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CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CASTE IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *HINDU: A NOVEL*

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Abstract

Sharankumar Limbale is very prominent figure in the area of Dalit Literature. Apart from his vast body of creative writings, he is well known for his monumental critical work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. *Hindu: A Novel* is set in 1990s and early 21st century, where the author tries to give a realistic portrayal of the changing dynamics of caste. He author examines various challenges and loopholes of Dalit liberation and aspirations in recent socio-political scenario. Being a Dalit activist himself, he also brings out the divisions and shortcomings of Dalit leadership. The main objective of the paper is to critically assess the Dalit consciousness and assertion and resulting challenges depicted in the novel. One of the defining structures of the plot of the novel is the portrayal of the clash between conscious and assertive Dalits in democratic environment and age old casteist mentalities of the upper castes. Although, the novel revolves around the murder of Taty Kamble, but it is not a murder mystery fiction or crime thriller. The murderers are known to the both the readers and the characters of the novel. There is nothing to uncover, the cause of the murder is well known to everyone. What the author tries to do in the plot is to uncover the psychological landscape of the society where these kinds of murders are normalized. The novel vividly portrays the hierarchical social order which have appropriated and normalized the slavery, oppression and voicelessness of the Dalits.

Keywords: *Dalit Assertion, Dalit Consciousness, Caste hierarchy, Casteism*

1. Introduction

Before critically discussing the major themes of the novel it would be imperative to give a brief overview of the plot of *Hindu: A Novel*. The novel is set in Achalpur, a typical casteist village of Maharashtra. The novel begins with the climax of the plot. The novel, begins with the murder of Taty Kamble, an Ambedkarite Jalsa artist and an ardent

Dalit activist. Taty Kamble's activism centered on the Dalit Liberation. For that, he used the traditional art form of the Mahars and Mangs for bringing awareness among the caste oppressions and it provoked upper caste of the village of Achalpur. Taty Kamble became a threat to the age old social order. Taty Kamble believes in conversion to Buddhism. He appeals to his fellowmen to convert

on Dhamma Chakra Parivartan day. In the meeting, he bluntly criticized the Hindu religion, "Why do you stay in a religion that doesn't allow you to enter the temple? Why do you stay in a religion that doesn't acknowledge your humanity? Why do you stay in a religion that does not allow you even water? A religion that forbids the treatment of human as humans is not a religion but naked domination..." (51 Limbale)

The horrendous murder took place immediately after the speech. The novelist described the scene through Sonali's eyes. The murder was witnessed by Milind Kamble and Gopichand and Manikchand. The scene of murder was immediately followed by a rape of Dalit woman by Manikchand and Gopichand in their farmhouse. The rape of the Dalit woman took place in front of the narrator Milind Kamble, a well known Dalit activist of the area. But he didn't have the courage to oppose the rape nor he had the courage to become the eyewitness of Tatya Kamble's murder. Through the character of the Milind Kamble, the writer wanted to bring before the reader the internal enemy of the Dalit Liberation movement.

After the murder of Tatya Kamble, the tension between Dalits and the non-Dalits loomed large in the village and which was used as a trump card by the power mongers. Professor Rahul Bansode, who is known as an honest Dalit activist, took advantage of the situation and used Tatya Kamble's murder for building his political career. Whereas, businessman and contractor Manikchand and Gopichand started playing shrewd political game by taking advantage of the rising tension between Dalits and non-Dalits in Achalpur. They had the upperhand in this dirty political game since Sandanand Kamble, younger brother of murdered Tatya Kamble worked as domestic helper and watchman in the farmhouse of Gopichand and Manikchand. Immediately after the incident, they made Sadanand Kamble as the village Patil of the Achalpur. Gopichand and Manikchand utilized his power for their selfish needs. Whereas, Sadanand Kamble became mere puppet to them. Despite becoming the village Patil, he was devoid of any power and respect.

Sadanand Kamble gets elected as an MLA and becomes a minister. Although, he has become a minister yet he manipulated by Manikchand and Gopichand. He has changed his testimony in his brothers's murder case to attract the Savarna Sympathy and Votes. At the end of the novel, Manikchand used the ministerial power of Sadanand Kamble to bribe off the judges and as a result all the murderers were acquitted. But Kabir Kamble took his revenge upon the prime accused Prabhakar Kamble as he shot him from close range amidst the celebration of murderers on their being released from the jail. The novel ends here.

2: Analyses

2.1. Dalit consciousness and Dalit Assertion

Hindu: A Novel is set in 1990s and early 21st century. By this time, many educated Dalits like Tatya Kamble, Kabir kamble, Mangesh Kamble, Rohit Kamble became aware about their socio-political rights. Tatya Kamble and other Mahars and Mangs of the village no longer sing and dance in Upper Caste Weddings and Special occasions. They even no longer accept the *Bidagi* (money) after a performances. Most importantly, Tatya Kamble and other Dalit activists and the artist, carry out and organize awareness program for the Ordinary Dalits by Performing Ambedkari *Jalsa*. Ambedkari *Jalsa* is different from tradition Tamasha. Inspired Dalit artists like Tatya Kamble changed the content of the *Jalsa* to create awareness among the ordinary Dalits. The upper castes of the village was not very much impressed by the evolved form of the tamasha, "Tatya Kamble's grandfather's *tamasha* was good. His father's *tamasha* was good too. The village had always admired their artistic skills. They provided pure entertainment. And the village gave them *bidagi* in return. People laughed at the tamasha until their stomachs ached, gave them bakshis. ...Nowadays, gods and goddesses are abused in their jalsas. There is no humour in them and no entertainment." (39 Limbale)

Earlier, Tamasha was performed to please and entertain the upper caste people. The Dalits used to sing and dance for the upper caste villagers on special occasion like wedding. But because of the Ambedkarite movement, the educated Dalits like

Tatya Kamble started using this popular art form to bring awareness among the common people. As mentioned in the novel, the Dalits of the Maharwada no longer sing and dance even though they are asked to do so by the villagers.

2.2 Religious conversion as Dalit Assertion

There are two central problem of religious conversion of Dalits are presented here. First, in the novel, Extremist Hindutva Group try to resist conversion of the Dalits to any other religion. It is interesting to interrogate if Hindus can't treat Dalits equal then why do they resist the conversion to other religion. It is described in the text in the following ways.

'How shall we give money when we don't give them water to drink?'

Then let them convert!'

'It will endanger the Hindu religion.'

'The fear is not about damaging the Hindu religion but about treating Mahars equally. Think about that.' (113 Limbale)

The extremists Hindus of the village are worried that they have to treat the converted Dalits equally and hence the hierarchical caste order will be disrupted. Caste structure is relational, the superiority of one caste is sustained by inferiority another caste. Secondly, even if Dalits are converted to other religion then also they are not liberated from their subordinate status. Mere religious conversion doesn't immediately solve the problems for the Dalits. Religious conversion doesn't entail economic independency of the Dalits. Although, their religion was changed most of them have to economically dependent on the Upper Caste for their survival. Most importantly, hierarchical cultural practices remain the same even after the conversion. 'Whatever religion they accept, ultimately they will remain in the Maharwada anyway.' (113 Limbale) This kind of defiance and assertion greatly offended the pride of the upper caste which created a suppressed tension among the upper caste villagers, "Unless we acquire an aggressive stance, Hindutva will not develop a sharp edge. And dalits will not bend down in front of us

unless Hindutva gets sharp-edged. Hindu society is awake now and therefore people must stop criticizing Hindus'. Hema Pandit read out the speech that Godbole Guruji had written for her." (96 Limbale)

Along with the rise of Dalit Consciousness and Dalit activism there has been a parallel rise of the Anti-Dalit activities in modern era among certain section of Upper Caste Hindu. The anti-Dalit elements are there to discourage the conscious Dalits youths in their attempt to break free from their subaltern state.

2.3 *Hindu:A Novel* as a critique on Dalit leadership and Dalit Liberation Movement

The crisis of Dalit representation is very much evident in the novel. The novel brings out the reality that even after reservation of political seats, Dalit voice and aspiration don't get properly represented. The power of the representatives are manipulated as in the case with Sadananda Kamble. Gopichand and Manikchand act as kingmakers since they have both the money and the manipulative quality. They decided to support Sadananda Kamble as an MLA candidate not because they have sympathy for him as he has been their loyal servant. They decided to project him as an MLA candidate because they could use him for their selfish needs. Sadananda Kamble is not one of those enlightened Dalits like Tatya Kamble, Rohit Kamble and other members of the Dalit Movement. 'He speaks like a pet parrot,' Bhima Bhole said. "'Sadananda, you will bring shame to the movement. Please don't play into their hands. This will further strengthen the unjust, and the common man will lose all hope,' Chandrakant Ambhore pleaded." (111 Limbale)

There are two types of Dalit character in the novel. One type Dalit characters are aware about their rights and are ready to challenge and fights for their rights. Tatya Kamble, Rohit Kamble and Mangesh Kamble belong to the first group who are conscious about their rights. Another type of Dalits are represented by Sadananda kamble and some other Dalits of the Maharwada who accepted their subordinate state as a divine ordain. The novelist points out that it is because of people like Sadanand

Kamble and Milind Kamble that Dalit Liberation is at stake.

2.4 Caste Dynamics of Post-Independent India in *Hindu: A Novel*

Although, the novel revolves around the murder of Taty Kamble, but it is not a murder mystery fiction or crime thriller. Because, the murderers are known to both the readers and the characters of the novel. There is nothing to uncover, the cause of the murder is well known to everyone. It is the representative of the casteist village in India. As the plot develops, it uncovers the psychological landscape of the society where this kind of murders are normalized. The novel vividly portrays the hierarchical social order, that appropriated and normalized the slavery, oppression, voicelessness of the Dalits. The very structure of the village is arranged in hierarchical order. When Taty Kamble and other Dalits activists started fighting for Dalit rights, the upper castes of the Achalpur felt threatened. They devised new ways to subjugate the new generation of assertive Dalits. If Taty Kamble's voice was silenced with brutal murder, the voice of the other Dalit activists was suppressed with manipulation of the 'State Apparatus' in Althusserian term. The novel shows the loopholes of the constitutional rights reserved for Dalits. The division between untouchables and other upper castes are spatial, cultural, economical and most importantly psychological.

The Psychological dimension of Dalit-Savarna division is the result of age old economic and cultural subordination of the Dalits. The murder happened because the villagers wanted teach an ordinary Dalits a lesson. It is mentioned in the text that even savarna's are victim of the caste system. They are called as a psychological victim. The normalization of inequality and oppression on the line caste resulted in brutal murder of Taty Kamble. In the novel, "Kabir Kamble said, 'It is very hard to fight this social order with weapons because our enemy is hiding in the scriptures. It is hidden in the hearts and the minds of people. The number of temples is going up daily and the queues in front of them are getting stronger.'" (102 Limbale)

Thus, the caste system is ingrained in the collective consciousness of both upper castes and the lower castes. In sociology and related social sciences, the idea of collective consciousness comes from the French theorist and sociologist Emile Durkheim. Collective consciousness is all about understanding what makes society work. For Durkheim, individuals in society - while we all have our own individual consciousness also share solidarity with one another. We work together in many ways and our collective consciousness is what allows this to happen. Basically, collective consciousness is a constellation of ideas, beliefs, and values that a great number of individuals in a given society share. Gramsci argued that diverse social groups attained "hegemony" at different times through inducing the consent of the majority of subordinate groups. In this sense, Gramsci's hegemony relates to how the ruling class uses their ideologies into common sense and natural and how they preserved that status quo.

In the novel, Sadanand Kamble is not allowed to hoist the national flag because that would hurt the sentiments of the upper caste. "We will not let Sadananda Kamble hoist the national flag,' Narendra Patil said. We salute the national flag hoisted by a Mahar? Of course not,' Bajirao Chavan added...we should tell him about the strong feelings of the people; Said Hema Pandit." (103 Limbale) "The strong feeling of the people" here refers to the hierarchical position of the upper caste have enjoyed in public space and in their social life. It talks about the Hegemonic Culture that has been normalized for centuries. This process of normalization of the hegemonic culture has also resulted in psychological barrier between dalits and the non-dalits.

Caste system has become a very potent weapon in the politics of the country. It is because caste identity is rooted in the psyche of the both upper caste and the lower caste. After the death of Taty Kamble, the enmity between upper caste and the Untouchables worsened. A tension between the both parties loomed large in the village and the Dalit colonies. This aggravated tension was used by the power mongers for their benefits.

3. Conclusion

Although, old feudal structure is gradually crumbling in the post-independent era yet upper castes in the novel were not ready to accept the radical change that modernity and education brought in the democratic space. The idea of equality and fraternity is considered as threat to the traditional uneven relationship between the Upper caste Hindus and the Dalits. Along with the breakdown of feudal structure and constitutional provision for the depressed class, it is becoming a challenge for the upper caste to maintain the hierarchical status that they have enjoyed for thousands of years. The avoidance of the traditionally assigned duties, have become easier for the untouchables because of the globalization, urbanization, and modernity. But, the Casteist mind is a product of the age old unequal arrangement of the social order where untouchables had been placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus, it is inevitable that the Castiest mind refuse to die down that easily. The problem persist in post-independent era, because certain section still want to subjugate the untouchables even after they are economically not dependent on the upper caste for their survival. It is the main reason for the murder of the Taty Kamble, the dalit artist and activists of the novel. In the above analysis, it is also seen that caste question plays an important role in the politics of the country where power mongers from both Dalit and non Dalits communities find it a very useful tool for acquiring power. However, voices of the ordinary Dalits find no place in such power games. Thus, the novel beautifully depicts the clash between traditional power system of India and the newly inducted constitutional power founded on the democratic principles.

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