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## **A Study of Sharankumar Limbale's Dalit Literature with Special Reference to Akkarmashi (The Outcaste)**

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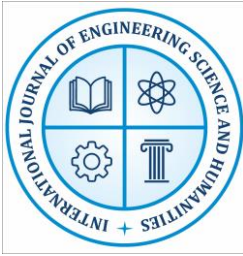
### **Abstract:**

This paper examines Sharankumar Limbale's contribution to Dalit literature, focusing on his landmark autobiography *Akkarmashi (The Outcaste)*. Limbale's writings serve as a powerful voice of protest, chronicling the centuries-long oppression and exploitation of Dalits in India. Through vivid narration and lived experiences, he challenges caste hierarchies and exposes the hypocrisy, violence and discrimination inherent in the social order. This study explores Limbale's depiction of identity crises, economic exploitation, social ostracism and the collective trauma of the Dalit community. It also contextualizes his work within the larger framework of Dalit criticism and aesthetics, showing how literature becomes a means of resistance and social change.

**Keywords:** Sharankumar Limbale, Dalit Literature, Akkarmashi, The Outcaste, Caste System, Subaltern Studies, Identity Crisis, Oppression, Resistance, Dalit Aesthetics

Sharankumar Limbale, a Dalit activist and a prominent critic in Dalit literature, was born in Maharashtra in 1956. He is one of the prominent writers who has depicted a crystal clear picture of Dalits' life in his writings. Apart from many research papers in national and international journals, he has penned down more than 40 books, all of which are worth reading. His critical work *Towards an Aesthetics in Dalit Literature*, published in 2004, is considered a milestone in Dalit literary criticism. His autobiography *Akkarmashi*, written in Marathi and translated in many languages, including English with the title '*The Outcaste*' depicts the suppression, subjugation and oppression meted on Dalits by dominant castes. It puts forward his charred experience, exploring the chronicle of childhood and young age. *The Outcaste*, an ordeal, portrays not personal but the whole community's oppression and exploitation and gives a message to Indian society to change its mentality and approach towards these long-oppressed and downtrodden people.

The present world has made unprecedented advancement in every sphere of life and people are making every possible attempt to keep pace with the changing world around themselves. Growing technology and education have created a global village with accessibility to every corner of the world. Being a part of this global village, India is not far behind if we talk about technology, medical science and another field of life. However, astonishingly, a section of Indian society is left behind in socio-economic advancement, reflecting age-old prejudices and misconceptions of leading stream society against these people.



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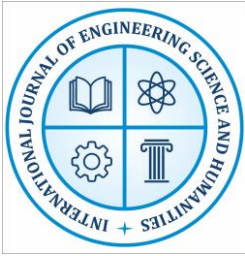
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The caste system is one of these people's most significant problems even after India attained freedom seven decades before. The social hierarchy of the mythical ancient scriptures is still practiced in society as people see their benefits and superiority in these documents. So Dalits have been tortured mentally and physically from time immemorial. Dalits are subjugated by the dominant castes without any hesitation whenever they have an opportunity to practice it. Doing toil throughout the day does not guarantee them for two times foods. Suppression and oppression done by the hegemonic section of Indian society are unbearable and intolerable. Due to prejudices and misconceptions circulating in society, Dalits have to suffer and they are not allowed to be a part of society mainstream. Socially, politically and economically backwardness of these people deprives them of acquiring high ranks and designation in various fields.

Since the time literature has been written, it has tried its best to entertain the readers and to mirrors the society. Writers have been using literature to expose the follies and evils of the society in which they live. By criticizing and mocking, intellectuals try their best to change the world according to their thoughts and vision. However, surprisingly writers from the elite class and dominant castes have never shown the real picture of Indian society facing segregation of works and people. The main reason for not depicting the caste system in their writing is their vested interest, as it privileges their hegemonic castes. They have never felt the charred experiences and mentally torture of Dalits and even if some of them understand the inhuman treatment, they avoid to write about the same fearing social ostracization. Raj Kumar believes:

The caste system with its myriad variations of superordination and subordination, its confusions and contradictions, rites and rituals, vices and virtues, dogmas and doubts, professions and protests - can sustain itself across different regions India in Varying degrees of rigidity (Kumar 115).

As the rituals and practices prevalent in the society always work and privilege to dominant section and benefitted section never sees anything wrong in these customs. As Social norms and code of conducts in Indian society have directly been taken from the old scriptures like Manusmriti, which divides society into four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras in hierarchical order, so these norms and rituals have been directly benefitting Brahmins and Kshatriyas providing them with a higher status in the society. According to the book, Dalits are on the lowest rank of this hierarchy and they do not have any right to education, wearing good clothes, collecting money, listening and reading religious thoughts and entering into temples. Because all these things were deliberately and intentionally imposed on Dalits for hundreds of years, so it had been believed that all this is natural and its God's will, as the words in Manusmriti and other so-called religious scriptures, are of God. Propagation of this culture for hundreds of years made it hard for the people to raise voice against this system as it looked odd and absurd to think that how all the people in this society can be treated equally.



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Division of people also verified that works allotted to them should also be hierarchical, so Dalits were forced to do all manual works, including cleaning, dropping, picking carcasses of dead animals and then skinning them. These manual work types are considered detesting, so with time, they were tagged 'untouchables'. In ancient times there was no one to raise their voice, so their image was created by the dominant class, which has one-sided control on reading and writing. Whatever was written and told to society was from the upper caste's perspective, which always tried to disseminate wrong ideas and thoughts about the deprived section as Mukherjee writes:

Hindu society was not content with avoiding the Dalit in its literature. It also made sure that Dalits could not speak in the tongue of the upper caste. Having determined that Dalits were impure and polluted, it legislated that they were not to learn or read Sanskrit, the gods' language and, so, the ultimate trope of Brahmanism (Mukherjee 4).

To understand the present work properly, it becomes essential, knowing precisely who Dalits are? Collins English dictionary defines the word 'Dalit' as "(in the traditional Indian Caste System) a member of the lowest caste". 'Dalit', which means 'broken' and 'scattered' in Sanskrit and Hindi, is associated with a group of ethnic people exploited and oppressed for thousands of years and subjected to untouchability. Sharankumar Limbale, a Dalit critique observes:

Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits, the terms describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word it will not do to refer only the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included. (30)

In his paper "Reading Sharankumar Limbale's Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: From Erasure to Assertion," Alok Mukherjee objected to Limbale's overhead view of including economically weak people in Dalits. He asserts that the Limbale above's view is his political move and objects that whether Dalitness is annihilated with the acquisition of wealth or education? His notions are that Dalitness is hereditary in a hierarchical system. Mukherjee staunchly asserts that in the traditional caste system, position or rank is decided by birth in the society in which a person is born, mobility upward and downward is not possible, so the inclusion of economically weaker section does not fit in the hierarchical system. If analyzed, Limbale's observance of Dalits minutely, the questions which arise are: Does economically weaker sections have the same experiences of caste biases and untouchability in its daily life? Do they (Economically weaker sections) also rebel against the caste system, or are they privileged? Do they have Dalit consciousness and commitment while producing literature?

The documents and some folk stories created misconceptions about Dalits' by projecting them as born criminal, thief and smuggler. All these prejudices and misconceptions were there in books and stories, so these were taken as God's will and it was propagated and disseminated that



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if someone debunks and works against these, he will be punished by God. This systematic and deliberately imposed foul thinking was believed to be accurate by these people as it operated from antiquity. However, with advancements in technology, education and reasoning, people from the lower strata started understanding the insidious system working on them and they started questioning against the popular culture. Dalits, who were tortured and tormented for centuries, took literature as a weapon to express their trauma and anger against the wrongs and ill-treatment meted on them by the hegemonic castes. The aim of Dalit literature from its inception has been to protest against the established system, which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the so-called higher castes.

Dalit literature is not merely literature... Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them, instead there is new thinking and a new point of view (Dangle vii).

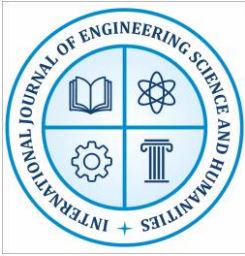
Analysis of Dalit literature provides an idea that these voices and thoughts are for creating awareness in the society about the age-longed trauma of a section of society. It is for a change in society that provides equal space to everyone without considering any caste and creed. It hopes for a society in which every voice will be heard and valued based on its importance.

Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group people who, as untouchable, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. (Mukherjee 1)

Dalits observe, the literature written by upper castes systematically introduces such characters and incidents that propagate the negative image of Dalits, so they object to this type of writing. Some critics of Dalit literature even assert that there should be different aesthetics to judge Dalit literature as it cannot be judged on the parameters of Brahminical literature. This literature has different dialects and it projects experienced incidents that make it unique. These writers' literary tools and techniques are not same, so it is an injustice to judge this literature on the parameters of other literature.

Dalit literature is marked by a wholesale rejection of the tradition, the aesthetics, the language and the concerns of a Brahminical literature that, even at its best, carried within it the signs of the caste-based social and cultural order. Instead, Dalit literature has established its own tradition with anti-caste or untouchable thinkers like Buddha, Kabir and Ambedkar as its signposts (Mukherjee 10).

Dalit literature is a new form of literature that started to come into existence after Indian Independence or the 1960s. Dalit writers took the inspiration from two precursors of the Dalit Movement, Dr B.R Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule and started to depict the daily experiences of Dalits in their narratives to expose the hierarchical Hindu caste system. The writings of the



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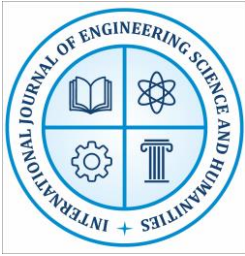
particular group of people in the society referred to as Dalit literature, which is, in fact, an outburst of the suppressed voice of Dalits. Dalit literature is the literature written by Dalit in which they express their own experiences of pain and pathos, agony and anguish. According to Sharankumar Limbale's Dalit literature, "mean(s) writing about Dalits by Dalits writers with a Dalit consciousness. The form of Dalit literature is inherent on its Dalitness and its purpose is obvious: to inform Dalit society of its slavery and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindu" (Limbale 19). The non-dalit writer who writes about Dalit cannot come under the Dalit writer's category because he fails to represent the real Dalit consciousness. So, in Dalit literature, Dalit experiences are more critical than expressions. The nature of this literature resides in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by the Dalit in the past and perpetuation of the same process in the present also. An outstanding work of Dalit literature originates and comes into existence only when a Dalit life portrays itself from the Dalit point of view. Its uniqueness is that it is born out of the womb of untouchability. Another feature of Dalit literature is its collective aspects. The events, incidents and experiences being depicted in writing portray the life and experiences of all Dalits.

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* is one such autobiography that deftly demonstrates the saga of sorrows, miseries, poverty and hunger. More or less, these life experiences show the experiences of all the Dalits dwelling in the various corner of the country. For Dalits, Social segregation is not just limited to different living conditions, but daily life is also fixed for them. Their attires and food is entirely different form higher class people, which explicitly show their economic conditions. The games of children are segregated according to their status in society. Limbale writes:

The Wani and Brahmin boys played kabbadi. Being marked as Mahar we couldn't join them. So Mallya, Umbrya, Parshya, all from my caste, began to play touch and go. We played one kind of game while the high caste village boys played another. The two games were played separately like two separate whirlwinds. (2)

In Indian society, Dalits' exploitation and oppression are due to the hierarchical caste system deeply rooted in orthodox and conservative Hindu religion. After Independence, some constitutional provisions were made to protect any discrimination based on caste, but such changes were not witnessed at the ground level. Even clearly declaring caste biases a severe offence, people never hesitate to indulge in it as people's mentality is not much changed yet. The writer portrays higher caste Shivram towards a Dalit when he comes to Shivram's tea shop.

Rambaap used to drink water and tea and he had to wash the tumblers too before he put them back in their place. He had to put the money for the tea on the ground or drop it from a height into the owner's hands because for a Mahar or Mang to hand money directly to anyone was a sin. When Rambaap noticed me watching him do all this, he said, 'We are



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low castes. What you have seen is a long tradition that has come down to us from our forefathers. What can we do about? How can we go against the village customs. (76)

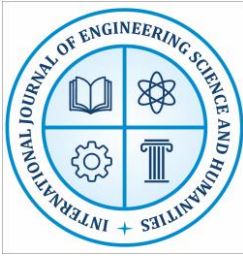
If analyzed economically, most of the resources are owned by the dominant hegemonic caste, so Dalits have to work to earn their livelihood, which opens a way for their physical and mental torture. Labourers from the Dalit community do works in the fields, but the benefit goes to a higher caste. These people do construction work of temples, schools and mansions, but they become untouchable as the construction is over. In this reference, Limbale writes, "the spade and shovels of Mahars were used to dig the well. The Mahar gave their sweat for it... They the Mahars, are the reason why there is water in the well. But now the same Mahars are not allowed to draw water from it, not even drinking water" (80-81).

High-class people never allow Dalits to touch their household utensils and other things, asserting that these people's mere touch will make these polluted. However, Limbale shows these dominant people's hypocrisy when they exploit lower castes, girls and ladies, physically. Limbale opinions hardly any girl or lady could escape from their lust. While they sexually exploit Dalits' ladies and fulfill their lust, they never get polluted but if these ladies and any member of their family touch high caste people they find themselves unsanctified. As these ladies do not have any other way to earn two times food except working on dominant castes' land. Higher caste people consider it their right to use ladies from lower strata as objects and commodities to quench their lust. They make them pregnant and never accept the newborn baby.

People who enjoy high caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion and inherit property have exploited these Dalits. 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. Some Dalit families survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of 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)

Limbale, an outcast born from a Mahar lady Masamai and upper-caste Hanumanta, has to face many problems. He felt an identity crisis as Hanumanta never accepted him as his offspring and society views him as a child born from the extramarital affair of Masami and Hanumanta.

My forefathers were Lingayat. Therefore I am one too. My mother was a Mahar. My mother's father and ancestors were Mahar, hence I am also a Mahar. From the day I was born until today, I was brought up by 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 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 belong to the village,



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whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom my umbilical cord connected? (38-39).

During Limbale's education, problems in documents made him disappointed as he could not identify himself when village Sarpanch asked him, to write his father's name on the certificate required. Being an illegitimate offspring of higher caste Hanuamata and lower caste Masamai, Sarpanch could not verify his caste and he had to return disconsolate.

The Sarpanch was in a real fix about how to identify me. 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 a father's name, nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all (59).

However, community and religion are not by choice to be born in any caste. It is a random process, but once a being is born, his behaviour, conduct and etiquettes are judged by his unfair caste that is a matter of concern in the 21st century. This thinking's systematic imposition drives society to tag some people as 'untouchable', which further leads to division in society and hatred to one another. Limbale observes

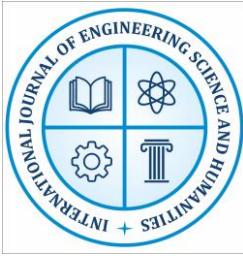
How is a person born with his caste? How does he become untouchable as soon as he born? How can he be a criminal by birth? From his feet Brahma gave birth to a vast low-caste community. Since then, the community has been living as untouchables (82).

Limbale's narrative, a voice of subalterns, left behind many questions to think about. Unhuman behavior insidiously working in the society affecting crores of lives cannot be allowed to operate ever. Leading stream society must ponder its conduct and marginalized must initiate taking steps for their social, political and economic emancipation. Conservatives and non-progressive customs and rituals must be broken as soon as possible to construct a better future. Orthodox beliefs which protect changes must be questioned, as Limbale asserts

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 massive tree of caste, religion, breeding, family? (105)

## **Conclusion:**

Sharankumar Limbale's writings, particularly *Akkarmashi*, stand as testimony to the lived realities of Dalits and their long struggle for dignity and equality. By presenting an unflinching account of poverty, humiliation and exploitation, Limbale not only documents his personal pain but also speaks for a collective consciousness silenced for centuries. His narratives challenge upper-caste representations, question religious and social practices and expose systemic injustices. Importantly, Limbale's work demands that literature be seen as a tool of protest and reform rather than mere aesthetics. The text reminds us that caste-based discrimination is not only a historical



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phenomenon but an ongoing social issue and it calls for critical introspection and societal transformation

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