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IDENTITY CRISIS OF PROTAGONIST IDENTITY IN SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S
'THE OUTCASTE' (AKKARMASHI): A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper focus on the multiple and fractured identities of a protagonist and his quest for creating a new and better identity for him in the society. Sharankumar Limbale's Marathi autobiography 'Akkarmashi' (1984) translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar as 'The Outcaste' (2003) is the narrative of a protagonist Sharan, an illegitimate son born out of the relation between a village Patil, a rich landlord of Basalegaon, Hanumant Limbale and a poor Dalit woman, Masamai. The stigma of untouchability and illegitimacy makes the life of Sharan most pathetic. The more he tries to think about the question of his identity more it becomes complex and painful for him. The author Sharankumar Limbale highlights the hypocrisy of Indian Caste system which grants permission and status to a High Caste Patil to develop extra-marital system. He is not branded as immoral whereas the woman with whom he keeps extra-marital relations is branded as a whore.

Key Words: The Out Caste ,Dalit Autobiography, Identity Crisis and protagonist Identities.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Manu, the ancient Indian lawgiver, untouchability is the punishment for the miscegenation between a member of a high caste and that of a low caste or an outcaste. The children of such an unequal pair become untouchables and the greater the social gap between the two parents, the lower the status of their children. The consequences are also more severe if the mother is of a superior caste. The notion of legitimacy and illegitimacy is based on the rules of endogamy and exogamy. The higher caste man can sexually exploit the lower caste woman with no stigma of immorality on him but the latter is branded as a whore. The mother and children are socially detested and the mark of illegitimacy is imposed on the innocent child since his very birth. The protagonist 'Sharan' in *The Outcaste* suffered from the same notion of illegitimacy as his mother keeps an extra-marital relationship with a village Patil of Basalegaon is one of the most captivating personality and he look for more unpublic maintenance relationship.

Quest for Identity: A Matter of Confusion for the Protagonist:

The protagonist Sharan's mother Masamai previously marries with Ithal Kamble and have two children. He works on the farm on a yearly contract basis on the farm of Hanmanta Limbale, a Patil of Basalegaon. Hanmanta Limbale helps Ithal Kamble in his hard times but keeping ill intention in his mind. On the ploy of immorality and the pressure of rich landlord the caste council forced Masamai to divorce Kamble. The divorce from Ithal Kamble to Masamai seems to be a banishment of Sita by her husband lord Rama. Hanmanta Limbale then keeps physical relations with Masamai. Masamai gives birth to a son. Hanmanta no longer want have any connection with the child and mother. Protagonist remarks, sharan kumar

"After his birth the mansions of the Patil community must have become tense. His first breath must have threatened the morality of the world. With is first cry at birth, milk must have splashed from the breast of every Kunti."

Generally the people of the house become happy when there is a birth of a son, but the birth of a child to a woman who has been redundant by her man considered as a sin and the infant and the mother both are branded as dishonest. There is no distribution of sweets at the birth of a child but a shame on a family. The newly born child faces a inequitable attitude from the relatives and society. The child is not able to find out his identity. The stigma of being an illegitimate gnaws the heart of Sharan and he raises some basic questions to himself:

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit if this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days 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 they considered her as a whore? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I, really? (*Limbale 37*)

The quest for identity of Sharan becomes more complicated when he finds splintered identities before and leaving him completely and its capable of doing particular thing properly. He is in a dilemma and in uncertain to choose one identity for himself. He feels kinship with a mythical character, Jarasandha portrayed in the epic Mahabharata.

The Feeling extremely alienated :

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 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 villlage, whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected? (*Limbale 38*)

With the intervention of Bhosale, the headmaster of the school, he gets his biological father's name added to his name in the school record. Hanmanta Limbale, Patil of Basalegaon is recorded as his father but he hesitates to accept him as his son. He faces a problem of his identity when he applies for freeship and wants to have a signature of Sarpanch on freeship application form. The Sarpanch refuses to sign the form of Sharan on the pretext of not knowing the real husband of Masamai. He disproves the name 'Masamai Hanmant Limbale'. Bhosale guruji proposes the his granny's name, 'Santamai Rama Balshankar,' but Sarpanch refuses on account of his grandmother living with a Muslim, Mahmood. The Sarpanch finds it intricate to identify him. Sharan at very young age raises a philosophical question and wants to be recognized as a human being. He remarks, "But I too was a human being. What else did I have except a human body?" He is critical of the tradition of identifying a person by his religion, caste or father's name. Sharan puts forth the question towards those who claim themselves as legitimate. He says,

“Can everybody guarantee that he is the off spring of the father whose name is added to his Name? Has anyone seen who sowed his seed? Has anyone seen the intercourse of his parents that resulted in his birth?”

Education played vital role in making protagonist aware about Dalit Consciousness. He feels that the Hindu religious system is at the root of the exploitation of his mother. Hindu Caste system grants permission to the high caste men to sexually exploit the women of low caste and brand the children born out of their relations as illegitimate without any stigma on the exploiters.

He gets intimated with “Dalit Panther Movement” which express the unity of all the Dalits. Sharan finds his umbilical cord associated with Ambedkarite Movement which speaks about the unrestraint of the Dalits. But still he feels alienation from the people participating in the movement. His low and adulterated blood keeps him away from the people in the movement who he feels as pure Mahars. His caste follows him even after his transfer to Latur. He doesn’t get a house on rent due to his low caste. Though previously Sharan used to rever God shiva now he doesn’t think that the people who river icons and sanctify outfit are his people. He says, “I used clean clothes, bathed every day and washed myself clean with soap, and brushed my teeth with toothpaste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable? A high caste who is dirty was still considered touchable!”

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar asks his followers to give up the religion which discriminates between man and man. As Sharan gets associated with Dalit movement he gets aware about the discriminatory treatment of Hindu religion and he decides to give up religion, god and everything which ostracize human beings. He says:

God discriminates between man and man. He makes one man rich and the other poor. One is high caste, the other untouchable. What kind of God is this that makes human beings hate each other?

We are all supposed to be the children of God, then why are we considered untouchable? We

don’t approve of this God, nor this religion, nor this country because they ostracize us. (Limbale 62)

Lastly, he associates his agony with the agony of Buddha due to which he give up his Kingdom, his beautiful wife and son. He wants to take refuge in “Dhamma” promulgated by Buddha. He finds his mother in the great personality of Babasaheb. At last he finds nothing meaningful in branding oneself the follower of particular religion.

He takes refuge in humanism. He realises that loving kindness can win the hearts of men Irrespective of the religion they belong to. He says, “If you cut out his religion a man is still a man. So why doesn’t a human being from one religion love a human being from another? Why does religion hinder them? Why is man kept in a prison or other place by conventions?”

Conclusion

Sharankumar Limbale’s search for identity in ‘The Outcaste’ seems to end in the revolutionary philosophy of Buddha and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who preached the emancipation of the downtrodden and marginalised sections of the society. He gets aware of the humanitarian ideology of Ambedkarite Movement yet some questions would nag him throughout his life. In the end of the autobiography he leaves some questions which would remain unanswered:

Notes:

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