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**A STUDY OF REPRESENTATION OF DALIT WOMAN IN LIMABAE'S
AKKARMASHI**

Dr. Sunil Raosaheb Raut

Associate Professor

Department of English

Baburaoji Adskar Mahavidyalaya, Kaij

Dist. Beed, MS, India

Abstract:

Dalit literature has emerged as a new form of literature which gave a jolt to mainstream literature by focussing on the issues of human beings rather than talking about the spiritual and imaginary world. By focusing on the real issues of man and giving realistic pictures of society, Dalit literature became a mirror of society in a true sense. Dalit literature is known for its effective blend of pathos and protest. Dalit literature gives voice to the issues of the common man. Dalit autobiographies are considered a hallmark of dalit literature as they portray realistic, vivid and authentic pictures of society. Though the major objective of Dalit autobiographies is to present a realistic picture of humiliation, exploitation and discrimination of the lower caste of society, it has also shed a light on the very pathetic and horrible condition of dalit women who have suffered triple times. This paper makes an attempt to study representation of Dalit women in Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography Outcaste originally written in Marathi as Akkarmashi. All major Dalit autobiographies portray dalit women in a realistic way. Dalit women have suffered on three grounds 1) as a Dalit 2) as poor person 3) as a woman

Keywords: Dalit Literature, Asmitadarsh, Subjugation, Exploitation, Inhuman, etc.

Introduction:

To understand the representation of Dalit women, readers need to understand first the meaning of the term dalit. Etymologically the word Dalit is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dalita' which means broken, split, crushed, grounded, downtrodden, and suppressed. Though Dalit literature's origin may be traced in the Bhakti movement, it got stimulus after the teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Under his teachings and influence, a large number of educated Dalits took writing as means of expressing their agonies, exploitation, and humiliation. They used literature as a weapon to protest against the discrimination and exploitation of the upper caste and asserted themselves. Dalit literature emerged in Maharashtra as Dalit movement through the magazine called *Asmitadarsh*. It started with the eminent poets like Baburav Bagul, Yashwant Manohar, Namdev Dhasal, and Narendra Surve who used poetry as an effective tool to raise their voice against the inhuman subjugation and exploitation of the upper castes.



Dalit autobiographies are considered hallmark of Indian Dalit literature as they give vivid authentic pictures of Dalits' lived experiences, struggle and indomitable spirit of Dalit. It is generally observed that humiliation, casteism, exploitation, marginalizations are the major themes of dalit autobiographies written by Dalit and non Dalit authors. The present research paper aims at studying the representation of Dalit women in Sharankumars Lmable's autobiography Outcaste. It was originally written in Marathi as Akkarmashi. All major Dalit autobiographies written by male and female portray life of Dalit women who had to suffer a lot but at the same time they showed indomitable spirit to fight against poverty, exploitation of upper caste men and male dominance of their own men.

Akkarmashi is an autobiography of Sharankumar Limbale which gives the vivid, realistic and pathetic story which really makes readers empathetic and ponders over the fate of Dalit. Limbale is called Akkarmashi because he is illegitimate and half caste as he was born to a father who belongs to high caste i.e., Lingayat and his mother belongs to lower caste Mahar. His friend calls him 'a base born'. It is not just the story of Sharankumar Limbale, but it also narrates the story of Masamai, mother of Sharan Kumar Limbale, Shantmai, grandmother of the author, his sisters, and other characters. Close reading of Akkarmashi will tell us that it is actually the story of women's exploitation by the upper caste people as well as their own men.

Akkarmashi exposes the undermining role of women in so called male-dominated society. It manifests that the woman does not have their self-identity and self-esteem in Indian society. It gives an in-depth and insightful study of Dalit women, their predicaments and their socio economic status which makes them victims of the social system. The entire autobiography presents and explores socio-economic circumstances in which women are sexually exploited. Masamai, mother of the author, was abandoned by her husband under the plot of the landlord and became a sexual victim. Dalit women are thrice exploited; they are exploited because they are untouchable and outcaste.

Dalit women are discriminated against and exploited three times as they are poor, they are women, and they are Dalits. Upper caste landlords and Patils used Dalit women as the object to satisfy their sexual desires. Dalit women are victims to higher castes people as they are poor and religion does not allow them to raise their voice against the atrocities of the higher caste people. They are exploited, outside by the higher caste men and women and inside the house by their own men as they are considered lower and weaker sex. Men are dominant in Dalit communities and they exploit their women as subordinate sex.

The caste system declares Dalit women as impure and therefore untouchable. Hence, they are socially excluded. This is a complete negation and violation of women's human rights. According to the Hindu caste hierarchy, there are four castes namely the Brahmins (priestly caste), the Kshatriya (warriors), the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (menial task workers). Below this four tier caste hierarchy, is another strata, who are called the untouchables (Panchamas). Among the untouchables, the status of women is further eroded and closely linked to the concept of purity. Being a Dalit is a symbol to tolerate pain, pathos, and exploitation. Being a woman means, a subordinate and weaker sex who is expected to render her services to the men. Woman is considered unwanted in the family right from her birth and thus, he had to face difficulties and exploitation from her birth. Almost all Dalit spokesmen clearly recognize women to be the most oppressed of their community.



Dr. B. R. Ambedkar described dalit women as "Dalit among the Dalit and the oppressed," He further said that Hindu caste system was a pyramid of earthen pots set on one another. When Brahmins and Kshatriyas are at the top, Sudras and the Untouchables are at the bottom like crushed and wasted powder. And at the very bottom are the Dalits and below them are the suppressed Dalit women. She is struggling for survival and existence. Dalit women have been kept powerless, their voices silenced, their dignity and personhood trampled on. She is leading a life full of disadvantages of being Dalit and of being a woman. Dalit are not only a socio-cultural group but often represent an economic class as well.

Status of Dalit Women:

More than 50% of the Dalit workforces were landless agricultural laborers. A number of social studies have revealed that Dalit women make up a large number of professional sex workers. 90% of those who die of starvation and attendant diseases are Dalit. Their untouchability status accentuates their economic exploitation and their poverty, strengthening their polluting social status.

Moreover the Dalit women are oppressed among oppressed and slaves. One even with a little human sensitivity gets stunned with the realistic and authentic accounts of the life conditions of the Dalit women, their suppression, humiliation, and suffering. There is no end to their sufferings. Their sufferings are twofold: they suffer as women and additionally, they become victims due to their poor social, religious, economic and cultural standing as Dalit women. Her experience of patriarchal domination is qualitative, more severe than that of non-Dalit women and opportunities and avenues available to her voicing her grievances and agonies are very few (P. G. Jogolanad). Indian society is a male dominated society. All men dominate women. Therefore it is very obvious for a Dalit man to dominate a Dalit woman. After fifty years of independence, she has to work hard to earn a livelihood for family. She has to undergo atrocities committed on her by her family drunkard husband. She has to protect herself from the people where she works and she has to fight against all the exploitation. Poverty is a great curse for the Dalits. Because of the weak economical condition, the Dalit women cannot progress. The women work in construction, serve as house maids, they break stones on roads, and such difficult tasks Dalit women have to make as two way struggle, one in the house and the other, out of the house women due caste system which has strong hierarchic and patriarchal bias discriminate against dalit women denying them just and equal wages, fare share in economic distribution, maternity benefits, the security and protection of property rights etc.

Maktoob Staff has observed that crime against Dalit women is on the rise. He referred to the recent report of National Crime record Beauru according to which dalit women are facing various torture and they are harassed. According to the report, cases of violence and rapes against Dalit women are on the rise. Even minor dalit girls are raped and kidnaped.

Further, the report of All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, has also found that dalit women are suffering various types of gruesome violence due to their poor socio economic status. As per this report dalit women are lowest in the area of education. They don't get easy access and quality education. They get basic facilities like health and proper food.



Limbale narrated in detail how dalit women had to face difficulties, starvation, discrimination and sexual exploitation. He writes that Dalit women suffer more in comparison to other women as they belong to lower caste as he writes.

Limbale has also sought attention of readers towards the problems of Devdasis who had to suffer a lot. He writes that Devdasis are sexually exploited and their children had to survive on begging. He writes, the children born to devadasi are considered impure by blood and are not entitled to trade or work in a village. They live by begging (Limbale 93).

Poverty of Dalit Women Reflected in Akkarmashi:

He describes the poverty of the family. He narrates how his sisters slept hungry and mother would fill her stomach with only water. He writes, “At the sight of my sisters who had gone to sleep hungry, I lost my appetite and could not sleep”. (Limbale) Limbale writes due to instant starvation his sisters and other family members were forced to eat leftovers and pills of banana. He narrates how dalit girl children were forced to steal some eatables in weekly market days. He narrates an incident when his sister Vani was hit with a chappal by a vendor for stealing a banana. He narrates how hunger and poverty forced Dalits to steal. He says, “We knew we shouldn’t steal but then how could we feed ourselves? Who steals out of habit? The poor steal for the sake of hunger” (Limbale). Limbale recalls how poverty forces his sister Vani to eat the banana skins which would make him cry.

Limbale gave details about his grandmother Shantamai who had to work very hard to fill their half filled starving stomach. Every morning Santamai would sweep the village streets while on Wednesdays she would sweep the entire marketplace. Later, when Masamai would quarrel with Limbale, Santamai came to live at a bus stand with Dada and Limbale and started living in an open area. Santamai would sweep the bus stand every morning and the shopkeeper would give her tea which she would share with Limbale.

Limbale has given vivid and sad descriptions of how poverty forces Dalit women to sell liquor. It was out of dire poverty that she took to this otherwise abhorred occupation. So the customers would come to their house and would spit and vomit there. They misbehaved with women. Limbale narrated how drunkards would flirt with his mother and would hold his mother’s hands while she served them drinks. Women had to beg to fill their and their children’s stomachs. Limbale showed how Gangoobai had to use infant Limbale to beg food from the villagers. They were so much dependent on the leftovers of the high caste. Masamai calls leftovers as nectar.

Limbale clearly mentions how his mother Masamai being poverty stricken and divorced by Ithal Kable falls into the trap of Hanmant Limbale who gives her a rented dwelling. Here Limbale described his mother as a “pet dove”. So, it is the poor social condition that makes Dalit women victims.

The study of an NGO, Navsarjan Trust and the Feminist Dalit Organization reveals: “Dalit women have no option but to earn livelihood for themselves and their family. Without access to land and economic resources, they are dependent on landlords, contractors and economically powerful men, whereby becoming vulnerable to exploitation and violence.”

Sexual Exploitation of Women:



Limbale narrated how dalit women are sexually exploited by upper caste men. He had given vivid description how his mother came into the trap and was sexually exploited by the Hanmant Limabe and other uppercase men. Being lower caste women, women reflected in Akkarmashi were more prone to sexual exploitation. Limbale raises a question, “Had she been born into the high caste or were she rich, would she have exploited so much?” It means dalit women suffer because of their caste and poverty. It is not just a case of Limbale’s mother but it is a common phenomenon in rural India.

Limbale feels that for a woman who is of low birth and poor, even the beauty becomes a bane. It was Masamai’s beauty which made the village men hanker after her. Her divorce from her husband was in fact caused due to her beauty as Hanmant Limbale affected her divorce only to sleep with her: “She was divorced by her husband, after which Hanmant enjoyed her and then deserted her. It is for this reason that she turned exasperated and she “never received her whole hearted love”. Limble brings to light the sexual abuse of Mahar women He 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. Dalit women’s offering of their bodies is inextricably linked with survival. To please Patils sexually means feeding the starving family. Keeping Mahar women as whores was a fashion of the Patils. He had further shed light on how landlords exploited women. Since farmers would allow Mahar near their fields; if cattle would go astray, these careers would treat women like slaves and force them for sex in the fields.

Limble also shed a light on the issue of child marriage through the marriage of his sisters Nagi and Vani. Nagi was married off to Kumar, who had already been deserted by two wives. He was old enough to be the father of Nagi who had not even reached puberty. He further showed how these marriages were short-lived and caused much trouble to young girls. Dalits girls were married at an early age and it stopped their progress. Marrying at an early age has affected their physical and mental growth and later they suffered more physical issues. Limbale has noted how the caste and the poverty made Dalit women to suffer. He writes,

My father had privileges by the virtue of his birth granted to him by the caste system. His relationship with my mother was respected by the society, whereas my mother is untouchable and poor. Had she been born into the high caste or were she rich, would she have submitted to his appropriation of her? It is through the Dalit movement and Dalit literature that I understood that my mother was not an adultress but the victim of the social system (Limbale IX).

The above narration gives us the clear idea about Dalit women’s socio economic standing and their problems.

To conclude, Akkarmashi gives vivid and realistic picture of Dalit women’s pain, exploitation by the story of Limbale’s grandmother, his mother, sisters and other female characters. It shows how Dalit women have to suffer three times. Dalit women face exploitation and torture due to their poor socio-economic condition. They became victims of the system. There is no end to dalit women's suffering. They suffer caste based discrimination,



sexual exploitation, starvation, and health issues But at the same time, he shows how his mother and grandmother struggled and tried to change their situation. The Outcaste represents a Dalit woman Masamai's desire to be free of her sexual roles and thereby become a subject with autonomy, selfhood and self-expression. Limbale, thus, imparts voice to the voiceless and speaks animatedly against the repression of the Dalits in general and women in particular through the story of his mother, sisters, and grandmother.

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