

Search for Identity Through Resistance And Struggle: A Study Of Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste: Akkarmashi

1Kiran kumar Boddu,

1PhD Research Scholar,

1Department of English,

1 Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore-632014, India

Abstract : *Dalit autobiography is one of the significant methods of writing the self and the community. It is considered as the voice of multilogues within a monologue. The writer speaks on behalf of his community needs, aspirations and problems. The self of the writer is portrayed as self of his/her community whose concerns, issues and causes are addressed. Sharankumar Limble in his self narrative The Outcaste: Akkarmashi (2003) assumes the responsibility of portraying the needs and the problems of the community through his self narrative The Outcaste: Akkarmashi (2003). The problems of the entire Dalit communities became the problems of his own self. The sufferings of the community became the sufferings of his own self. Therefore, the author self is put forth as an epitome of the Dalit community, their sufferings and problems. The aspects of Dalit community are given prime significance in the writing and particularly discussed and narrated through the eye of Limble himself by taking the sole responsibility of representing and voicing out his community needs and aspirations, problems and difficulties at various levels. Lmbale's The Outcaste: Akkarmashi (2003) encompasses the entire reality of socio- cultural and historical aspects of a mahar community in village through the writers's eye. The paper presents various aspects of socio-cultural and historical condition of not only mahars but also of Dalits in India as the victims of age old traditions and customs.*

IndexTerms - Community, Dalit Autobiography, History, Identity, Resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman, a great American poet, essayist and journalist has written a commendable and widely acclaimed poem 'Song of Myself' which is incorporated in his book *Leaves of Grass* (1885) wherein the poet says:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

(Section 1) In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less/and the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

(Section 20) It is you talking just as much as myself... I act as the tongue of you. (Section 47) I am large, I contain multitudes.

(Section 51)

The above proposition traces the aspects of inter-subjectivity, I-Thou relationship and Co-existence that prevails and exists between the writer and the community. The writer 'self cannot exist without relating to the community members, he/she assumes the community needs, aspirations, desires, pain and anguish as his own and portrays them as inherent elements of an autobiographical work. Though the author writes about himself in personal pronoun 'I', there is a hint of connotation of plural pronoun 'We'. Whatever the writer celebrates be it sufferings, difficulties, problems, joys, happiness and ecstasy is portrayed as sufferings and problems, joys and happiness of the community. Therefore, the author situates himself in the given context and experiences the situation by putting himself and shares a collective voice within a single voice.

The Outcaste: Akarmashi (2003) is an autobiographical work written by an eminent dalit activist, critic and writer Sharankumar Limbale who has been gaining popularity in the dalit literary circle. The scholar appreciates the writer for being frank and openly discussing all the incidents without any hesitation for documenting such incidents in a literary text which will have a wide range of readers is needed much courage and strength. The writer has taken a bold step to present to our eyes visually as it is happening now. The scholar says that this work is a true account of Limbale's life in particular and true account of Dalits life in general. The book addresses of numerous points particularly on the subject of identity and generally touches the issues of untouchability, caste discrimination, gender discrimination and Dalit's oppression and upper caste dominance and practice of hegemony on Dalits and inhuman treatment of Dalits, sexual harassment of Dalit women and impoverished life of Dalits. Basically, *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (2003) highlights the split identity of Limbale who is born to a upper caste father and to a lower caste mother. Limbale goes on a search for his identity whether he is belonging to a upper caste family or to a lower caste family. The big challenge that we find in the life of Limbale is finding out his identity itself.

Coming to the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the work, *The Outcaste* (2003): one of the most important aspects is wherein Limbale talks invariably the issues relating to the caste, religion and identity. Limbale speaks out with a deep sense of dejection "Man lost himself under this huge tree of caste, I faced the problem of finding a house in a new town and my caste followed me like an enemy. I could not get a single room. Every town and person was caste conscious. This casteism has dehumanized everyone". (106) Limbale highlights caste discrimination and exploitation done on by upper castes upon Dalits. Caste system has become a psychic burden to Dalits. It has become a huge barrier for the Dalits to develop and progress. Caste psychologically suppresses the intellectuality of Dalits and makes them inferior, voiceless and powerless. Limbale remarks that, "What kind of religious burden do we carry like a porter his load? Why is this burden of religion thrust upon us? Why can't we discard it? How has man lost himself under this huge tree of caste, religion, breeding, family?" (105)

Dalits carry the caste burden in number of ways such as in schools Dalits are asked to sit separately from upper caste boys and girls, Dalits are not allowed to enter temples, Dalits are not allowed to draw water from the wells of upper caste, Dalits are forced to live outside the village, Dalit are not allowed to enjoy the free natural resources, Dalits are not allowed to possess property, Dalits are sexually exploited by upper caste, Dalits are forced to experience poverty, Dalits are not allowed to read religious text, Dalits are treated worst than animals, Dalits are not given fair wages for their hard work and Dalits are not allowed to participate in public feasts and so forth. In *Karukku* (1992), Bama speaks about the caste consciousness that prevails among upper caste communities “Wherever you go, whatever you have studied, it seems that this caste will not leave you that easily” (25). In P. Sivakami’s *Grip of Change* (2006) we can also find similar expression of the caste consciousness “Where are you from? What is your caste? And your name?” (05). “Caste will persist till you and I die in fact, caste will be around for generations yet to come. We can’t ignore it” (22)

Another significant aspect to be pondered is the poverty and impoverished socio-economical condition of Dalit’s lives and family of Limbale. In particular the family of Limbale struggles absolutely to come out of poverty. The family struggles and fights with hunger from beginning to end. The family goes to an extent to do any sort of activity to satisfy their hunger. Santamai, the grandmother of Limbale works very hard throughout the day but she gets very little amount of money. She earns money as sweeper of streets and other public places. She also sometimes collects the indigestive grains which are taken from cow dung. Masamai, the mother of Limbale goes to an extent that she offers her body to earn money in order to feed her children. Dada, the Muslim member but stays with Limbale’s family. The family of Limbale depends on his money. If he does not earn any money that day the whole family goes for starvation. Dada earns money by carrying loads. Next we have Limbale and his sisters. Limbale and his sisters could not earn anything because they are small. So they addicted to stealing of things from public places. Limbale gives a reasonable answer that our work is justifiable and legitimate because hunger in us forces to do such activity. He also justifies her mother’s activity for being adulterous. It is because of her poverty she forces herself into that dirty profession. It is neither lust nor desire but poverty. It is not only the family of Limbale faces poverty, the entire maharwada faces poverty. Limbale writes:

Why shouldn’t I enter my mother’s bed? Isn’t she an adulterous? But whenever I look at my mother and Santamai my throat constricts. Masamai and Santamai are not the only examples. They sold themselves to be loved and cared for by someone. They hadn’t sold their bodies to appease their lust. Do we exit 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)

Another important aspect is treating Dalit women as sexual objects. A Dalit woman is made for an upper caste man. Masamai, the mother of Limbale is the victim of sexual harassment. She is a very beautiful lady in the maharwada; her beauty attracts upper caste men to have sex with her. She is forced to do sex if she rejects she deserves punishment. Dalit women are made to experience such abominable act perpetrated by upper caste men. Limbale raises a question that if Dalits are considered untouchables how can upper caste man touches the body of Dalit women and have a sex? He writes:

Santamai and I went to a moneylender. He was drunk. Santamai and I stood at some distance from him. Santamai’s blouse was torn exposing her breast. The moneylender kept staring at the peeping breast, but he refused to lend us the money. His look spread like poison in my heart. I wished that the blouse of this moneylender’s mother or sister was torn so that I could stare at their breasts. I burned within. Our poverty was detestable. I wanted to rebel against such humiliation. (82)

Another aspect to be pondered upon is Dehumanizing Dalits on caste lines. Thomas Hobbes, a great political thinker says “man is a wolf to man” which can be interpreted to mean that man preys upon man. This is true in the case of Upper caste men who give utmost importance to animals like cow where as human beings were given least importance. Upper caste men love and honour animals but inhuman treatment was shown on Dalits. If the animal does not feel well they touch and do all kinds of worship on it. But a Dalit is not touched by upper caste men because he pollutes their body, it is the notion that the upper caste men had. But Limbale says “how can a Dalit become an untouchable because he brushes his teeth, he cleans his body every day, he washes cloths and breaths the same air as an upper caste men breathe?” (56)

The Outcaste: Akkarmashi also touches upon the culture of polygamy. The culture of polygamy is practiced in the African Continent. The same culture is seen in the lives of upper caste men. It is just because of the caste system that allows upper caste men to possess Dalit women body besides their wives. Limbale writes:

The Patils in every village have made whores of 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 Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil’s whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. Besides survival on the charity of a Patil what else can such a household expect? (38)

There are many men who desire to have sex with Masamai because she is a good looking lady in the maharwada. There is also another lady called Laxmi who becomes pregnant by an upper caste man and she is left by him. This shows Dalit women body as a site for upper caste men to quench their sexual urge as sign of dominance.

The question of Identity and quest for meaning in life is the most significant aspect of life of Limbale which is always a dream for Dalits that never came to be true as in the case of Limbale. Limbale looks at his broken identity. Limbale asks:

Does this mean I am Muslim as well? Then why can’t the Jamadar’s affection claim me as Muslim? How can I be high 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?” (38)

This is a big challenge for Limbale to decide his identity. Limbale is hated and ill-treated by his own community who is born to an upper caste man. He is questioned many times about his identity for instance whenever he is in school he was asked by his teacher as well as students. Limbale belongs to two bloods. One is mahar blood and other is Patil blood due to this he is rejected to give admission in a school and later in college. Though Limbale consciously aware that he is son of a Patil, he never identified himself with an upper caste community. He sternly made his mind to identify himself with a mahar community, though it deserves him a least respect in the society. This shows Limbale's humbleness and his fellow feeling for his community. Yet another moment much perplexed and questions identity of his particular community and Dalits in general who seems to be restless declares:

Who will undertake Dada's funeral after his death? Will Muslims attend his cremation? Would people come for the rituals on Santamai'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)

Egalitarianism: Brotherly Attachment is another significant aspect that can be found. Dalit life revolves around the principle of egalitarianism, where Dalit thinks in terms of welfare of all communities. Though Dalits are ill-treated by upper caste men they never rebelled against them rather Dalits are obedient enough to their evil practices. For instance in the case of Limbale who has seven sisters from different fathers and but with the same mother. Limbale never showed any difference to them and he equally loved them all. "Didn't Suryakant and Dharma ever remember their mother, Masamai? How could they live without their mother?" (70)

At one point in time Sharankumar Limbale also reminisces:

Sometimes she punishes us but she also loves us a lot. Is there any woman whom Suryakant and Dharma claim as their mother? Who got them ready to go to school? Was there anyone to listen to their stubborn demands? Did they know what a mother means at all? Do their classmates tease them for not having a mother? What a pleasure it was when Nagi, Nirmi, and I played, watched fondly by our mother! (70)

There is also another incident that when an ex-husband of Masamai's dies who has taken her two babies soon after their birth, she brings two children home but Limbale never shown any difference to them. All the children loved each other. They are helpful to their mother. This shows how a dalit family constructs a society in positive manner, where as an upper caste family divides the society. Moreover, this thought of Limbale indicates his affection for his brothers and sisters. He thinks that he is fortunate to have such brothers and sisters.

Unhygienic Abodes of Dalits is another aspect which can be envisioned. The dwelling places of Dalits were worst and unhygienic condition. Dalits were made to abode at the edge and corner of a village or town. Most of the aboding places of dalits were in a dumping yard or a garbage yard or beside in a toilets or in a cremation sites. Dalits are made to occupy such places due to their lower caste. Limbale writes:

Initially we lived in the open behind the bus stand. We made stoves by arranging stones. Half the fire went waste because of the unruly wind. It was very difficult to make our bhakaris. My duty was to gather twigs, rags, and bits of paper for fuel. If I picked up something from a farm its owner would beat me and drive me away. My hands and legs were bruised and torn by thorn pricks. We ate and lived in the open behind the bus stand. Four tin sheets offered us shelter during the rainy season. (42)

Limbale also gives a vivid picture of Maharwada's socio-historical condition which is taken generally as Dalits' condition in India that has been universally envisioned and acclaimed as the town of the colonized people. Frantz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and writer allegedly claims:

The Maharwada is like the town of the colonized described by Frantz Fanon: The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by the men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there; it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on the top of each other, and their huts are built one on the top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. (30)

Another essential aspect is crossing borders of caste, religion and identity which are more in complex nature. Muslims are not very mindful of caste system. For instance, Dada a Muslim who lives with Dalit family that with Limbale's grandmother is unmindful of caste. Dada loves her so much and he is the source of income for the Limbale's family. He is not mindful of his status, identity and religion and lives as if born with them. Portrayal of such typical personality shows that Muslims are in a way to merge with the Dalits and create a space that Muslims are not conscious of religion, caste and status while interacting with non-Muslims like Dalits. In the sense that they are on the way to build bridges among the broken lives. Where as a Hindu Brahmin does not tolerate such a change rather he is on the way to collapse the bridge which is established for the purpose of progress, upliftment and development. Limbale questions religion and caste allegedly:

Is it man who is a hindrance to religion or is it the other ways round? Is the premise of religion greater than man? Is religion made for man or man made for religion? Does man cause religion to degenerate, or is it religion that degenerates man? Can't man exist without religion and caste? (40)

Conclusion

Dalit autobiographies are written with the intention of bringing a change in the society. The primary aim of writing Dalit autobiography is to highlight the burning socio-cultural and historical issues through which the writer undergoes a traumatic experience to bring a social change. The writer Sharankumar Limbale highlights the socio-cultural and historical aspects of Dalits through his personal narrative mode and experience. *The Outcaste: Akarmashi (2003)* has awakened Dalits at large to be conscious of their rights and to resist the age old caste system. It vividly presents the deplorable situation of Dalits who have been denied of the fundamental dignity of life of human being. *The*

Out Caste in a way represents the Dalits outcry and tattered and shattered lives of the Dalits. Like Limbale, there are many dalits who are in a state of identitiless, half caste and outcaste. Moreover, Like Limbale's mother there are many dalit women who face sexual atrocities, harassment and urge by uppercaste men. Therefore, it sternly protests against the social evils of the system.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bama. 2000. *Karukku*. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. New Delhi: Oxford Publication.
- [2] Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books.
- [3] Limbale, SharanKumar. (2005). *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*. Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Sivakami, P. (2006). *Grip of Change*. Chennai: Orient Longman Publication.
- [5] Whitman, Walt. 2007. *Leaves of Grass*. USA: Dover Publication.

