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**DALITS IN QUEST OF IDENTITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE OUTCASTE
(AKKARMASHI)**

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ABSTRACT

In comparison, biography is considered more trustworthy than autobiography as it is supposed to show the brighter phase of life and to hide the darker things. But in the present autobiography, there is no brightness. It is the darkest in all. It is really sentimental and demands our sympathy since it all happened in real life rather in imaginary bent of mind of writer. The plight of dalits is challenging their existence. We feel pity not merely for Limbale but for each Dalit who is dying day to day in the name of religion, untouchability, sexual exploitation, starvation, casteism and many more things. Being a Dalit is really proved to be curse. They are just puzzled in this chaos of hunger and casteism. So far as their identity is concerned they are suppressed enough to raise any voice against their exploiters .

Sharankumar Limbale is an author of Marathi language, a poet and a literary critic. He is known for his excellent work "Akkarmashi" which is autobiographical. It has been translated into many languages as it is a useful source to know about Dalit literature. In English it was translated by Santosh Bhoomkar and got it published by Oxford University press with the title 'The Outcaste' in 2003. Limbale's present autobiographical novel really shows the plight of dalits. It is well compared with Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy' or Jean Genet's 'A Thief's Journal'. It is not the first autobiography in dalit literature. Many were written before as Daya Pawar's 'Baleeta', Laxman Mane's 'Upara' and Gaikwad's 'Uchalya'.

In India, many evil things are prevalent since ages as casteism, untouchability, injustice and exploitation. In post-independent India, dalit's plight was miserable enough. They had no identity of their own. Their caste became curse. Sharan and his all family members suffer due to Casteism and they have accepted this curse as Rambaap advised Sharan not to take any action against,

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

The ancestry of casteism got cleared much when Sahtamaih had the view:

Life is not the same, we suffered more injustice in our days.(78)

This long history of casteism made them alien in their own land. Raj Kumar rightly believes:

“The caste system- with its myriad variations of subordination, its confusion and contradictions, rites and rituals, vices and virtues, dogmas and doubts, professions and protests- is able to sustain itself across different regions of India in varying degrees of rigidity.” (Kumar, 115)

Casteism according to the prime architect of Indian constitution Dr. BhimRaoAmbedkar, is the strongest reason for dividing human beings, ZakirAbedi here quoted Ambedkar:

“Ambedkar strongly states that Brahmins have succeeded “to idealize the real and realize the ideal.”
“Caste is divine, caste is sacred.” Caste system is not merely division of labour, it is also division of labourers” (Abedi, 204-205)

Dalit women face the exploitation in its cruelest form. Santamai, Masamai, Chandamai are not only instances rather alldalit female world have been facing injustice since the very beginning. Some are rejected as they were unable to bear sons. Masamai proves to be real victim. To be born beautiful among dalits is proved to be curse for her. She became the source of lust for Hanmanta Limbale and Kaka Patil. Being a concubine of Patils, she is the most depressed of all. She never got justice. Her all children suffer as they are tagged Mahars and illegitimates. The question arises if Mahars are considered untouchables where this untouchabilitygo when higher class males rape them, fulfill their lust and enjoy the liquor from their hands. AnitaGhosh has quoted Mrs. Bansode’s poem in which dalit female world is hoping for justice:

“Thiscomplaint of mine
is against the orthodox culture
which has imprisoned us in a sealed room
which has given us the charity of life
completely boycotted.
Where the wind feats us as strangers
Where the monsoons gives us only famines
Where the water plays with us
The most inhuman game of mirage.
We are rejecting this
Unclean and poisonous life
And to escape from their cruel curses.
Will you give me
A bright and auspicious moon?
My countrymen, to your court
I have brought a complaint
Will you give me justice?” (Anita Ghosh, 48)

Dalitsenjoyedno existence, no identity. Identity is marked with birth, with father’s name and with caste. But all were suffering. Limbale is considered outcaste as he doesn’t have any worth, neither he is Mahar nor Patilsince he is born out of illegitimate intercourse of his mother and Hanmanta. Being a son of Hanmanta, he never got his father’s name. He is lost being, has no existence as he himself views:

My father lives in a mansion, my mother in a hut, and I on the street. Where will I die? Where are my roots exactly? (62)

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)

Sharan was brought up under the care of Santamai and Dada. Dada was a muslim by caste but he loved Sharan as his grandson. He hardly got his bread by working as a porter. He lives in Mahar community but the question of his identity is unsolved. When Santamai's step-son wished to inquire about him, she replied:

Someone we know. He has no one. He stays with us and works as a porter. He is a stranger.(58)

The question why dalits seem disinterested in raising their voice against this injustice and exploitation is starvation with which they live through day and night. They work for Patils, clean their shit, bow before them as animals. They can't go against them since they get food from them by doing tiny works. They sell themselves for their stomachs. Hunger is the worst thing ever:

A woman becomes a whore and a man a thief. They make you clean shit, it makes you eat shit. (8)

Sharan himself accepts this thing that why they remain silent:

Do we exist first 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)

Untouchability is a wider discussed phenomena in dalit society as Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar and other social reformers marked it as the worst thing among dalits. Nizari Pandit sums up the pathetic condition of an untouchable, saying:

"The accident of being born an untouchable handicaps a person in all spheres of life. In spite of his extraordinary mental and physical abilities, he has no regret to live normal life." (Nizari, 169-170)

Mahars were not allowed to enter in temples, they were not allowed to drink water from the same well which they dug by their own hands. They couldn't get the tea from the cup from which higher-caste people used to drink.

Limbale questions:

How a person born with his caste? How does he became 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)

Towards the conclusion, it is well observed that through his autobiography, Sharan Kumar Limbale showed us the miserable past of dalits. He depicted their worse life in which they enjoyed no worth, no identity and no existence as they were just puzzled in the chaos of starvation, casteism and untouchability. Dalits, too are humans. They too are born as flowers in the same garden taken care of by Almighty. Limbale hopes in the future they get their worth and justice which they deserve.

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