

## II

### ***The Outcaste (Akkarmashi): Enigma of Dalit Women***

The term “Dalit Literature” came into existence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1958, when the first conference of Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha was conducted in Mumbai. The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits and to inspire them for their social, economic and cultural development. Baburao Bagul was the main exponent of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. He was considered as the father of Dalit literature. In his writings the influence of Marx, Lenin, Gorki and Chekhov is seen perceptibly but he was also influenced by Gautam Buddha, Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar’s thoughts. Baburao Bagul compared Dalit literature with African American literature. Hence he was the first person who could locate Dalit literature in international literary perspective. After that a number of writers like Narayan Survey, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Kamble, Josef Macqwan, Sharankumar Limbale, etc. were inspired by their liberated spirit, strong style and poignant poetic images and portrayed the realities of life and struggles of the people belonging to the lower strata of the society. Arjun Dangle, a former Dalit Panther in Maharashtra in *Poisoned Bread* asserts: “Dalit literature is not simply a literature. Although today, most Dalit writers have forgotten its origin, Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change” (*Poisoned Bread*, p.6). If Sheoraj Singh Bechain’s autobiographical writing especially *Struggle of a Child Labourer* is considered a milestone in modern Dalit literature, Kharat’s *Taral Antaral* (1981) and Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmashi* are among the major autobiographies which tell us about the miserable condition of Dalits and their desire for self-respect. Sharankumar Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* was the first critical work in English which opens the debate among Dalit writers regarding aesthetics of Dalit literature.

Baby Kamble is the first Dalit women writer in Marathi Dalit writings. Her *The Prisons We Broke* deals with two major problems—oppression faced by the Dalit in the hands of the upper caste people and discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. Probably one of the finest writings concerning Dalit women exploitation—social, economic and physical, was written by Bagul. Bagul’s *Murali* (Devdasis) deals with the exploitation of marginalised women who suffered sexual exploitation. Having travelled a substantial journey, Dalit literature in Marathi is now celebrated as the representative literature of untouchables across the boundaries.

The present research is an attempt to study one of the most renowned Dalit writers in India—Sharankumar Limbale and his essential Dalit aesthetics that he has practiced in his autobiography—*The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)*. He was born on June 1, 1956. Most of his writings are written in Marathi and translated into English and other languages. He is an illustrious writer and his writings mostly rest on the Dalit struggles and identity. So far, he has written forty books on poetry, short stories, and autobiographical writings, including *The Outcaste* (2004). His autobiography is written in Marathi and translated into Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi, Malayalam languages. The English translation of the text by Santosh Bhoomkar caught the attention of the world at large. He got many awards and won the wider acclaim from the public for his literary talents. He is also known for his critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* which is the widely referred book on Dalit Literature after Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread* and Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I am Not a Hindu?*. In an interview given to Arvind Nawale, he responded to the question as to what made him a Dalit writer:

Thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar and Dalit movement inspired me to write. Atrocities against Dalit made me to react. My writing is reaction against brutal and inhuman caste system. Equality, freedom, justice, democracy are streams of my blood. I never tolerate injustice against common man irrespective of his caste. I want to see a beautiful Nation without exploitation, corruption and atrocities. From thousands of years Dalits are neglected. Now we are aware of our rights and power. Dalit literature is a manifesto of our movement. My life is part and parcel of Dalit movement. (Limbale)

*Akkarmashi* is a Marathi word and means an outcaste or illegitimate. This is about a person who has no identity, no home and who tries to find out his identity in the society. The story of *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* is the story of Sharankumar Limbale himself. Through his autobiographical narration, he describes the pathetic condition of caste-based oppression and struggles of a Mahar caste person in Maharashtra state. Sharankumar Limbale in his acknowledgement note observes:

I have put in words the life I have lived as an untouchable, an half caste and as an improvised man. There is a Patil in every village who is also a landowner. He invariably has a whore. I have written this so that readers will learn the woes of

the son of a whore. High caste people look upon my community as untouchable, while my own community humiliated me calling “akkarmashi”. This humiliation was like being stabbed over and over again. I have always lived with the burden of inferiority. And this book is a tale of this burden. (Limbale ix-x)

It is the fair representation of author’s personal dilemma as a child born as a result of illegitimate relationship between his mother who belongs to a Mahar community and a person named Hanmanta who belongs to high caste. He is caught in a difficult situation as his mother is an untouchable, while his father is a high caste Hindu. His mother lives in a hut while father lives in a mansion. His father is a landlord while his mother is landless. He identifies himself as an ‘akkarmashi’ (half-caste) and therefore he is even worried about his marriage. He narrates his enigma in the words: “A girl I married needed to be a hybrid like me to ensure a proper match. A bastard must always be matched with another bastard. No one else will marry their daughters to a bastard like me.” (98)

In this book the narrator describes the pitiable condition of Dalits who have been exploited from the ancient time by the caste Hindus. They are continuously exploited socially, culturally, physically and economically. Dalits are not allowed to enter the public places. The village wells were dug by the sweat of the Mahar but once the work was over, the same Mahar’s touch was considered as “polluting”. This is the agony of a Mahar’s life. The narrator further says that not only the illiterates but also the educated people from high caste believed in caste system and untouchability. In a school picnic tour, the low caste boys and girls are not allowed to sit among the rest of the students while eating their food. The high caste children take their food under a banyan tree while the low caste children are banished to crowd under a tree which has tattered shadow. The narrator describes the humiliation faced by him from his class teacher in school. He says:

When I went to school the next day, the teacher had already asked the boys and girls to write an essay on the picnic. The students of the seventh class were busy in writing the essay on the picnic. Although I was in third class, the teacher asked us also to write. Both the classes were running in the same room. While the senior boys and girls wrote shifty, I sat worrying when the teacher noticed me,

apparently doing nothing, he grew annoyed and shouted, ‘You a son of a bitch, come on start writing. (4)

It is ridiculous to observe that the Caste-Hindus love and sympathize with animals but they are not seen to have sympathy with the Dalits whom they consider as inferior even to animals. Limbale documents: Hindus sees the cow as their mother but when a cow (which they consider as their mother) dies they need a Mahar to dispose it off. Limbale further depicts that no doubt Dalit are oppressed in the society and get inhuman treatment by caste Hindus but the condition of a Dalit woman is far worse and therefore she is doubly marginalised on the name of caste as well as gender. She is considered as a toy with which it is safe to play. In a conference addressing the issues of Dalit Women at Hague on Human rights and Dignity of Women, it was prominently argued:

The situation of Dalit women needs special attention. Dalit women are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world: they make up more than two percent of the world’s total population. They are discriminated against three times over: they are poor, they are women and they are Dalits. (Human Rights and Dignity of Women 4)

Moreover, if any Dalit woman is good looking and happens to be ignorant and powerless, she is bound to be sexually harassed and victimised by them. As a result, she is hated and discriminated against not only by the caste Hindus but by the so called untouchables as well.

To be born beautiful among the Dalits is a curse. There is a famous saying that neighbour’s wife is always more beautiful than one’s own. Everyone in the village chases a beautiful woman. Masamai was beautiful and she suffered for it. (37-38)

Masamai, the mother of the protagonist, is one such victim who has to suffer at each and every step of her life. She was married with Ithal Kamble who used to toil on the farm owned by Hanmanta Limbale, a Patil. No doubt, Patil helped him during hard times but while helping Ithal Kamble, the Patil’s intention was quite different. This rich man was out to ruin a poor man’s family which was happy in its own way. Limbale reflects:

Every time the dominant classes attack and exploit the weak, they violate their women. The sexual exploits of the men among the wicked exploiters draw legitimacy from their authority, wealth, society, culture and religion. But what of the exploited woman? She has to carry the rape in her womb. This rape has to be born, fed and reared. And this rape acquires and lives a life. (xxiv)

When the caste-council forced Masamai to divorce Kamble, he is allowed to remarry but Masamai is forced to live only to look after her children born out of the wedlock or otherwise in absence of her husband. Limbale finds it strange that in Hindu society a man is free to treat woman like *paan* which he can eat 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 because she is supposed to remain chaste, pious and loyal to her husband throughout her life. The caste Hindus exploit the women like Masamai without ever realising their responsibility towards them or the children born out of the illicit relationship which they maintain with Dalit women. In *The Outcaste*, Hanmanta Limbale lured Masamai and had illicit relationship with her. He even offered her a rented house at Akkalkot where he could easily approach her just to satiate his lust. The narrator reflects:

It was a kind of revenge to live openly with the same man who had uprooted her from her family. Hanmanta Limbale now possessed her like a pot dove. They lived happily. Masamai became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Who is the father of this boy? Hanmanta did not want any of this to happen, but who can disown child? A child is a reality. (36)

Sharankumar Limbale was born as a result of the relationship between Masamai and Hanmanta Limbale. After his birth Hanmanta deserted Masamai only to compel her to have contacts with other people as a result of which she gave birth to a number of children after Sharankumar. In the words of the author: “We were all of one womb and one blood. We shared a common mother but different father” (38). Despite Masamai’s liberty in sexual matters, she is portrayed as a victim of the social order which makes the Dalit woman as easy prey to the licentious upper caste landlords. Her shifting from Kamble to Limbale and then to Kaka makes the narrator feel sorry about her life: “What sort of life had she been living, mortgaging herself to one owner after another and being used as a commodity?” Her lot has been nothing but the tyranny of sex (59).

Masamai is treated as a commodity to be exchanged in the market without ever guaranteeing any dignity or self-esteem to her. Hers is a case of a condemned human being deprived of any realisation of her 'self'. She is what she is made up by the caste-based patriarchal society devoid of sensitivity and sense of respect for women.

The upper caste people exploit the women of lower caste both physically and sexually. They cross all limits of propriety for the sake of their bodily pleasure. They even do not hesitate to assault pregnant Dalit women and then to desert them:

People who enjoy high caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion and inherit property, have exploited the Dalits of this land. The Patils in every village had made whores the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalits families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patils whore. Even the children born to her husband are considered the children of Patils. Besides survival on the charity of a Patil what else can such a household expect? (38)

*The Outcaste* is the story of the author who had to suffer throughout his life for the fact that he had no identity, no home or place of belonging. His mother had once been properly married but her husband had left her. She began sleeping around, especially with the high caste men of the village. Limbale was born with a Dalit mother and a father who was the chief of a village. He could not get certain papers signed for school because the head of the village could not properly identify his caste by his mother or father and they would not accept his grandmother as his guardian because she lived with a Muslim. When there came the time for marriage, he could not even get married to an outcaste girl because his blood was not considered as pure.

*The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* further portrays how the behaviour of caste Hindus is quite illogical and hypocritical. On the one hand, caste Hindus practice untouchability and unabashedly discriminate against the Dalits on the basis of the caste system, while on the other hand, untouchability doesn't come in their way when they exploit Dalit women sexually. The autobiography points out that the caste system in which Dalits live is essentially discriminatory, undemocratic and indifferent to the Dalits, and therefore justice generally evades them. Taking

into consideration the nature, characteristic features and role of the caste system, the non-Dalits especially caste Hindu men hardly hesitate to harass, exploit and victimize the Dalits, particularly Dalit women.

According to Limbale, Dalits are generally forced to live away from the locality of caste Hindus but when caste Hindu men want to have sex with the Dalit ladies, they openly disobey the social norms as long as they need such ladies for their comfort and carnal pleasure. Reflecting on the dual approach of the caste Hindus in an essay “Untouchability and Dalit Women’s Oppression”, Bela Malik rightly remarks:

Caste pollution by either presence or touch that operated so in case of conflict over public resources seemed not to matter at all in the extraction of labour when it comes to taking water from a hand pump, notions of ritual are invoked, when it comes to the extraction of labour into the field, it does not matter at all that the seed is planted, the crop tended and the grain harvested by the same untouchable. The same applies in the case of rape as social revenge/ punishment/ coercion. (Malik 323)

The narrator is ostracized even from his own family. His mother Masamai treats him like a step-son but his grandmother, Santamai has deep love for him. She treats him like his own son and undergoes great hardship to bring him up and educate him. Whenever the narrator does something outstanding, she feels proud of him. Her attachment to the narrator is genuine and deep. The narrator is so much attached with Santamai that he prefers to stay with her instead of his mother. Like most of other Dalit women in the vicinity, Santamai used to collect dung for making cakes of dung to sell them. She herself eats *Bhakaries* made out of the *jowar* grains which are washed out of the dung of animals and gives Sharankumar Limbale *Bhakaries* out of the floor collected as alms. When Sharankumar was a little baby, she used to tie him to her back while doing her work. She is the representative Dalit woman sacrificing her comforts, identity and pleasures at every moment of her life without ever being conscious of the vicious circle that has forced her to suffer. Bela Malik remarks that:

It is true that Dalits in general are oppressed; Dalit women bear a disproportionately higher share of this burden. Given the division of labour within the household, women have to suffer more from the lack of access to water, fuel

sources and sanitation facilities, exposing them to humiliation and violence.  
(Malik 323)

Viewed from the Marxist perspective, the root cause of all the problems concerning Dalits is economic divide leading the Dalits to face perpetual hunger and starvation. It is not that the Dalits don't try to come out of the vicious circle but the social construct has made them internalise the fact that they are destined to face discrimination, exploitation, depravity and disgrace in spite of their hard work from sun rise to sun set. They get nothing but exploitation and harassment. The narrator's family is compelled to start the business of illegal brewing and selling of wine for the sake of their stomach. They have the limited source of income to manage two meals a day for the members of the family. The people belonging to Dalit community suffer from hunger. After doing hard labour from morning till evening, it is very hard for them to manage two meals a day. For them, Most of the times their stomach remains unfulfilled. They cannot afford to eat chapattis made by grains. They usually eat *Bhakari*. For them:

*Bhakari* is as large as man. It is as vast as the sky and bright like the sun. Hunger is bigger than the seven circles of hell. Man is only as big as a *Bhakari* and only as big as his hunger. Hunger is more powerful than man. A single stomach is like the whole earth. Hunger seems no bigger than your open palm, but it can swallow the whole world and let out a belch. There would have been no wars if there was no hunger. What about stealing and fighting? If there was no hunger what would have happened to sin and virtue, heaven and hell, this creation of God? If was no hunger how could a country, its borders, citizens, parliament, constitution come into being? The world is born from stomach, so also the links between mother and father, sister and brother. (50-51)

The issue of hunger among Dalits is so crucial that, according to Limbale, a Dalit is all the time concerned with the question of satiating his hunger. In *The Outcaste*, a Dalit is portrayed as a man striving to satisfy his stomach. Filling even one stomach proves difficult for him. He survives even by swallowing his own saliva. Dalit may have to remain unfed for days without eating anything. The perpetual hunger may compel him to sell himself for his stomach. It is the hunger which can force a woman to become a whore and a man thief. *The Outcaste* highlights that though women discrimination is a common phenomenon, it is more severe and painful at the



time of scarcity because it is a woman who has to sacrifice the most. Obviously, it may result into her malnutrition, stunted growth and exploitation (physical, sexual and mental) by those who offer to help them in crisis.

The present narrative exhibits a detailed account of everyday life, customs and beliefs of the community by shifting between the individual and the community. Here, the narrator narrates the atmosphere of his family where he used to live with his mother. He says:

Our house was always crammed with customers. Sometimes they continue drinking late into the night and we went to sleep while they were still there. Sometimes there was a quarrel. Often they arrived when we were having our meals. When they started flirting with my mother she quarrelled with them. Many a time I saw them holding my mother's hand while she served them drinks. I was helpless; the very nature of this liquor business was such. (29)

Here, the narrator describes the pathetic condition of his family. It also shows the helplessness of a person who fails to protect the dignity of his mother in such an embarrassing situation. The narrator considers hunger as the root cause for all this. He is of the view that if there is no hunger then there is no need to do all these dirty works like selling illicit liquor or serving in the houses of heartless Patils. Limbale captures the heartrending picture of Dalit family when he narrates that:

Starvation was written in our faith lot from the moment of our birth. Most of the time all my sisters went to sleep without eating anything. Nobody woke them for dinner because there was nothing to eat. I at least ate something. Mother gulped only water; Dada satisfied his hunger by smoking biddies. At the sight of my sisters who had gone to sleep hungry, I lost my appetite and could not sleep. I felt like giving a portion of my food to my sisters. (21)

A poor person suffers throughout his life without any substantial cause. The ignorant Dalits face the stigma of caste system in every walk of their life. Limbale expresses his surprise on the manner in which the upper caste people apply the untouchability. Limbale laments the existing social construct when he comments: "What is so peculiar about our touch that it pollutes water, food, houses, clothes, graveyards, tea shops, God, religion, and even man?" (81). They cannot eat food cooked by a Mahar woman but can accept liquor by the hands of the same woman and

can afford to have her as their temporary partners for bodily pleasure without ever being conscious of the future of that woman and the child born out of that warmth. He reflects: “Drunkards accepted liquor from house of a Mahar but not water. They had affair with Mahar women but would not accept the food they cooked” (35). The Dalit women are not only victim of the lust of upper caste males but the males of their own caste are equally responsible for their humiliation in social life. The narrator does not glorify the Dalit males but rebukes them for their neglect of their wives and mothers, their drunkenness, their apathy towards women folk in general and lack of action on their part.

The present text is a kind of outburst against the inhuman behaviour of the upper caste people against Dalits. Perhaps, the narrator tries to find out the remedy of the maladies not by pleading before the dominating Patils, but by creating opportunities for himself amidst the challenges which are posed before him in spite of the fact that he is groomed in an environment where a man’s fortune is determined by the caste in which he is born. If one is born in upper caste, most of his/her problems are solved but unfortunately if one happens to take birth in the lower caste, his/her whole life becomes a terrible experience for him/her. The Brahmanic social order ensures that the doors of most of the opportunities are shut for these ‘wretched of the earth’. They suffer the stigma of caste from cradle to grave. The society recognises a man in this world by his religion, caste or his father. However, the narrator of the story regrets throughout the story for having neither a father’s name, nor any religion, nor a caste, leading him to feel that he has no inherited identity at all. He is all the time confused as to what relationship his mother has with Kaka; who the father of Nagi and Nirmi is; and what relationship he has with Nagi and Nirmi. These questions haunt him quite often as there is nobody in the world who can afford to give him the name of the legitimate father and same is the case with his other siblings. In an article “Chronicle of a Fatherless Being” written after the publication of *Akkarmashi*, Limbale observes:

I have sown the events, incidents and experience from my life of twenty-seven years ... This is the story of my life, an expression of my life, an expression of my mother’s agony and an autobiography of a community. Being fatherless is as much my fate as it is to be in a general ward (in hospital) of suffering. (xxiv)

The author further propagates that as he belongs to a poor Dalit family, his grandmother could not afford to give *Bhakari* made of grains to all family members. He narrates that she used to

serve the other members of the family *Bhakari* made of fresh grains while she herself ate *Bhakari* made from Jowar which is collected from the dung. When the writer told his grandmother about the delicious food which they got on school picnic as a left over by high caste children, she rebukes him for not bringing the leftovers for her. According to her left over food is nectar. At this the narrator feels disgusted and hopes:

Are we ever going to be lucky enough to wear good clothes and have nice food to eat? What immortal link did we have with this mansion? In what way are we connected to the heritage of this mansion? Where do we stand in the line of this Patil caste? We were born to a Patil and yet we could not claim to belong this mansion. Why does not this mansion accept us? Why is this mansion dumb? Why are its jaws locked? (55)

Santamai's husband discards her and marries another woman. Deserted by her husband, she suffers a lot but the moment she hears the news of her husband's death, she is shocked and bursts into tears, and feels her duty to attend her husband's cremation. Here the writer seems to be impressed by the strong sense of commitment, sacrifice and dutifulness among women in spite of the fact that they are always considered as 'other'. Though women like Santamai are always denied love, affection, care or graceful treatment in a patriarchal social setup (and more so in case of Dalit women), they are quite conscious of what they are supposed to do for their husbands and show excessive attachment to them. Women remain subjugated in different roles society assign to them. The autobiography presents a harrowing account of women devoid of essential human dignity, freedom, human rights, realisation of the self, opportunities to assert her identity and the consciousness about her rights. She is treated like a soulless object and is used, exploited and bargained according to the convenience of the high caste Hindus.

The autobiography presents the discriminatory practices being adopted against the Dalits in various spheres of life— social, cultural, political, economic, legal and religious. The religion, be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or any other, propagates equality among humans across the narrow boundaries, is one the biggest tool of discrimination when it comes to Dalits. One day Sharankumar and his friend Parshya entered the temple when the recitation of Holy Scriptures was going on. Parshya's father had seen them entering in the temple. He became angry and shouted "I will break your leg if you behave like this again. We were supposed to say our prayers

from the steps outside our entering a temple will make God impure. We were expected to behave responsibly. The untouchable must not enter a temple.” (62)

The discrimination is perceptible even when two human beings are considered as unequal only because of one being born in a rich or high caste family and another in a poor or Dalit family. The essence of Brahmanic philosophy is also very close to establishing the notion that even God discriminates between man and man. He makes one man rich and the other poor. One is high caste, the other untouchable. Limbale interrogates this design of the dominating groups in the words: “What kind of God is this that makes human beings hates each other? We are all supposed to be the children of God, nor this religion, nor this country because they ostracize us.” (62)

The most remarkable element in Limbale’s life-story is his focus on the representation of women. They are childless women, deserted women, widows etc. who bear the stigma of social injustice. He represents his mother as a woman who has been cheated and exploited again and again and bears the burden of upbringing her children. Their exploitation does not end at one generation; rather, it effects generation after generation in one way or the other. First of all Santamai had to undergo perpetual sufferings for her being deserted by her husband which subsequently compelled her to live with a Muslim fellow. Likewise, her daughter Masamai was left with no other option but to surrender her propriety before a person like Hanmanta on her desertion by her husband. Her womanly beauty becomes a curse for her as instead of feeling self-gratified, she feels abused on her being exploited bodily by all those who could afford to have her as a concubine.

Hunger and starvation override all other concerns when it comes to survival and therefore Masamai’s extra-marital relationships stand justified as the notions of chastity, morality and consistency as defined by society, if adhered, could have led her to die of hunger. Though complainingly, Limbale himself feels convinced that perhaps his mother had no other option but to sell her body to survive. He reflects:

Why should a child suffer for the sin of its parents? The author started to hate his mother by thinking that why did she commit adultery at all? But soon he got reply and thinks that “They sold themselves to be loved and cared for by someone. They had not sold their bodies to appease their lust. Do we exist just for the sake

of that hunger? Beyond hunger lies a vast life. There is life beyond bread. And yet I had no experience of life beyond this ghetto. (64)

Hers is a tale of endless miseries in a society guided by patriarchal and casteist norms. Masamai becomes an appropriate epitome of a doubly marginalised woman—first in the hands of patriarchy and then more brutally subjugated for her being a Dalit woman. Further, the body politics remains crucial while defining the enigma of women like Santamai, Masamai and sisters of the author. The author expresses the agony of situation more movingly when he anticipates the similar fate for his sisters representing the third generation of Dalit women. The rumour of his sister Nagi going around with the son of the Senior Patil troubles Limbale the most but his frustration subsides as soon as he realises the fact that perhaps Dalit women are destined to be exploited in the given social construct. He presents the ugly picture of a caste-ridden society denying all human rights, dignity and graceful life to Dalit women. The status of Dalits, especially Dalit women in the present Indian context gets highlighted in the report of the National Commission of Human rights of India which reports:

... more than 62000 human rights violation are recorded annually. On average, two Dalits are assaulted every hour, three Dalit women and children are raped, two Dalits are murdered and at least two Dalits are tortured or burned every year.” (Yuwaraj 158)

He puts together numerous incidents suggesting the depravity of women while they are beaten like slaves or sexually harassed by the Patils. He finds himself lost while narrating the bestial treatment meted out to Dalit women by the society where Dalits sacrificed their “daughters, wives, sisters, and daughters-in-law to dark nights in the Patil’s mansion. They were sacrificed like animals are at the time of laying the foundation stone of a building” (79). The history seems to repeat itself when Limbale observes that his sisters are as vulnerable as Santamai and Masamai were while they were quite young. The narrator observes:

Injustice done to me was not just today’s phenomenon but had a long history. The roots of this injustice went deep into history, for many thousands of years. My agony was also the agony of Lord Buddha.... This, my history, made me restless like the young Shivaji. (79)

The people belonging to Dalit community suffer from poverty. Due to poverty they do not bother about the health and education of their children. They think that every child born in the family is supposed to provide financial support to the family. It is for this conviction that they ignore family planning. On the one hand the source of income for these families is quite limited, while on the other hand they have a big family. It results into many problems like malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment and improper growth in general. The children belonging to Dalit community are expected to earn at an early age for the family. The Dalit children even in the tender age of 10-15, are supposed to earn for the family. The boys belonging to Dalit community are engaged as child labourers and girls belonging to Dalit community are supposed to stay at home to do all household chores and care for their little siblings. In his autobiography Limbale describes an incident in which his friend Harya who was of the author's age does not get opportunity to get education but is compelled to work as a child labourer. In Limbale's own words: "Now that Harya had started working he was no longer a burden, but an asset to the family" (2). Though child labour is prohibited by our constitution under article 24, which provides that no child below the age of 14 years can be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in other hazardous employment, it is still prevalent in our society especially among Dalits. In today's context we hardly see any hotel or *dhaba* without these child labourers or "*chhottoos*". Similarly, illiteracy and ignorance among the Dalits give rise to other social problems like child marriage, casteism, discrimination at different levels and poverty. In the autobiography, Limbale shows his concern towards these issues while finding it difficult to break the shackles of social stratification and untouchability.

Limbale points out that in the society governed by high caste Hindus discrimination is prevalent even among the followers of the same religion i.e. Hinduism. Though they are Hindus by faith, the people belonging to Dalit community are branded as untouchables. Defying the notion of 'Children are the followers of God's abode', children belonging to Dalit community are deprived of the privilege to enter a temple. For them, it seems as if God itself is biased and has no compassion for these 'wretched of the earth'. Limbale regrets that the religion which is perceived as a unifying force is operated as a divisive tool by those who consider themselves as the true custodians of Hinduism.

Sharankumar Limbale further points out that it is not only the Dalit woman who suffers but also the offspring of her extra-marital relationship out of compulsion. It is so because an illegitimate

child faces double burden of torture in the society. He refers to his own life to suggest that while considered as the son of a Patil he is restricted to play with other children belonging to lower castes and at the same time high caste children do not allow him to play with them for his being born into a Dalit family. They treat him as an untouchable. In such a situation he finds himself alienated and caught into a catch-22 situation. When he plays with Mang boys, his grandmother rebukes him by saying:

If you play any more with the Mang boys, I will stop feeding you. You can then go to Mangwada. Are you born from the seed of a Mang that you keep their company? You are the son of a village head. You must eat and play like a prince. You are the son of a Patil.... (20)

The caste council forced Masamai to divorce Kamble. The council forced her to leave her suckling baby and four year old son Dharma. The council does not bother either about the future of a motherless child or about the mother who is forced to stay away from her children. They seem to have ignored the fact that “The relationship between a husband and a wife can come to an end but what about the relationship between a mother and her sons?” (37). Limbale wonders as to how his mother collected the courage to abandon her two children Suryakant and Dharma at the moment when Ithal Kamble deserted her. The painful separation of a mother from her children is portrayed in the light of the fact that a Dalit woman doesn’t have the right to even bless her children with motherly care against the wishes of social practices which don’t allow a woman to practice autonomy in the matters as crucial as child care, family planning, divorce, remarriage and other crucial issues affecting her life significantly. Like a typical Dalit woman, Masamai remains a victim of one man or the other throughout her life. Divorced from Ithal Kamble, she starts living with Hanmanta only to be deserted by him. She suffers the most when Hanmanta refuses to acknowledge Sharankumar as his offspring, and therefore she decides to stay with Santamai, her mother. Santamai welcomes her happily and provides a shelter to her because: “Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything.(37)

Limbale’s grandmother lives with a Muslim. As a result of which the village head refused to acknowledge his grandmother as his guardian. His father was a high caste person while his mother was untouchable. He remains confused as to which community he really belongs to. Sharankumar Limbale further says that he never got real love from his mother because half of

her was my mother and the remaining half a woman for that Patil. He felt that his mother was snatched away from him. He asks a question to himself: “Who wrenched my mother away from me?” Why was she sterile for me? (65). It shows as to how someone’s lust affected and ultimately ruined that family. In such a situation a woman suffers the most— first because of denial of ‘selfhood’ by the society and secondly because she has to remain apologetic all the time for spoiling the future of her children. Her situation becomes like grains which are crushed by stone grinder. The high caste people desert them after fulfilling their lust only to make them give birth to ill-gotten children and to bring them up in adverse circumstances marked with poverty, hunger, deprivation, denial, uncertainty and disgrace. These children are thus made to venture into the journey of life full of pain and misery. In such a way Dalit women are thrown to live a pitiable life throughout her life.

The most remarkable attribute that Sharankumar seems to celebrate through his autobiography is that even in the most difficult circumstances, women are shown to have affection, love, tenderness and respect not only for their children but also for those who have betrayed them, deserted them and left them to live on their own. Masamai was not an exception as she considers it her duty to forgive Ithal Kamble, her husband who had divorced her and discarded her, when he was near to death. Masamai forgives him and nurses him very affectionately. Her present devotion towards her husband is never affected by her bitter experiences of sufferings in past. But at last she could not save her husband and he died. She wept and did not eat anything for a few days on the death of the same person who was significantly responsible for making her live a wretched life. Limbale tries to capture the strangeness of the situation when he shares with his sister the news that “Our mother’s husband has died” (69). Masamai’s excitement knows no bounds when Ithal Kamble’s mother reached her with her two sons—Suryakant and Dharma. She was overwhelmed with joy and hugged them fondly, making Sharankumar feel envious of his mother’s excessive affection for those strangers. He further consoles himself by thinking that “Suryakant, Dharma, Nagi, Nirmi, Vani, and I were all born to the same mother. We were conceived in the same womb and had come from the same blood. But how like strangers we were!” (70)

Once Sharankumar and his friend Parshya were insulted by a high caste girl named Shobhi on the name of caste and untouchability. She asks them not to touch her water pot because their touch will make water impure. Parshya starts arguing her by saying that “Your water gets impure



if we touch it, if that's so then why doesn't this river turn impure? If a human being becomes impure by our mere touch then why didn't your colour change to green or yellow, as it happens when someone is sick or poisoned?" (71). Here, Limbale senses irony of the situation where the Patils don't get deterred by any inhibition while seeking sexual pleasure from Dalit women but when it comes to Dalits touching high caste women, entire social order reminds them of their status as 'untouchables'. Though they argue with Shobhi in a fit of revenge but very soon they realise the possible consequences because they had heard that once a young boy from their community dared to look on a woman belonging to high caste community resulting into mass exploitation of Dalit women. Limbale gets reminded of the fact that the trial was executed against the people of lower caste and when they returned from the jail every man's wife had had a baby in her lap because they were raped in the absence of their husbands.

Similarly, the author narrates an incident when he goes to the money lender with Santamai to borrow money for his admission. To his surprise, the money lender gages at the torn out blouse of Santamai but refuses to give any money. At this point of time Sharankumar, though helpless, thinks to take revenge and therefore feels like insulting and humiliating the high caste women by adopting the similar gesture. It is through these instances that the narrator captures the discriminatory social construct where women are always considered as a tool to take revenge. Besides, the abuses are so formed that they question the dignity and grace of women folk.

Sharankumar feels that the intensity of Dalit sufferings is not going to lessen because the people belonging to Dalit community think that it is predestined to suffer and therefore they accept their fate as it comes to them without much aggression or resistance. They are groomed in a way that they come to internalise the reality of their dark lives as if it were a divine dictate. The socio-cultural construct is so discriminatory and compelling that Dalit people think that they are created by the God only to serve the people of high caste. Obviously, they feel privileged and gratified on receiving the slightest favour from the High-caste Hindus. Once when Kaka's father was ill, Masamai with Sharankumar and Nagi visited Kaka's mansion for the first time. Surprisingly, she feels privileged to have an opportunity to go to her husband's house for the first time and to meet his family members. They are served tea at Kaka's mansion despite all inhuman treatment they received. Sharankumar and Nagi feel privileged on entering the mansion and Masamai feels uplifted to see that Kaka's wife has prepared tea for her. They get no proper welcome there as they are subjected to indifference and unspoken wrath with Kaka's wife

exhibiting her dislike for them. For Masamai, all this is quite enough. After entering in the palatial mansion of Kaka, Sharankumar ponders over the possible temptation which might have driven Kaka to visit his mother's hut. Such stereotypes of questions keep on haunting him again and again. The narrator is conscious enough to observe the duality of human beings like Kaka who enjoys freedom to visit Masamai as per his desire and convenience but when Masamai visits his mansion for the first time, he hides himself in the house somewhere. Dalit women are treated as toys with which it is safe to play. It is quite evident through the instance when Masamai quarrels with Kaka asking him to give some share in his property for their livelihood. Instead of showing the sense of responsibility towards the woman whom he used as an object, he stops visiting Masamai and starts visiting Jani who was Kaka's first keep. Women are treated as commodity for the fulfilment of men's lust and whenever they assert their rights they are deserted and left for perpetual suffering. There are numerous instances in the text where the reader gets convinced that the women belonging to Dalit community are doubly marginalised.

Utterly disappointed, Sharankumar asks his mother as to why she gave birth to him in spite of the awareness that a child born in a Dalit family is destined to suffer in the society. However Limbale is taken aback with his mother's reply that he must be thankful to her for giving birth to him and not killing him like a sow which eats a piglet to satiate its hunger or a woman like Devki who buried her baby under the garbage. She is convinced that she has faced far deeper agony and harassment than her children while she nourished them in spite of the hunger, starvation, poverty and wretchedness marking her life. Limbale's account of hunger among Dalits is so forceful that even a dead monster would peep out of the grave to notice it:

On the hand there was the garbage, on the other our hunger. The junk was sold by weight. I felt our hunger should be weighted instead of the junk, then we would know, at least how much it weighted. Perhaps we should weight not only our hunger and stomachs but ourselves too.(74)

As Dalit people suffer from poverty they do not have even basic facilities and privacy in their lives. The author regrets that his mother and sisters used to bathe openly in their compound because they do not have a bathroom for taking a bath. The women living in such adverse circumstances can hardly afford to claim their human rights because even the institutions responsible for protecting the essential dignity of humans without discrimination, are

discriminatory. It is so because these institutions are dominantly occupied by High-caste Hindus guided by the dictates of orthodox Brahmanic philosophy. The stigma of child marriage, especially in case of women, is so common that the Dalit parents get worried of their daughters' future at an early age, and unfortunately for them better future implies marriage in a well-to-do family, though in an age when their daughters are supposed to be sent to schools.

Limbale has himself undergone the trauma of observing his sisters getting married at the stage when they were not physically developed, and that also with some grown up men—may be three-times older than them. On the author's sister Nagi coming to the age of puberty, the writer becomes furious about her future when Santamai informs him that nowadays she is going around with senior Patil's son. Seeing his sister with Patil's son he becomes angry and starts beating her. The whole neighbourhood gathers there. Masamai thinks that Nagi had done nothing wrong. This disgusted Sharankumar a lot. The paradox of the situation gets perceptibly narrated in the autobiography when Sharan Kumar's sister Nagi and the senior Patil's son Nandu get married secretly. The author himself is not convinced of the future of the marriage and apprehends the success of the marriage when he remarks: "It was nice that Nagi was married but would the marriage last? Would they live happily together?" (88). As expected, the senior Patil drives out Nandu on his secret marriage with Nagi. Nandu then comes to Masamai's house and starts to live with Nagi in her house but Nandu is so deeply engrossed in the idea of untouchability that he does not eat anything from Masamai's house and prefers to visit his father's house to take meal.

Limbale captures the pathetic condition of Dalit women for their being discriminated even by their husbands who happen to be born in upper caste families. For him, it is quite amazing to observe that the male counterpart has no objection to the marriage of his body with the body of a Dalit woman but with the fulsome realisation of his distinction as a high-caste Hindu. Limbale reflects on the practice of untouchability affecting the Dalits in different spheres of their lives. He narrates an episode when Narayan, the Patil employed the Mahars for digging a well. After sweating for days together and using explosives to dig the well, the Mahar labourer could make it possible to bring water in the well but as soon as the well becomes functional, the same Mahar is not allowed to draw even the drinking water from the well. Sharankumar thinks that when it comes to hard labour the Mahar's touch does not pollute anything but when it comes the turn of taking profit they (Mahar) are denied, with the pretext that their touch may pollute the water. Limbale satirises the existing social order when he questions as to why the Mahar is not

considered an untouchable while he digs the well, builds the houses or does the most difficult works to make the life of the dominant Hindus convenient.

Masamai was once the keep of Hanmanta, now she is Kaka's, the Patil of Hanoor's keep. Once, Hanmanta visits Masamai's house with Kaka. Seeing his biological father for the first time, Sharankumar feels excited and relieved as he thinks that now no one would humiliate him but he gets disappointed to learn that the purpose of Hanmanta visiting Masamai's house is quite different. Kaka, the Patil of Hanoor wants to persuade Masamai to sleep with Hanmanta, the same fellow who has ruined her life. In a fit of anger, she refuses to do so and asks them to run away: "if you two do not go away instantly I will burn myself" (61). The episode portrays the high-caste Hindus as insensitive, ruthless and bestial in nature as instead of respecting the feelings of a child who is feeling delighted to have his father in his house, these Patils are indulged in deriving sadistic pleasure by inflicting more and more pains on them. These high caste people never think about the sorrows and sufferings of women tortured by them. The Dalit women are deserted by them only to look after the offspring of their lustful union with them.

Unfortunately, caste discrimination is highly prevalent in education system in spite of the fact that our constitution ensures that the state shall endure to provide free and compulsory education to the children under the age of 6-14 years in article 21 A which got inserted vide 86<sup>th</sup> amendment 2002. The Supreme Court of India in its verdict in Mohini Jain vs. Union of India also clearly interpreted that each citizen has the right to education. Realising the education as the core of life with dignity, the Government of India enacted the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. Despite the commitment of our Constitution, Supreme Court and the Executive to give ample opportunities to every child for free and compulsory education, the education remains a far cry in case of Dalit children, and it is rather far more distant in case of female Dalit children. The education which implies broadening of mental horizon and imparting wisdom enabling the people to live gracefully and harmoniously is taken as a tool for discrimination when it comes to educating Dalit girl children. The importance of education as the most crucial factor to bring change among individuals and society has been highlighted by the exponents of Dalit consciousness including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and scores of other popular Dalit writers. Bandhumadhav, in his story "The Poisoned Bread" underlines the significance of education as the vital tool for liberation through a dying Dalit character. He says: "... never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you

can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars.... The poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man.(Bandhumadhav 174-75)

The autobiography presents a series of episodes highlighting discriminatory practices adopted by the people against the Dalits in different spheres—religious, social, cultural, economic and educational. The inhuman treatment meted out to the children belonging to Dalit community in schools is really a setback to the essence and spirit of the Constitution which provides certain fundamental rights including the right against untouchability under article 17 and right to life which is interpreted as ‘right to life with dignity’. The author regrets that children belonging to Dalit community are not allowed to sit with other high caste children. They are called out by their caste names. The author further gives the example of his own by saying that his teacher used to assign him a duty on every Saturday to smear the floor and walls with cow dung paste only because he belongs to a Mahar community. Once when the author dared to sit with other children of his class, he was slapped by the servant of the mansion. The episode of school picnic is rather more painful for the author as instead of allowing the children to make merry without discrimination, the teacher being the representative of high-caste Hindu treats the Dalit students as outcaste and ostracised beings. These episodes make the author realise that: “Every body’s place was more or less fixed.” (6)

The high-caste children are shown under the impression as if the right to education is meant only for them and therefore they torture the Dalit children through various means. The ignorance marks the lives of the villagers in general also as when the author visits his home while pursuing his M.A. course, the people assembled there fail to appreciate higher qualification and ask him to complete his matriculation which for them is more crucial to find a job than M.A. When the author replied that he had already done his matriculation and now studying in M.A. They replied: “Boys with BA and MA degree are useless and unemployed. You just get through your matric and come to us.” (98)

In the autobiography, caste discrimination is so much prevalent that the habit and attitude of a person is decided by his caste only. When the author gets an opportunity to get a job as a telephone operator, he at once joins the job because he wants to provide financial support to his family. In Ahmedpur, where he is appointed as a telephone operator, Sharankumar Limbale hides his caste identity and gives the impression in the locality that he is a Lingayat by caste which

makes him receive a warm welcome there. He starts behaving as a Lingayat. In his own words: “I hid the photographs and books of Dr. Ambedkar in my trunk, I started reading novels by V.S. Khandekar, and detective stories” (104). He also writes his friends not to use the word “Jai Bhim” on the letters which they write to him. He started saying “Namaskar” instead of “Jai Bhim” to acknowledge others when he meets them. But there is always a fear in his mind that one day his identity will be revealed. When Santamai and Kaka visit him he fears and tells a number of lies to hide his identity before the Lingayat community people.

Among the people belonging to Dalit community discrimination between male child and female child is more prevalent. Sharankumar being a male child get an opportunity to get education while his sisters Nagi and Nirmi are deprived of getting education. They are asked to stay at home and do all household chores. Depriving the girl child of the opportunity to get education has serious consequences as they remain confined to the gloomy world of illiteracy, backwardness, ignorance and endless helplessness. The education which can enlighten the individual as well as the society as a whole remains a distant dream for the female Dalit children. Like religion, culture and the patriarchal social construct, education is one of the most crucial factors to subordinate the Dalits, especially Dalit women. Had if they were educated, Nagi and Nirmi would have asked for their human rights and therefore they could have realised their ‘selves’ by identifying their potential and raising the voice against the prevailing discrimination. The evils like child marriage, child labour and polygamy must not have occurred if the girl children were educated and informed. Considering the discrimination against Dalit girl children as crucial, Rajpal Singh Chikhalikar observes:

The image of Dalit women is mostly determined by her childhood experiences which she has in her social ambivalence as a girl of the Dalit family she is deprived of several rights and privileges which a non-Dalit girl enjoys in its fullest. Dalit adolescent girls are not permitted to wear ornaments, clean dress and even they are not allowed to enjoy delicious foods. (Chikhalikar 1)

The story of discrimination against Dalit women perhaps concludes with the convincing moral that denial of education is a well-devised tool used by the society to keep the Dalits away from the mainstream and to intensify their marginalisation and humiliation. The recent verdict of the Supreme Court upholding the constitutional validity of Right to Education 2009 Section 12 (c)

providing 25% reservation to the children belonging to deprived sections in the private schools is the testimony to the fact that education is pivotal for the life with dignity. However, the people running private schools fail to appreciate the spirit of the provisions of RTE Act 2009 as the media reports highlight the disappointing instances of humiliation and discrimination against the children admitted in big private schools. Recently, the Hindu reported such an instance with the headline “New Age Untouchability” describing the inhuman treatment meted out to Dalit children in a school in Bangalore. It reads as: “Four children studying in a private school here have been forced to attend school in humiliation, after the school allegedly cut off tufts of hair on top of their heads. This was done to reportedly distinguish these children, admitted under the Right to Education (RTE) quota, from other students” (The Hindu). The incident is very close to the humiliating episode in the autobiography where the Dalit children are subjected to extremely inhuman treatment in the school. The news is obviously a big setback to the agenda of achieving the vision of inclusive education leading to inclusive democracy. Similarly, in *The Prisons we Broke*, Baby Kamble narrates the tale of discrimination against female Dalit children in schools where the higher caste girls would hurl taunts and abuses at them. They taunt them saying: “These Mahar girls put on such airs. They have even touched the taps! Now where should we drink water from? Stupid things!” (Kamble 108)

Throughout their life the girl children face discrimination for their remaining uneducated and hence for their inability to understand as to what is good or bad for them. Being uneducated they cannot understand their rights and rightful place in society and become the victims of all kinds of sufferings in the hands of their male counterparts. Nagi and Nirmi cannot get education and therefore they are married at an early age with such persons who are much older to them. This kind of marriage cannot be happy. In this regard the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) report published by United Nations in 2007 rightly deliberated:

Girls and women who are married younger, especially when married as children, are more likely to experience domestic violence and to believe that it is justified for a man to beat his wife... Gender inequality is both a cause as well as a consequence of child marriage. Child brides usually have lower levels of education than girls who get married at an older age. Education is therefore seen as a way to prevent child marriages. Once a girl is married... Early marriage, together with its relation to low levels of education, high levels of violence and

abuse, severe health risks and harmful power dynamics, results in increased vulnerability to poverty for girls and young women. (United Nations)

Without getting education they cannot think about their future. The frequent break up in the marriages of Dalit girls like Nagi and Nirmi occur only because they fail to ask for their rights—social, economic or legal. In case of Nagi and Nirmi, both are uneducated and hence cannot become independent and therefore, they are bound to suffer the cruelty of their husbands throughout their whole life. Discrimination between male and female child is observed not only in the provision of education but in other spheres of life also. Sharankumar himself admits that sometimes when there is no food in the house he is given at least something to eat while his sisters go to sleep without eating anything. Even Santamai being a woman loved Sharankumar more than his sisters. Even in today's context, discrimination against Dalit women is quite common in within her family and outside the family. Sharmila Rege rightly remarks that “Dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault and physical violence at the work place and in public.”

(Rege WS-43)

Untouchability is still prevalent in our society after such a long time after independence. In a serial titled *Satyamev Jayate* hosted by Aamir Khan on Star TV channel, a special episode on untouchability was telecast recently. In the episode, it was shown that not only the uneducated Dalit people but also the highly educated people belonging to Dalit community suffer a lot even today due to their caste. One of the invited educated Dalit women Dr. Kausahal Panwar who is Professor of Sanskrit in Delhi University stated that in spite of her being highly educated, she suffers discrimination on the name of caste even today. The episode provided a platform for the Dalits to share their experiences of being discriminated in different spheres of life. Commenting on the issue, Balwant Singh an I.A.S. officer (who got the premature retirement after five years of his induction) says that no doubt he became an I.A.S. officer but he was a Dalit first and an officer after that. He made it a point that the job of an officer could provide him bread but not self-respect so he left his job after five years and became an author. The problem of manual scavenging was also highlighted in that episode. Needless to say that the episode proved an eye-opener for the society and the government resulting into the Prime Minister and the Minister for



Social Justice inviting the star anchor Amir Khan to discuss the issue with them, may be as the part of strategic gesture.

Though by the constitutional amendment 1993 the tradition of manual scavenging is prohibited but the stigma of caste is so pervasive that lacs of Dalits are still engaged in this disgraceful activity. However, the impact of the episode was so intense that the government had to announce through media that it is going to introduce the bill in the coming session of the parliament to handle the issue of manual scavenging. Responding to a query in the episode, a Dalit activist made a pertinent remark that in spite of the prohibition the Indian Railway is still engaging the helpless low caste employees especially for manual scavenging on the platforms. He highlighted the dual character of Indian citizenry where a person who cleans the railway platform by manual scavenging is considered as inferior and untouchable while on the other hand the person who spreads excreta on the platform is considered as neat and clean which is nothing but the discriminatory attitude of the society as a whole. Even in the age of globalisation, it is observed that most of the Dalits reside in the suburban ghettos away from the mainstream of city life. Ever increasing number of slums is self-revelatory to prove this point. (Khan)

*The Outcaste* is obviously the narrative of the enigma of Dalit women in a caste-ridden society where they are perpetually made to realise their insignificance. The society is so cruel for these Dalit women that the culture, religion and tradition are interpreted in a way that the Dalit women remain 'doubly marginalised'. The autobiography presents a horrid picture of the society where Dalit women are relegated to the status lower than the beasts. Moreover, the saddest part of the story is that three generations of Dalit women are shown as equally exploited in the given social construct. Obviously, it suggests that there is hardly any positive change enjoyed by these Dalit women in a country boasting of democratic values all the time.

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