

Fractured Identity and the feeling of Exclusion in Sharankumar Limbale's (Akkarmashi)The OutCaste

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Abstract

Dalit Literature has been an awakening movement for the excluded Dalits in India. Many Dalit writers have been documented their own society and their impoverished life in their autobiographies. Sharan Kumar Limbale is a well known Dalit author and has written more than forty books. However he has been popularized after his writing of an autobiography *Akkarmashi* in the dialect of Marathi. Afterwards it has been published in various dialects, in English it has been translated by Santosh Bhoomkar. *The OutCaste* records limbale's own anguish and struggles faced by him as he was born to a Patil father and a Mahar mother. The paper attempts to investigate the author's fractured identity and his exclusion from his Dalit society.

KEYWORDS: Identity, subaltern, exclusion, discrimination, humiliation.

'Dalit' is a Marathi word describes about the expelled people from the Indian society who are living edge of the villages as untouchables. Dalit Literature focuses on the subalterns who are suppressed, marginalized, downtrodden and exploited section of society. They have been discriminated, humiliated by the hegemony of society on account of various social factors. "Discriminated on account of various factors, the Dalits are the victims of various structures that construct society like economic, social, gender based, cultural, etc. long suppressed in to submission and silence the marginalized or Dalits have emerged out of the shadows of centuries of subjugation. Inspired by revolutionary social activities they have given a voice to their identity through a literature of their own" (Stanley 15).

For many centuries they have been voiceless, Dalit literature helped them to bring out their pains and agonies as they experienced for generations which came to light on by the Dalit writers. Dalit writing gave them Dalit identity; more over Dalit literature had become a protest literature against the hegemonic upper castes. The Dalit Literature analyzed the castes system and found the evil practices which had been imposed on lower caste people for ages. The Dalits writers are writing their own experiences and illustrate about their communities' hunger, social injustice, sufferings and pains which they consistently experienced for generations by upper castes.

A human's identity is created from his birth itself which gives him self-esteem and self identity in the society. In our Indian society we have been acknowledged or identified by our caste, race, occupation, family, culture, tradition etc. The fundamental

human values like liberty, fraternity, equality which can be the key factors of the Dalit Literature, were a quest for identity in the society. Untouchables' identities can be seen in all languages of Dalit literature. The Dalit writers write about their resistance, issue of identity, experiences of their communities through their words.

According to Denis Wrong the term 'identity crises' have become the 'semantic beacons of our time' for they communicate verbally the discontent prevalent in our modern life and society. The question of identity and identity crisis plagues modern man in his quest to carve out niche for himself in this world. But the same question assumes a much crucial and gigantic proportion for an individual for whom identity becomes a struggle to survive with dignity and equality (qtd Stanley 15). The narrator has been struggling with identity crisis. He portrays his identity crisis through his autobiographical elements till the end of his writing. "Limbale is cursed with a fractured identity. He revolts against this, loudly questioning the denial of privileges that befit a Patil's son. Infact constantly questions the very nature of his identity that has been thrust upon him" (Mangalam, P.68).

Limbale condemned himself as a half caste (an *Akkarmashi*) he remains a social outcaste unable to locate his space in either of his parent's community. He observes that his village Patils used to have whores invariably in society. They made the innocent Dalit women as their whores and gave children. Finally the patils would abandon them and the children born to Dalits' women would be regarded as illegitimate children branded as *Akkarmashi*. The narrator laments his mother is an untouchable and his father is a Patil so that "My father lived in a mansion, my mother in a hut in the Maharwada, and I on the street. Father is a landlord; mother landless. I am an *Akkarmashi*...condemned, branded illegitimate" (97).

The narrator had been humiliated as he was born to a Patil father and a Dalit mother as an illicit child. In our Indian rigid society Dalits had been ostracized but Limbale had been doubly ostracized as he was as an adishonest child, and as he was born to a Mahar woman. "Meaning of *Akkarmashi* is illicit child, offspring born out of socially unacceptable relationship, offspring born out of a relationship in which a woman has been made a mistress by a well to do and inhuman person by exploring her helplessness. This sort of offspring is known as *Akkarmashi* in Marathi" (Yadav, 139).

Limbale pointed out that his birth had disturbed everyone in his family. According to him his birth was an unwanted and unaccepted one as his family members didn't express any compassion or love towards the tender baby Limbale. Since he feels excluded: "My birth was considered inauspicious, as I was born at midnight. After the delivery Masamai my mother, sat with me in her lap. My first cry disturbed Satamai and Dada's sleep. Dada suddenly woke up and thought that a cat fight was on...Alarmed, Masamai shouted, 'It's the baby, you will kill him'" (P.34).

Since the narrator was born to Hanmanta Limbale a Patil, his birth was a tension to the Patil community. The whole community had seen him as a mark of unrecognized child for their society. Even Mahars considered him as a half caste (illicit) child. His identity crisis further more aggravated as the narrator questions continued:

After my birth mansions of the Patil community must have become tense. My first breath must have threatened the morality of the world. With my first cry at birth, milk must have splashed from the breasts of every Kunthi. Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because of a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose sonam I, really?. (P.37)

The author analyzed the background of his paternal and maternal grandparents. As his mother's forefathers from Mahars he also thought himself from an expelled community. But when he investigated about his father he would be belonged to upper caste. His inquisitive questions urged him to find out his identity. Still he is searching for his identity; Most of the time he is longing for his identity feels as an excluded person:

My father and his forefathers were lingayat. Therefore I am one too. My mother was Mahar. My mother's father and forefathers were Mahar, hence I am also a Mahar. From the day I was born until today, I was brought up by my grandfather Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar. My grandfather in the sense he lives with my grandmother, Santamai. Does this mean I am Muslim as well? Then why can't the jamadar's affection claim me as Muslim? How can I be caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am untouchable, what about my father who is high caste? I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belongs to the village, whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected?. (P.38-39)

The narrator feels the identity crisis wherever he goes it followed him. He couldn't escape from the clutches of caste and identity. He couldn't acknowledge either by his caste or his family. As he had fractured identity he was pointed out by the society as a bastard child and humiliated by both his parents' community. "It is surprising to note that he is an untouchable among the untouchables. His identity is that of an "Akkarmashi" and this is what the narrator tries to present through the many episodes of his life. With a government job and education to cushion him, Limbale still finds it difficult to get a wife. Limbale never enjoyed the prospect of selecting a wife of his choice. A single attempt at bride-viewing ends in disaster. At one point the reader suspects Limbale to be satisfied with any woman for a wife. He does not make a choice" (Stanley 21). Since the narrator's identity is an "Akkarmashi" he insists: "The 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" (P,98)

The narrator recalls an incident when he got the scholarship for his higher education he had to fill the form and had to get the signature from his parents and the village sarpanch (head). As his identity was not recognized by the society, Sarpanch refused to put the signature. Somehow finally he accepted and put the signature by the recommendation of Bhosale Guruji. Since the author laments; "But a man is recognized in

this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither a father's name, nor any religion nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all" (P.59).

As he was born to Hanmanta Limbalehe had been humiliated in his Dalit community and not accepted by his father as his offspring. He feels like a half caste as he was between post and poll of his mother's and father's community while he feels alienated; "I am an alien. My father is not Mahar by caste. In the Maharwada I felt humiliated as I was considered a bastard; they called me Akkarmashi. Yet in the village I was considered Mahar and teased as the offspring of one...My father lives in a mansion, my mother in a hut, and I on the street. Where will I die? Where are my roots exactly?"(P.62).

The author was not only humiliated in his society but also at home. His sisters Nagi, Nirmi, Vani used to tease him while they were playing. Such insults and hurts made him annoyed. At times he feels alienated; "You have no connection with us. Nobody knows where you come from. Our fathers are not the same, hearing which I cracked within and without. I burned within. Nagi words pierced my heart. The feeling of alienation weighed heavily on my mind"(63).

Exclusion and Identity crisis are the constant theme of Limbale's Akkarmashi (*The OutCaste*). Dalit people's exclusion from the social stratification of Indian society, Limbale's feelings of Identity crisis, exclusion from his community and from the Indian rigid society are the prominent existed themes of *The OutCaste*. Sunil Kumar remarks:

The first type of exclusion faced by Dalit community is their exclusion from the hygienic way of life. The author mentions in the text that the Dalit settlements are located outside the boundaries of the village. But most strange sort of exclusion is the exclusion that is faced exclusively by the narrator owing to his 'akkarmshi' identity. He is sandwiched between the excluded and the illegitimate. Sired by highcaste blood and born from the Dalit womb, he is neither dalit nor high-caste. This constitutes the blueprint of all types of further exclusions in the narrator's life. (Kumar P.58)

Kaka is a Lingayat, he gave asylum to Masamai after Hanmanta Limbale deserted her. Kaka made her as his mistress and gave children to her. He was a father of all the sisters of the narrator. Sometimes Kaka used to ask Dada that as Sharan didn't have any identity you should not take care of him. For that Dada would replied 'for the sake of Satamai I am looking after him'. When he heard that he felt heartbroken and feels alienated and longing for his identity. "I felt like the sparrow who suffers because its nest is destroyed. Who should I go to? Who would claim me when both my mother and father rejected me?" (64).

Whenever he thinks about his plight in the society he would feel bad and longing for his identity. His identity crisis followed him throughout his life as he concludes his words thus; "Who will undertake Dadas funeral after his death? Will Muslims attend his cremation? How can they perform rituals after his death? Where would they bury his body? What will happen to his corpse? What will its fate be? In which graveyard will

they cremate him? Would people come for the rituals on Santama's and Masamai's deaths? Why this labyrinth of customs? Who has created such values of right and wrong, and what for? If they consider my birth illegitimate what values am I to follow?" (113).

His fractured identity affects him wherever he goes his identity cannot be revealed to anyone with confidence. "Akkarmashi, fights a Dalit cause and at the same time questions more widely and broadly the need of a pseudo identity of a religion or a caste. Sharankumar Limbale questions both" (Pillai, P. 117). As a Dalit and as a bastard child the author undergoes the alienated dilemma. Being a Dalit he experienced injustice and indignity, being an illegitimate child he faced fractured identity, longing for original identity throughout his entire life.

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