimination faced by Dalit women. Analyzing the voice of women in this autobiography requires a deep dive into the themes, characters, and socio-cultural context of the novel. His work, which is autobiographical, sheds light on the marginalized lives of Dalits in India, and women's experiences within this framework are particularly poignant.

While talking about Dalit, Singh, V. (2012) in his "*Aesthetics And Sensibility Of The Oppressed: Writing On Or From A Dalit Perspective*" opines,

Dalits have written about their experiences which showcase the caste binaries and caste based discrimination and subjugation. Many opine that only those who are marginalized/Dalit and have experienced the marginalization can truly and authentically write about the marginal/dalit. (Singh, 107)

He believes that only those who have undergone or faced the oppression and struggle can pen down their experiences effectively. Many Dalit writers have written their autobiographies to bring out the life and struggle of the Dalits into light, so that others can know about their situation.

Limbale's work often draws heavily from his personal experiences and struggles. His autobiography, "*Akkarmashi*" ("*The Outcaste*"), is a seminal work that vividly portrays his life as an untouchable in India. His writing is starkly realistic, portraying the harsh realities of caste discrimination, poverty, and social injustice. He does not shy away from depicting the brutal and often disturbing aspects of Dalit life. Limbale's work is charged with emotional intensity, conveying the pain, anger, and resilience of the marginalized communities he writes about. His narratives often evoke a strong emotional response from the reader. Despite the complexity of the issues he addresses, Limbale's writing is characterized by its simplicity and clarity. He uses straightforward language to communicate his messages effectively. His writing is deeply critical of the social and political structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. Limbale often challenges the dominant narratives and exposes the hypocrisies of the caste system. Limbale's works are rich with cultural context, incorporating traditional Dalit folklore, customs, and oral histories. In one of his interviews, when the interviewer asked about the experience he encountered after the outcome of his book, he replied, "When my book came out and I became star. I got publicity, fame and name. I became spokes person for my cry and problems. I became an icon for forth coming generations to write for social justice. My life changed by my book. I become bold and confident in my life. (Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu, 2)

This not only adds depth to his narratives but also preserves and honors the cultural heritage of the Dalit community. Beyond storytelling, his writing serves as a form of activism, advocating for social change and justice. Limbale's works are often a call to action, urging readers to confront and dismantle the systemic discrimination faced by Dalits. He often references other literary works, historical events, and cultural symbols, creating a layered and intertextual narrative that resonates on multiple levels. Limbale's writing is not just a reflection of his personal journey but also a powerful voice for the voiceless, challenging societal norms and advocating for equality and human dignity.

Dalit women are subjected to severe social ostracism. They are often considered impure and are excluded from mainstream society, leading to a life of humiliation and deprivation. They are forced into menial and degrading jobs. They are paid less and often work under harsh conditions, reflecting their economic exploitation and social subordination. Within their own communities, Dalit women are expected to adhere to patriarchal norms and gender roles. They have limited autonomy and are often denied decision-making power in their personal and family lives. Physical and

emotional abuse within the family is common. Dalit women often endure domestic violence, with little recourse for justice or support. Dalit women are frequently victims of sexual violence perpetrated by upper-caste men. These acts of violence are often committed with impunity, reflecting the power dynamics and systemic inequalities in society. Victims of sexual violence face societal stigma and shame, further victimizing them and limiting their opportunities for justice or redress.

These women often live in extreme poverty, with limited access to resources and opportunities. Their economic vulnerability makes them more susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Education is a critical avenue for social mobility, yet Dalit women face significant barriers in accessing education. This lack of educational opportunities perpetuates the cycle of poverty and marginalization. Religious institutions often reinforce caste-based discrimination. Dalit women are denied equal participation in religious practices and are treated as inferior within religious communities. The discrimination and hypocrisy within religious settings lead to a crisis of identity and faith for many Dalit women. This internal conflict is a recurring theme in Limbale's narrative.

Despite the systemic oppression, Dalit women exhibit remarkable resilience and strength. Limbale highlights instances of personal and collective resistance, where women fight against their circumstances and seek to improve their lives. Limbale emphasizes the importance of education and awareness in empowering Dalit women. Knowledge becomes a tool for challenging oppression and advocating for their rights. "The Outcaste" provides a vivid and harrowing account of the multifaceted oppression faced by Dalit women. Limbale's work is a powerful indictment of the social, economic, and cultural structures that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. It calls for a deeper understanding and transformation of these oppressive systems to achieve true social justice.

2. Objectives of the Study

- i. To gain familiarity with different struggles encountered by Dalit women
- ii. To investigate their struggles, exploitations and psychological aspects
- iii. To exhibit Sharankumar Limbale's talent in dissecting the problems in the society
- iv. To carry forward the message of Sharankumar Limbale for the welfare of the down trodden people

3. Significance and Relevance of the Study

- i. The discussion about caste and its impact in Sharankumar Limbale's 'The Outcaste' that exhibits new views about the society
- ii. Empathy and sympathy may be aroused in the heart of the readers due to various struggles the characters encounter

iii. Light is thrown about various caste and social problems prevailing in the Dalit society

iv. Awareness of critical analysis can make a root for the future research.

4. Literature Review

Research Scholars often study Sharankumar Limbale's works within the context of Dalit and subaltern literature. His contributions to Dalit literature and human rights discourse are significant, providing a critical lens through which to view the intersection of caste, politics, and gender. While praised for his courage of his themes, some critics argue that Limbale's writings is harsh and realistic.

Devika and Chandra Bose (2021) in their article "Exclusion and Exploitation in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*" opines that the writer exposes the exploitations of Dalits through his personal narratives. The writer has witnessed the caste system, underwent mental agony, sufferings and even discriminations. He brings out the pathetic situation about the Dalits that in several places they accepted untouchable practices. The article finally discusses that according to the writer education is a drug through which the social diseases can be cured. He believed that through education only the hard clutches of the society can be relieved.

In their article titled "Pathos and Protest in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*" the researcher Mahendra Sahare (2020) discusses about pathos and protest of Dalit literature. Through this, they bring out how the author's society was discriminated, exploited and humiliated. Limbale expresses his situation as an illegitimate child, who was born to an upper caste man and an untouchable mother, which created the pathos. This autobiography is the way he protest against the upper-caste humiliation and exploitation.

Jamshad Ali (2017) in his article "Politics of Orphanhood: Discourse, Power, and Resistance in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)*" opines about Limbale's arrowing life in an obnoxious social order. He discusses many factors including orphanhood. He says that this autobiography is considered as a resistance against social exclusion and stigmatization of orphans.

Provakar Palak (2021) opines in his article "The Outcaste: An Intersectionality of Self, Community and Nation" about Limbale's representative as Dalit individual. He analyses about the autobiography and finds to connect the definition of autobiography.

5. Methodology

The methodology applied in this article is analytical which is based on utilizing and analysing both primary and secondary sources. It is available in books, e-materials and journals. The format, citation style and referencing of the article have all been closely followed by the APA latest edition.

6. Analysis and Findings

Understanding the voice of women in "*The Outcaste*" necessitates a grasp of the socio-cultural context in which these women live. Dalit women are subjected to severe discrimination and exploitation. Their voices are often suppressed not only by the upper castes but also by Dalit men who themselves are victims of a broader oppressive system. These women are double marginalization. They are oppressed due to their caste and gender. This dual burden is evident in their daily lives and interactions. Limbale portrays women who struggle to assert their identity and dignity within a society that devalues them on multiple fronts. Sexual exploitation is a recurring theme in Limbale's narrative. Upper-caste men often see Dalit women as easy targets for sexual violence. This exploitation is not just a physical violation, but a profound dehumanization, stripping them of their agency and humanity. The narrative does not shy away from depicting these brutal realities, making the reader acutely aware of the systemic abuse faced by these women.

The economic status of Dalit women is precarious. They are often engaged in menial jobs that pay poorly. Limbale illustrates how economic dependency exacerbates their vulnerability to exploitation. Despite their hard work, they remain impoverished and are often the primary breadwinners in their families, shouldering the financial burden. Despite the overwhelming oppression, the women exhibit remarkable resilience. Limbale portrays them as strong and enduring figures who, despite their suffering, strive to maintain their dignity and support their families. Their resistance is not always overt but is evident in their day-to-day survival and the small acts of defiance against a system designed to crush them.

In "*The Outcaste*" Limbale's mother is a central figure in the narrative. Her life is a testament to the struggles faced by Dalit women. She is a victim of sexual exploitation, bearing children from different men who use and discard her. Hemrah Bansal (2016) when discussing about the status of Limbale's mother in the autobiography states that

Limbale recalls his concern for his mother who would refrain from attending wedding ceremonies and other festive occasions. Since his mother would never attend such feasts, Limbale would sneak some food to his mother to placate her wriggling hungry stomach. On one such occasion, he is caught by an upper-caste man, Girmallya who abuses him as 'the son of a bitch'. After this incident he would not sneak anything and would even hesitate to eat at such gatherings which would descend his mother's wrath on him. (Hemraj, 58)

The author wanted to give his mother left overs in functions. Since he was not allowed to enter the function hall he sneaks and gets the food. Poverty makes her to do illegal things. She even scolds him when he demands food.

Do you want me to feed you with dust – there is nothing else in this house... Go and find out if anyone would like to buy me in the market?" (9)

Even though they lived in poverty, she emerges as a pillar of strength, working tirelessly to support her family. Her voice is one of suffering but also of unyielding resilience. The novel also portrays other women in the community, each representing different facets of the collective struggle. Even his sisters slept hungry where his mother will take only water to hide her hunger. Limbale writes "At the sight of my sisters who had gone to sleep hungry, I lost my appetite and could not sleep" (21). These women share similar stories of exploitation, poverty, and resilience. They form a support network, providing emotional and practical support to each other, showcasing a sense of solidarity amidst their suffering.

His mother once started selling liquor in her house to chase the poverty and feed her family. As a little boy the author has witnessed the filthy customers who would come to consume alcohol and spit and vomit there itself. He even witnesses the drunkards touching his mothers hand and flirting with her. Without understanding the situation, his grandparents will quarrel accusing her of adultery. Not only this, his grandfather will humiliate his grandmother abusing her for adultery. The author says, Dada's teeth had fallen out, his hair had gone white, his face was a mesh of wrinkles; and yet whenever Dada got a change he humiliated Santamai" (34).

Through this he brings out the situation how the women who struggle to take care of the family instead of men is being abused. Being a male his Dada doesn't want to look after his home, and people, but blame the working women.

Apart from this "*The Outcaste*" can be analyzed through the lens of intersectionality, which considers the overlapping systems of oppression that affect Dalit women. Limbale's narrative highlights how caste and gender intersect to create a unique form of oppression that is distinct from what is experienced by upper-caste women or Dalit men. When he talks about his mother Masamai, he expresses her condition before and after her marriage. She was married to a man Ithal Kamble, but it didn't go well. Finally out of compulsion they got divorced. After divorce she was selling woods for her living. Later when she got remarried, she was not given the status of a wife. Limbale opines

A man can eat paan and spit as many times as he likes, but the same is not possible for a woman. It is considered wrong if a woman does that. Once her chastity is lost, it can never be restored (36).

He brings out his mother's pathetic situation. Many females in his society are subjected to such humiliation. He throws light about the condition of women in his Dalit society. He tells about the sexual abuse of the lower-caste women.

The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on

attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. (38)

For Patils, keeping the Mahar women (lower-caste) became a fashion. Sometimes, the wives of the Patils welcome the Mahar women. They tend to do this to please their husband and do not want to get beatings from them. In various situations, these women tend to take care of the children of their husbands concubines. Moreover, if her husband is in the death bed, it's the wife's duty to take care of him, bath him and massage him. Women do consider that it's her duty to take care of her husband what ever they do to her.

The concept of intersectionality is crucial in understanding the plight of Dalit women in this autobiography. Their experiences cannot be fully understood by looking at caste or gender in isolation. Instead, the intersection of these identities shapes their lives. Limbale's work provides a vivid illustration of this intersectionality, showing how caste-based discrimination and patriarchal norms work together to oppress Dalit women.

Limbale's narrative provides a platform for the voices of Dalit women, who are often silenced in mainstream discourses. While their voices are mediated through Limbale's perspective, the novel gives them a form of agency by acknowledging their suffering and resilience. The women in the novel are not mere victims; they are active participants in their struggle for survival and dignity. Limbale's portrayal of women's suffering is stark and unflinching. He does not romanticize their struggles but presents them in their brutal reality. This raw depiction serves to highlight the extent of the oppression faced by Dalit women, making their plight visible to a broader audience. The narrative evokes a sense of empathy and solidarity. Limbale's depiction of the women in his community is empathetic, recognizing their pain and resilience. This empathetic portrayal helps to humanize the women, presenting them as individuals with their own stories and struggles, rather than mere symbols of victimhood. The writer clearly states that even though the primary focus is on caste oppression, he also critiques the patriarchal structures within the Dalit community. The novel highlights how Dalit men, despite being victims of caste oppression, perpetuate gender-based oppression within their own community. This critique is essential in understanding the multi-faceted nature of the women's oppression.

7. Conclusion

Shankarankumar Limbale's "*The Outcaste*" is a powerful narrative that sheds light on the lives of Dalit women. Through its unvarnished depiction of their suffering, exploitation, and resilience, the novel provides a voice to those who are often silenced. The women in the novel embody the dual struggle against caste and gender oppression, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to understanding their experiences. Limbale's empathetic and critical portrayal ensures that their stories are not forgotten,

serving as a testament to their strength and endurance in the face of unimaginable adversity. "The Outcaste" is a stark and unflinching portrayal of the brutal realities of caste discrimination in India. Through his personal narrative, Limbale not only exposes the harsh truths of Dalit life but also highlights the indomitable spirit and resilience of those who refuse to be defined by their oppression. The autobiography is a call for empathy, understanding, and social change, urging readers to acknowledge and challenge the deep-seated prejudices and systemic inequalities that persist in society.

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