

The Female Castaway in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*

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I am a lost cloud in the sky of patriarchy;
 I am a rotten flower in the garden of caste hierarchy
 I am an orphan on the earth of brutality

-Priyanka Vaidya

Abstract: Sharan Kumar Limbale is a writer, poet and literary critic with forty books in his credit. He is famous for his autobiography *Akkarmashi* (*The Outcaste*) and the critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit literature* (2004). The present paper titled *The Female Castaway in Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste* studies his autobiography under the light of women survivors in the sea of patriarchy and casteism. The Caste system endowed by Manusmriti declared Dalits as 'the other' in the society. Sukhadev Thorat opines that "The Hindu social order, particularly its main pillars, viz., the caste system and untouchability, presents a unique case. As a system of social, economic and religious governance, it is founded not on the principle of the liberty (freedom), equality and fraternity, the values which formed the basis of universal human rights, but on the principle of inequality in every sphere of life". With the emergence of Dalit movement dalits revolted against their oppression and found a way of assertion through Dalit Literature. It is noteworthy that The Dalit movement considered women of even the highest caste as Dalits, because of their oppression. Dalit autobiographies are sketches of reality and life oriented. They all mirror the inhuman practices of caste system but Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* adds something more to that, it is a Bible on Dalit feminist discourse. It exhibits Sharan's long struggle of existence with his broken image to lead a respectful life and how he flourishes. Tromila Wheat rightly says "What is it like to grow up as an impoverished outcaste in modern India? Perhaps the best way to find out is through the words and emotions of those who have lived through the experience and who have the education and talent to write so expressively about it".

Keywords: Dalit feminism, Dalit autobiography, Violence against women

The Dalit women are marginalized and are doomed to vices like rape, sexual exploitation, child marriage, illiteracy, divorce, forced prostitution in the name of religious practices like Devadasis and Jogins. Masami is a victim of sexual violence. *Akkarmashi* is a documentation of her trampled motherhood and encroachment of her body crushing herself. Margaret Sanger says "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body". Sharan Kumar Limbale's autobiography *The Outcaste* mirrors the adventure of Sharan Kumar in coming in terms with his birth. While describing the

horrors of caste Sharan narrates how the plight of the women is multiplied by internal and external intrigues. Sharan's childhood was very tormenting, unhappy and awful. Two women Santamai and his mother Masomi play a very important role in his life. Sharan was brought up by Santamai and it was always love-hate relationship with his mother. The ordeals they went through to fill their tummies is heartrending as Dalits were deprived from the basic needs of life.

Dalit women struggled hard to survive as it was hand to mouth existence. Santamani was more a mother to him than a grandmother. She did all sorts of work like sweeping, the village streets, collecting dung and making round cakes of dung, selling them dry. Santami would collect the undigested grains of jowar from the cow dung and prepare flour from it. She never allowed Sharan to have these bhakris but once when he had tasted it had felt like eating dung. Santamai would eat these bhakarīs without any sign of nausea. "She gave no sign of being assaulted by the stink of dung. She just pushed it into her mouth, and it went down her stomach, whereas the dung heaved up mine" (11) When Sharan used to cry out of starvation for Bhakari his Santamai would beg around the village and got him something to eat. Santami would tie Sharan to her back when he was baby and swept the village streets. The Maharwada survived on only just few morsels of bhakari and a little water though they toiled whole day. The liquor business in their home was very tormenting for him. "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). Even there was constant fear of policemen. There used to be good chance of drinking by even family members. Sharan as a small boy had drunk liquor like tea. Even his sister Nirmi had drunk and fallen on the side of road and they had gone searching for her, who had gone with Kamalakka to get the stuff for liquor. Liquor was always followed by quarrel and sharan was reduced to tears from his Santamai and Dada's fight. Sometimes, a spirit possessed Santamani who would begin to screech in a shrill voice. "The street connecting the village to the Maharwada was full of drunkards. Drunkards accepted liquor from the house of a Mahar but not water. They had affairs with Mahar women but wouldn't accept the food they cooked" (35). Dalit women were always taken granted and upper caste men preserved absolute chastity of their women.

Sharan had faced discrimination within his community due to his half caste birth he was not considered eligible for marriage and had faced many rejections. His love interest Shewanta got married to other man as he was an illegitimate child. Santamai had promised to ask her hand but as it was not possible she had warned him "The Mahars are a very fierce people. They will cut you into pieces and there will none to call for us. Our house has neither a male child nor a female one to continue our lives. They will force us to sleep with them"(27). Sharan's mother and her husband Ithal Kamble had led a happy life even in their poverty. Ithal Kamble worked as a bonded labour to the landlord Hanmanta Limbale. Because of this rich man his mother was forced to divorce her husband and separate from her suckling baby and four year old son Dharma. Masamai was a free woman after that and started doing all sorts of work to fill her tummy. She was a dedicated wife and mother whole life was shattered, "But now

uprooted, she felt like Sita lost in the Dandakaranya searching for shelter”. (36) Ithal Kamble remarried as a man it was permitted but Masamai was never remarried but had many children. A man can eat paan and spit as many time as he likes but the same is not possible for women. It is considered wrong if a woman does that, once her chastity is lost it can never be restored”.(36)According to Neena Arora “Man considers it as normal behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and physical levels outside marriage, while it is ruthlessly condemned as adultery in case a woman indulges in it even though accidentally the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not even involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts prosecuting her. This condemnation is dictated by man’s interest in preserving rather than by any moral consideration”.

Masamai had refused the offer of becoming a singer in a troop and was determined to live on her own but the man who had spoiled her family life allured her. She was given a rented house at Akkalakot and she took as a kind of revenge to live openly with the same man who had exiled her from her family. Her happiness was disturbed by her pregnancy and the birth of a boy. The Patil’s family was in tense. Sharan thinks “My first breath must have threatened the morality of the world. With my first cry at birth, milk must be splashed from the breasts of every Kunti”. (36)

Sharan was constantly troubled haunted by the thought that “Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore ?(37) Sharan did not like his mother giving him this birth which was not accepted by anybody. There was nobody to celebrate his birth, admire him affectionately, no naming ceremony but only a rejection and resentment. Even he never received his mother’s whole hearted love. “Masamai, my mother, always treated me as if I were her stepson”.(42)He was picked from the cradle by his mother’s friend Gangoobai who was a nostrum monger to beg to arouse people’s sympathy. Hanmanta did not acknowledge the boy as his offspring Hanmata who possessed Masamai like a pet dove picked quarrel after the birth of a baby and had denied the baby saying it resembled Dhondya the potter. Finally without any choice his mother came to stay with her mother Santamai. “Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything”. (37)“To be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. Masamai was beautiful and she suffered for it she was divorced by her husband, after which Hanmanta enjoyed her and then deserted her.

The uppercaste Patils exploited Dalits women as they wished. Dalits were renounced in the society but their wives were accepted to appease sexually. 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 were many Dalit families meant only for Patils sexual gratification Masami had ten children, two from her husband, one from Patil Nimbale and the rest by another Patil Yeshwantrao Sidramappa. So many children were born one after the other from one womb but from different fathers. As they were registered as Hindu Lingayata in the official records they were neither acknowledged by

Mahar community nor by the Lingayat community. They lived on their own a semi Maharwada. Sharan suffered much dilemma for his disinheritance from either of the community and says “I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belong to the village, whereas the other half is excommunicated, *who am I?* to whom is my umbilical cord connected? (39)

Sharan is in a fix to name his caste as Mahar or Lingayat and even to be named as Muslim as his Dada was muslim with whose affection he is brought up with as though he was his own child. Religion was never a hindrance in their relationship. Sharan’s Dada’s name was Mahmood Dastogir Jamadar. He used to work hard as porter and earned less. For the sake of ten paise he carried heavy loads of luggage even risking his life. When a Muslim was elected as village Sarpanch his Dada was appointed for the work of lighting the street lamps as Dada was Muslim and even his grandma was appointed as street sweeper but both of them lost their jobs when other caste man was elected as village sarpanch. Dada who was married and abandoned by his wife started to live with Santami and earned for her family. Most of the time they were left with empty stomach. When only one bhakari was left in the basket Santami would make Sharan to eat and she used to remain hungry. His grandma and Dada were great pillars in his childhood. Sharan was always loved more by his grandmother. Once both his grandmother and mother had fight on his issue and his grandmother had left Maharwada and started living at the bus stand. 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.(50) Sharan recalls all the unpleasant experiences he faced to fill his tummy. Most of his childhood is spent in village bus stand. “Santamai swept the village street, went around begging, massaged the bulging stomach of pregnant women and also worked as a midwife. Dada lit the street lamps, worked as a porter, distributed newspapers, went to school carrying Tiffin for the pupils – a drunkard who would lie anywhere.(53) When Santami worked as a midwife and had gone at night in the morning Sharan had felt orphan if she was not around. When Santami heard the news of her husband’s death had wept loudly though he was disloyal and desolated her for another woman. In Santamai’s absence Dada had slept drawing him close. “I felt as if Dada was my real father, though we happened to be of different religions”.(58) Their relationship was above religion, it was a true human bond above caste and creed.

Sharan never understood his mother’s relationship with Kaka. He was not comfortable with them in their home. “Mother was scared of Kaka because she had given birth to six daughters, never a son”. (56) when she was able to bear a son in her womb she was happy demanded some share in his property. Sharan’s mother was always tense if Kaka didn’t appear for few days as she had to combat with another lady like her Jani. Finally Kaka had yielded to her pressure and had transferred two acres of land to his mother. Sharan remembers a story told about a Mahar woman by his mother who chased Patil and slept in front of his house in anticipation of keeping her as his whore. In a way being a keep to Patils Mahar women maintained their families. Sharan is very furious when he thinks about his mother’s life. He hates her way of life, “mortgaging herself to one owner after another and being used as commodity? Her

lot has been nothing but the tyranny of sex".(59) This was almost a tradition a Patil always a big land owner has a Dalit woman as his whore. "There is at least one such house in every village children born to such a whore have no legal father because there is an unbridgeable gap between such a father and son. The prestige of the father is stake!" (59) The most annoying experience to Sharan was to get signature of Sarpanch on his freeship application form. His identification of caste and his father's name was hellish for him. He cries out "But I too was a human being what else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion caste or his father; I had neither father's name nor any religion nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all".(59) Born to a lingayat father and mahar mother Sharan felt like an alien. He was very humiliated when he was called as Akkarmashi, a bastard. Sharan used to console himself by relating him to the fate of very much like Karna. The first meeting of Sharan with his father was also disturbing. His mother was in full rage as Kaka had brought his father Hanmanta not to meet his son but to sleep with his mother. The agony of a Mahar woman is ruthless because of her body. That night Sharan had seen his mother's pain but was unable to understand anything. The two men wanted to share her body as though it's a commodity. Sharan's mother was strong enough to deny this and sent them away by threatening to burn himself. "That night she hugged me as she slept and cried a lot. Her sobbing was like the explosion of a Volcano". (61)

Masami was more adulteress than a mother. She was unable to enjoy the motherhood throughout her life. Sharan's mother was snatched away by Patil. Sharan was never cajoled by her, she never expressed or showered her affection. She was sterile, unemotional towards him. There were many mothers who were risking their lives to abort their babies. Devki poor spinster who worked on Girmallya's farm performed abortions. The tragedy was she was unable to abort her own baby. After the birth of the baby she had buried it under the garbage. There was another pathetic mother who was conceived because of her own father. Dhanavva had come back home as a widow and her own father had taken advantage of her Dhanavva had kept it as a secret for so long that she had crossed the abortion time. Dhanavva's father Shankar was beast who said, "I have sown the seed from which she has grown as a plant. Now why shouldn't I eat the fruits of the plant?". (62) "Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with the abuser usually someone known to her."s Masami who was a deserted wife and divorced by Ithal Kamble was brought to her in his last days. When all the treatment was unsuccessful on him they had thought as he had wronged and dishonored Masami he had to be absolved by her. Masami had taken vow to save her ex-husband and did her best to save him. Ultimately without any progress in his health condition he was taken back and died in his home. How could be there atonement for the crime he did to Masami who had taken away her sucking baby. For all her plights he was responsible but strangely she had accepted her duties of wife at his end. According to Simone de Beauvoir's gender theory, "Women do not try to come out of the oppression as since times immemorial women were familiarized to acquiescent roles". Sharan wanted to know if she ever thought

about Suryakant and Dharma who was born from her husband. Even he wanted to know if those children were missing their mother and how was their life without their mother.

Dalit women were easily presumable and Sharan narrates a very disturbing story to substantiate this. Once a Dalit youth dared to look lasciviously at a high caste woman from the village. This was considered a serious crime and the whole village had gone to court against Dalit men who were sentenced to prison for a year. The most shocking thing had happened when they returned home. Every man's wife had a baby. "The Dalit women had been raped when their husbands were in prison. A village always acts atrociously like this against the Dalits" (71). As Sharmila Rege examines "Strict controls were imposed on the high caste Hindu wives that controlled their labor and chastity sanctified by religious scripture. Thus the controlled behavior and body of high caste women attributed to legislation while the social and sexual labor of the lower caste women was made available to the land economy. Social behavior and labor of poor women lets open access to the women of Dalits that causes sufferance and agony. The world full of wolves and vultures for the Dalit dove is inescapable."

Dalit women were badly abused, maltreated and molested. Some farmers even harassed them sexually pulled them into the crop, and raped them" (79). Sharan was disturbed by the ancestral stories which were full of sufferings and injustice told by his grandmother. Sharan says his forefathers were security guards at Patils' mansion. They were so loyal to their masters that they never dared to peep the beautiful face of the Patil's wife. "On the contrary they sacrificed their daughters, wives, sisters and daughter-in-law to dark nights in the Patil's mansion. They were scarified like animals are at the time of laying the foundation stone of a building" (79).

The poverty had forced Masamai to get her young daughter married to an older man Kumar who was already left by two wives. Even Nagi had not stayed with him for long time and returned home. Sharam remembers the ignominy on his mother Santami because of their poverty. When they had gone to a money lender he was staring at his mother's breast which was peeping from her torn blouse. He refused to give them money but kept staring at her breast which made Sharan burn inside. When Sharan acquired education he rebelled against the casteism and humiliation in his own way. He had gone to police station with the cup where the Mahar were given different cups at the tea stall. He had even beaten his sister Nagi who was roaming with a guy. "In reality I was fighting the whole village. I was trying to be a man with self- esteem but Nagi was letting me down. The custom of dedicating girl child to god is practiced only among the backward community like Mahars Ambabai, Yallamma, Laxmi, Khandoba are the gods and goddess worshipped by the Mahars. Sharan points out "I have never come across a Potraj among the Brahmin or Waghya among the Lingayath, the high castes. Why are such customs laid down for Mahar only? (93). The Devadasi system which was very popular at that time created havoc for the children born out of it. They were never accepted in the society and were kept out of the village. They led life by begging. There were many superstitions beliefs among them. Sharan remembers how his grandma Santami would be possessed by some spirit when they entered the pilgrim

place Chivari. She used to tremor till she entered the temple and saw the goddess. They would get tired of running after her.

Sharan got a job as a telephone operator at Ahmedpur and he discontinued his further education. Finally he was at the juncture of peace. With the Surname Limbale Sharan was able to live the life of his other blood by getting house for rent in Lingayat colony. He had warned his friends not to write Jai Bhim in their letters and even avoided his Mahar friends on the road. Many things got better for his generation and were moving towards modernity. He mentions one of his friends Mallya who lead a better life after getting a job. Even men behaved more reasonably with women. His friend Harya was married to his niece and had caught her read handed with the son of Patil. But he had forgiven and reconciled with her Sharan had felt happy for them. Sharan witnessed the change in the status of Mahar women gradually moved towards the way of progress in earning respect in slow pace. When there would be change of attitude towards women in this male dominated society then only women can live respectfully. Chris Weedon states, “Men by virtue of their penis, can aspire to position of power and control within the symbolic order, Women on the other hand, no position in the symbolic order, except in relation to men, as mothers and even the process of mothering is given patriarchal meanings, reduced in Freud, to an effect of Penis envy”.

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