

dalit consciousness in limbale's outcast

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Sharan Kumar Limbale's autobiographical novel- outcaste akkarmashi is an account of the author's identity as a dalit and its illegitimacy. The caste system in India had made a hindrance in the socialization of the author, and then being an illegitimate child Limbale was brought up like an outcaste. Being a dalit child, Limbale was socialized in a way that restricted him even from public spaces. The social exclusion he had experienced is vividly portrayed in the novel. The novel was originally written in Marathi, the native dialect of the Mahar community, to which the author belongs.

Limbale was just twenty five year old when he wrote his autobiography. It was published in the year 1984 in Marathi and in 2003 its English translation done by Santhosh Bhommkar was published. Akkarmashi, the original title means impure or an illegitimate child. But it's translated to English as outcaste. Limbale became a prominent dalit writer after his autobiography was published. Akkarmashi is a real life portrait. Limbale was born to an untouchable mother named Masamai, who belongs to Mahar community. But his father Hanmanta Limbale was a high caste land lord, Patel.

Since the Patel doesn't accept him as his son, he lived with his mother. Most of the time he was with his grandmother Santhamai, who was rejected by her husband and living with a Muslim partner, Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar. His childhood was miserable. Starvation was the highest suffering. Since they belong to Mahar community, Limbale's family didn't have any privilege to live a good life. In authors note, Limbale wrote: My history is my mother's life, at the most my grandmother's. My ancestry doesn't go back any further.

My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father in a mansion. Father

is landlord; mother, landless. I am an akkarmashi. I am condemned, branded illegitimate. The educational facility that he got was under the privilege of reservation for dalit communities. He was the only educated person in his family. It was through the education that he got, he came to the realization of his dalit identity. Influence of Dr. B. R Ambedkar made him aware about the dalit consciousness.

The dalit literary movements in Marathi literature, the activist group like dalit panthers had made him conscious about his dalit identity. To study about akkarmashi and Limbale's autobiography, it's needed to have a definite explanation of the word ' dalit' in dalit literature. Harijans and neo-buddhists are not only Dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundaries of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes.

The word Dalit is originally a Marathi word means broken, oppressed, untouchable, downtrodden, and exploited. They come from the poor communities which under the Indian caste system used to be known as untouchables. They constitute nearly 16% of the Indian population. Literature produced by the elite class in India doesn't portray the lives of these dalit people. Their representation in literature was insignificant. It is in this context Dalits started writing about their pains, sufferings and poverty. Dalit literature became a powerful collective voice after 1960s.

it is in Marathi, dalit literature started. Then it spread all over India, especially in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. In Marathi there are two main streams in literature- Brahmanical hierarchical literature and <https://assignbuster.com/dalit-consciousness-in-limbales-outcast/>

dalit literature. Short story, poem, novel, criticism, and in all genres of literature Dalits produced their work of art. This thesis entitled "Limbale's outcaste as an awakening dalit consciousness" is intended to study the text as a product of the self-esteem that Limbale got from the awareness of his dalit consciousness.

In his childhood Limbale was frustrated with his dalit identity. But later through the education and influence of dalit movements, Limbale proclaimed himself as a dalit with pride. This happened only because of his dalit consciousness. Even if caste identity of a dalit is like an insult, Limbale revealed his dalit identity through his first work outcaste akkarmashi. The dissertation is divided into five chapters. This first chapter explains the origin of Dalit and movement and introduces the Dalit writer, Sharan Kumar Limbale. It also contains a general idea of the text.

The second chapter reveals the caste system in India and the condition of Dalits in India. While the third chapter pictures the dalit literary movements in India, influence of Dr. B R Ambedkar and the fourth chapter presents the text as an autobiography and a product of dalit consciousness. The fifth chapter sums up all the ideas explored in the four previous chapters and concludes that Limbale's outcaste is one of the predominant works in dalit literature and it's a by-product of Limbale's awakened dalit consciousness.

Caste identity in India

Caste system is a vital component of Indian society. Caste is one of the smallest divisions in India. It's estimated that there are about three thousand above castes in India. Each caste is different from the other and may be just

opposite to one another. Even the religious conversion cannot overcome the stigma of caste. In his book *Caste in India* Hutton comments that caste is a kind of phenomena only seen in India. May be there are social classes just like the caste in other countries, but this kind of variety and rigid structure cannot be find in any other country.

In the introduction of the novel *outcaste* G. N Devi writes: The phenomenon of caste as a status marker has probably been the most unique feature of Indian society. The origin of the notion of caste is so obscure and its manifestation in social life is so complicated The word ' caste' is used in India to refer to groups and categories of very different kinds. Two types of distinction are particularly important. The first is between varna and jati, and the second between caste and sub-caste.

The difference between varna and jati can be briefly described as the difference between a model and a conceptual scheme on the one hand, and a set of real social groups of categories on the other. There are only four which are arranged in a particular order, where as jatis are many and their rank order is both more ambiguous and more flexible (Chakrabarty, 134) ' Jathi' is the Sanskrit word from which the synonym for caste in almost all Indian languages came. In English ' caste' came from the Portuguese word ' casta' which means race.

One caste means a group of people with same origin and common name. According to Hindu religious beliefs, origin of caste is described under the discourse of ' Chatur Varna'. In this idea Brahmins have come from the mouth of Lord Brahma, Kshathriya from the hand, Vysyar from the thighs and at last Sudras from the legs of Brahma. It gives primary position to

Brahmins and the Sudras were considered as mere objects. Even in Varna system there are many sub castes in the same Varna. There are some features about the caste system. First one is caste is fixed by birth.

One will be the member of the caste into which he/she is born and will remain in the same caste till death. The occupation of the caste too is fixed. One should only do the work allotted for his caste. Endogamy was another mark of caste. If one get married with a person outside his/her community he/she will be out of the caste. It was the problem faced by Limbale, since his parents belonged to two different castes. He was an outcaste. Pollution is the most idiotic concept based on caste. Each caste is separated from another caste by distance to avoid pollution. Even in the case of food, caste was marked.

Hierarchical power structure in the caste system gave primary position to Brahmins while untouchables were the last. Untouchability was strictly followed in India. In most villages of India, untouchables used to live in the outskirts of the village. The social stratification and injustice arising out of the concept of caste attached to the accident of birth have been faced and questioned repeatedly by thinkers and social reformers throughout the history of India. It's important to understand the term 'Sanskritization' while dealing with caste identity.

In his book Social Structure M. N Sreenivasan gives a description about it: Sanskritization is the process which forced the dalits and other backward communities to change their rituals and life styles to that of Brahmins. () According to Sreenivasan sanskritization had made many changes among dalits with the influence of Brahmanical ideologies and westernization. But <https://assignbuster.com/dalit-consciousness-in-limbales-outcast/>

even after imitating the rituals of higher caste people, there were no changes in the relation between Brahmins and dalits. Sanskritization happens through imitating elite upper class. With Sanskritization the hegemony of Brahmanism became intense.

Holy books of the Hindu religion had a major role in sanskritization and Brahmanism. It was through these religious texts, Sanskrit traditions and myths started working in common man's mind. Studying Sanskrit and getting the degree gave Brahmins a higher position in the society. Buddhism and Jainism are the two movements which protested against sanskritization. Buddha never used Sanskrit to teach his principles since it is unfamiliar to lower castes. Through rejecting caste system Buddhism influenced dalits and later it resulted in the conversion of dalits from Hinduism to Buddhism.

Maharashtra, the state to which Limbale belongs, was a good example of a society which strictly followed caste system. In a penetrating article on 'Caste and Politics in Maharashtra' Miss Maureen Patterson has analyzed the forces of caste underlying politics in Maharashtra. She discusses the part played by the three important castes, viz. , Brahmins, Mahrata, and Mahars, in the politics of Maharashtra. The Brahmins were the first to become westernized in Maharashtra, and this resulted in a near monopoly of posts for them in the new set up. The early political leaders were mostly Konkanastha Brahmins.

But they were only 4% of Maharashtra. Mahar community to which Dr. B. R Ambedkar and Limbale belong was supposed to do the most hideous works. The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by the Constitution of India (by the mastermind Dr. B. R. Ambedkar) in 1950. But in practice, the <https://assignbuster.com/dalit-consciousness-in-limbales-outcast/>

Dalits are still subjected to extreme forms of social and economic exclusion and discrimination; physical and mental torture. Their attempts to assert their rights are often met with strong resistance from the higher castes, resulting in inhuman torture, rapes, massacres, and other atrocities.

Caste identity was in two different levels for higher castes and for dalits. When Brahmins enjoyed their identity of caste as an upper class Indian they got many privileges just because they were born into a high caste. On the contrary, the stigma of caste identity as a dalit was a curse. Caste identity denied even humanity to them. They lived like in hell, in the midst of untouchability Chapter 3 Dalit Literary Movements Caste system can be considered as a means of exploitation through which the working class people and their manpower was stolen and thus Indian economy was developed.

It was because of this reason that none of the great Indian politicians or so called famous peoples didn't speak against the caste system. Their duty was to protect this stupid notion for the sake of their religious and political survival. Dr. B R Ambedkar was the only person who fought against the caste system. The history of Dalit literature can be traced back to centuries. But Dalit literary expressions were never taken into consideration due to the hegemonic nature of the field of literary production. The emergence of Dalit as a political category and identity coincide with the emergence of Dalit literature.

Recent researches by scholars reveal the widespread character of Dalit writings in various parts of India. Research also shows that Dalit literature had long before acquired a distinct language through its heterogeneous

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character which challenged dominant literary canons. Dalit literature acquired a recognizable identity towards the middle of the twentieth century. The term 'Dalit literature' - 'Dalit' meaning oppressed, broken and downtrodden — came into use officially in 1958 at the first conference on Dalit literature in Mumbai.

The emergence of the Dalit Panthers (a political organisation formed in 1972 in Maharashtra) is a significant moment in the history of Dalit literature which was furthered by various political/literary movements across India. The debate between Gandhi and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), one of India's foremost revolutionaries, an untouchable and a fierce critic of Gandhi, is a major event in Indian history. Ambedkar famously said 'Mahatma, I have no country'. This discussion between Ambedkar and Gandhi has provoked debates on nationhood and Hindu religion.

Although untouchability was abolished with the 1950 Constitution of India (drafted by Ambedkar), Ambedkar's experiences continue to be the lot of India's 170 million Dalits today. Dalit literature in its initial stages was identified as specific protests directed against everyday humiliations that individual dalits and Dalits as a community face. Most of the debates about Dalit Literature have failed to adequately acknowledge the new vocabulary of imagination and aesthetic sensibility produced by these literatures.

Dalit literature cannot be reduced to an engagement with victimhood. In the hands of poets like S. Joseph, it has spawned new literary canons by disturbing the usual language available in the pre-existing canonical literary circles. Dalit Literature today has established itself as a new mode of literary and aesthetic imagination and writing. With the advent of leaders like <https://assignbuster.com/dalit-consciousness-in-limbales-outcast/>

Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra, who brought forth the issues of Dalits through their works and writings the Dalit movement got a forceful representation.

They started a new trend in Dalit writing and inspired many Dalits to come forth with writings in Marathi. Although started in an unorganized way, Dalit literary movement gained pace with the active support of B. R. Ambedkar's revolutionary ideals which stirred into action all the Dalits of Maharashtra. His statue in suit and tie, the dress of most of the educated, holding a book that represents the constitution is a symbol of pride and inspiration for the coming generations.

He inspired and initiated the creative minds of India to enforce the socio-cultural upsurge for the total emancipation of the Dalits. Dalit literary movement therefore is not just a literary movement but is the logo of change and revolution where the primary aim was the liberation of Dalits. The word Dalit in Marathi literally means "broken". It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus.

The term expresses weakness, poverty and humiliation of a particular section of Indian society at the hands of the upper castes. Dalit literature is nothing but the literary expression of this helplessness. The upper caste Hindus treat them as untouchables and they are not allowed to enter a temple or any other sacred place. In the 20th century, the term "Dalit literature" came into use in 1958, when the first conference of Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society) was held at Mumbai.

Dalit literature, which looks at history and current events from a Dalit point of view, has come to occupy a niche in the body of Indian literary expression. It forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature and politics. The primary motive of Dalit literature is to give a voice to the relentless oppression of Dalits in India's caste hierarchy and to inspire the possibility of their social, economic and cultural development. Dalit literature has its roots in the lives of the people who are suppressed, crushed, downtrodden or broken to pieces.

The characters of its literary pieces work as manual labourers cleaning streets, toilets, and sewers. Therefore the primary motive of Dalit literature is the protest and liberation of Dalits. Atrocities on Dalits go back to the ancient times when Ekalavya a young prince of the Nishadha tribes, and a member of a low caste, was asked to cut his right thumb as his Guru Drona's fee. The reason was not to let a low caste supersede the royal blood. Dalit Literature is mainly the result of socio-cultural changes that took place in Maharashtra after independence.

Silenced for centuries by caste prejudice and social oppression, the Dalits of Maharashtra (formerly called untouchables) registered their protest in the form of short stories, poetry, novels and autobiographies. The volatile surroundings made writers like Annabhau Sathe (1920-1969) depict through realistic and effective writing the inhumanity, lawlessness and cruelty. He wrote thirty five novels, one among them was Fakira (1959). Sathe wrote directly from his experiences in life, and his novels celebrate the fighting spirit in their characters who work against all odds in life.

Dalit literature emerged into prominence and as a collective voice after 1960 when a fresh crop of new writers like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarao Kharat, came into being with the Little Magazine Movement. They represent a new, direct, angry, accusatory, and analytic voice in the literature. Dalit writers make their personal experiences the basis of their writing. Always prominent in their writing is the idea that certain notions have to be revolted against, some values have to be rejected, and some areas of life have to be strengthened and built upon.

Dalit writers write from a predetermined certitude, their writing is purposive. Dalit writers write out of social responsibility. Their writing expresses the emotion and commitment of an activist. That society may change and understand its problems- their writing articulates this impatience with intensity. Dalit writers are activists- artists who write while engaged in movements. They regard their literature to be a movement. Their commitment is to the dalit and the exploited classes.