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DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *THE OUTCASTE*

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on Dalit Consciousness through an analysis of Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*. The novel is condemned as a representation of protest literature where the writer tries to assert the identity of a marginalised community. The purpose of the paper is to explore the veracity of the treatment of Dalits by the hands of the upper class and through this novel, one can witness the raised voice of the oppressed class against the authority. Eventually, Limbale brings up the notion of his desire to establish a space where humanity and egalitarian society pervades. The struggle of the outcaste highlights the consciousness of Dalits. This novel portrays the anguish and absurd experience of his life being a Dalit. The paper concludes with a justification to demonstrate how Limbale paints the canvas of his own experience as a member of the Mahar community who challenged the topmost class in the hierarchy of varna system. It deals with the quest for identity and enquires about its own roots that is who he really is and what is the existence of his identity? Being a member of Mahar community, he comes to know that his identity is a combination of Mahar and Lingayat. Overtly, he was pivoting around the class-conscious concept of identity. With the help of textual analysis, the writer depicts Dalit consciousness as an act of revolutionary idea which causes a shift in the thought process of individual from varying background. It sank into depth of Dalit subjectivity.

Keywords: Consciousness, Struggle, Reality, Dalits and Untouchability

"Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier". - *Annihilation of Caste* by B.R Ambedkar

Introduction

India is primarily known for the existence of class division in the last 250 years due to the existence of evil practice known as the varna system. With the advent of the British empire, concept of class, caste and race becomes problematic in the growth of a country's economy. Limbale is very vocal about pointing out Dalit consciousness after experiencing discrimination for such a long time. The

genesis of word Dalit comes from Sanskrit language and it means 'crushed' or 'broken piece'. The word was firstly used by Jyotirao Phule while writing her story of 'untouchables' (Kumar 4). There were various movements have ignited in India to upgrade the position of Dalits. The literature of Dalit was traced back to Maharashtra in the 1960s, where the first conference was held to bring forth the concern of 'outcaste'. They are famous with the name given by Mahatma Gandhi, known as Harijan whose meaning is children of God, it never gives them any sigh of relief as it displays an expression of sympathy against which they become furious. In contrast to this, the author blames the god for discrimination. They are treated as inferior because of their belief in Hindu mythology holds that Dalits are born from feet, which is why they are regarded as the lowest rank. At the same time, this novel will help readers understand the concept of Dalit consciousness. According to B.R Ambedkar it's about making slaves aware of their slavery. Zakir Abedi, a critic quoted Ambedkar as saying:

"Ambedkar strongly states that Brahmin have succeeded" to idealise the real and realize the ideal". "Caste is divine, Caste is sacred" (Abedi 204-205).

Sharankumar Limbale wrote a novel originally in Marathi and then gets translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar in 2003 from where it gained the wide readership all over the world. So, many poignant incidents in Limbale's life have been depicted. He was an illegitimate son born to an untouchable outcaste mother and an upper caste father known as Patil. This puts him in a liminal state because such kind of relationship never exist in society. Also, he had no name to connect with him. This book is a harsh critique of the lack of compassion that lower castes have endured for centuries. The expression of writing led Dalits to find their way to narrate the sagas of their lives. The aim of a research paper is to present an argument as to why Dalits were treated as second class citizens? Is self-awareness enough to settle down the mainstream? And lastly, what effects does it have on society? It is an autobiographical work whose definition is given by Sarah Beth as follow:

"Dalit autobiographies are meant to be understood as a representative life story, where the 'ordinary' or 'representative' Dalit individual uses his narrative to raise his voice for those who are silenced by caste oppression. Yet, although Dalit autobiographies certainly invoke multiple subjectivities where the individual 'I' is linked to the communal 'we', the relationship between the two is neither direct nor unproblematic" (Beth 5-6).

Discussion

Autobiographies are meant to share the expression of self by revolutionizing the caste as an unwanted grain against which agitation prompts to resist the problematic idea. Despite this, the relationship between literature and reality is shown through the lived experience of Dalits that is the suffering they are compelled to endure. Self becomes important through the voice of subalterns. The text addresses the issue of identity from the very beginning. At first glance, one comes to know that the protagonist was brought up by Santamai and her partner, to whom he calls dada, but in reality, he is a Muslim who pays heed to the different castes present in the novel. He faced many problems due to his caste. For instance, he encountered difficulty in enrolling the school and not be able to marry the girl with whom he was in love, but later on he managed to fulfil his aspirations. In this regard, many critics have looked from different perspective. Scholar Ravi Shankar Kumar pointed out in the essay 'The Politics of Dalit Literature' that:

"Sharankumar Limbale argues that Dalit literature is aimed at raising the consciousness of the Dalit masses and making them aware of their conditions combining Marxism and Ambedkarism he suggests that writers play a significant role in the political and ideological contestations involved in making a humanist society. Limbale links the Dalit literary phenomenon with the struggle of the Dalit masses and other working classes to build a humanist society and rejecting their degraded existence in Indian society" (Kumar 49).

The novel vividly describes the discrimination and how they were ostracised from dominant community. The opening pages of Limbale's *The Outcaste* gives a glimpse of primary school life which make him acknowledge his identity as an outcaste whose world is totally different from eating habits to dressing even in the games. This segregation made his community impure due to which he combats with humiliation. Despite that, he recounts the event where his school teacher called him the son of a witch. The other boys also insulted him on the first day of school, someone threw stones at him. Thus, different titles are assigned to them due to being a Dalit. He brought into the notice that low class work was always associated with Dalits. His grandmother picks up lumps of dung and cleans the leftover grains in it. Later on, puts it under the scorching sunlight, which is unbearable especially during summer. It is hard to do toiling, no one is concerned with their flesh and blood. In such harsh circumstances, entire community is able to survive along with the psychological impact on the mind. Beside this, there was an incident when there was a picnic scheduled, but what happened to lower caste students are not aware of this, which is why they are forced to eat tasteless food while upper class students had delicious fried food for lunch and later on Mahar community students eat leftover food as directed by their respective teachers. In this regard, Limbale pointed out the discrimination in the following statement:

"The Wani and brahmin boys played kabaddi. 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 2).

Even the games these boys played are not innocent, which vividly portray Dalit as 'other', just like Edward Said in his essay 'Orientalism' (1978) illustrates orient as the 'other'. It is inventing differences to separate a dominant group from a supposedly inferior 'other'. The upper caste people use this invention to justify political, social and cultural interests in front of the Dalits. In a similar way,

people from the Mahar community underwent evil practices of segregation. It becomes mandatory to develop the mind of higher authority to eliminate disparity. In addition to this, oppression is not only extended to the struggle of one gender, but women are also subject to it. For instance, when a writer portrays the condition of a mother Masamai. Her life was ruined by Patil after taking a divorce which ultimately hindered her way to move forward in life. Not only this, his mother sold herself to overcome starvation of children. She made a sacrifice because of her caste, which is repeatedly emphasised the devastating situation that Dalits have to face in order to survive in a brutal society. In general, women are doubly marginalised, first because of caste and secondly due to gender. Limbale writes:

"Our village has provided us with bread so we owe much to them. They did provide bread but in exchange satisfied their lust with our women. I can bear to think of Masami caught between bread and lust who will rescue my mother? She will die blemished, an object of someone's lust" (Limbale 64).

Not only this, his grandmother was forced to sell wine and in between, men flirted with her and in return, she scolds them. To earn their bread, they are undergoing fearful experiences and through this, the writer brings consciousness of his caste. Poverty was the sole cause for women to submit themselves in the hands of men who always crave sexual lust and use them as an object. There are various events that loudly express biased treatment. He is doubly marginalised because of belonging to Mahar community and being an illegitimate child. In this direction, Dalit feminist scholar Sharmila Rege pointed out:

"The category 'woman' was conceived as collectively, based on their being oppressed by the fact of their womanhood" (Rege 40)

The writer became more aware of the injustice being done to the community. He depicts the hostel life where Dalit boys used to live was described as like a 'zoo'. Due to violence, every person in the community stopped saying Namaskar and started saying Jai Bhim throws light on the fact that Dr. B.R Ambedkar plays a significant role with respect to the

narrative of Dalits. Simultaneously, the writer was fired up with the rage of misrepresenting the Dalits by Hindu community. He comes with his own text by detailing into the minutest details initiating from dawn to dusk in the life of untouchables. Dalit is treated like a slave only to deal with the chores of upper caste. In a way, Dalits are assigned with a fixed role by society.

With reference to consciousness, all he wanted to showcase life of Dalits is meant to be liberated without any restriction as they also have the capability to fly high with the power of enlightenment and knowledge. Human thinking and reasoning played vital role for asserting the entire community. The motive of writer is to bring forth the crisis of identity abrupt from the side of mainstream. Education act as a tool for outcaste to display themselves from a point of view and with a true light altogether. It is an urge to sustain the life based on humanity. It awakens the consciousness of Dalits that being a Dalit is not a crime rather a responsible human whose task is to make a classless society and to cut the shackles of superiority and inferiority. Hence, caste is a state of mind which Limbale states with reference to the novel. He intends the audience to resist the subjugation of Dalits. The element of self becomes important here. Self- consciousness gets asserted by representing themselves with their experience (Anubhav). For Dalits, Anubhav is the only powerful tool which is capable of presenting the world of pains, trauma and sufferings. It acts as the looking glass to demonstrate the reality.

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