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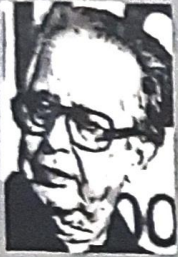
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33.	REFLECTION OF SOCIO - PSYCHO REALISM IN MAHESHI ELKUNCHWAR'S <i>FLOWER OF BLOOD</i>	Ms. Hiware Jyoti Suryabhan	116
34.	INDIAN CULTURE AND PATRIOTISM IN THE WRITINGS OF SAROJINI NAIDU	Dr. Sudam Laxman kumar	114
35.	GIRISH KARNAD'S <i>THE DREAMS OF TIPU SULTAN: A PLAY OF VISIONARY DREAMER</i>	Dr. Anant Vithalrao Jadhav	117
36.	CHETAN BHAGAT'S <i>2 STATES: A CULTURAL CONFRONTATION</i>	Mr. Kalyankar A. S. Mr. Karale N. G.	122
37.	THE EFFECT OF INDIAN TRANSLATION ON CULTURE	Dr. Shrimant R. Tonde	126
38.	CHETAN BHAGAT'S <i>FIVE POINT SOMEONE: A PROTEST VOICE OF YOUTH</i>	Mr. Karale N. G. Mr. Kalyankar A. S.	129
39.	REFLECTION OF INDIAN SOCIAL REALITY IN SHASHI THAROOR'S <i>RIOT: A STUDY</i>	Dr. S. T. Haibatpure	132
40.	REFLECTIONS OF FEMINISM IN WOMEN'S LITERATURE	Dr. Jeetendra Nagorao Deshmukh	135
41.	DR. APJ ABDUL KALAM'S <i>WINGS OF FIRE AS A REFLECTION OF THE SELF AND SOCIETY</i>	Mr. Arvind Chandrakant Biradar	138
42.	INDIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN KARNAD'S PLAYS	Dr. Bhosale Gajanan Vishwanath	141
43.	INFLUENCE OF GANDHI IDEOLOGY ON RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA	Dr. Arya D. W. Miss. Kendre S. A.	145
44.	RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA: A MICROCOSM OF THE INDIAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY	Dr. Y. S. Handibag	150
45.	AN EXPLORATION OF BAMA AND URMILA PAWAR: DALIT WOMEN'S FEMINIST VISIONS	Jadhav Mukesh Baliram	155
46.	THE THEME OF <i>BHAKTI</i> REFLECTED IN TAGORE'S <i>GITANJALI</i> .	Prof. Dr. Jawalge Hanumant Rambhau	159
47.	THE REFLECTION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES IN SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S <i>THE OUTCASTE</i>	Dr. Rajendra D. Gholap	162
48.	DYNAMIC OF CIVIC YOUNGSTERS, THEIR LANGUAGE & NON RURAL REALISM OF INDIAN THE NOVELS OF CHETAN BHAGAT	Uday Madhukarrao Kharat	166
49.	SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN NARAYAN'S <i>THE GUIDE</i>	Dr. Bhosale Gajanan Vishwanath	170
50.	CONTEMPORARY DALIT SHORT STORIES- AN OVERVIEW	Shuddhodhan P. Kamble	173
51.	CULTURAL CONFLICT IN BHARTI MUKHERJEE'S <i>THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER</i>	Dr. VIJAYKUMAR G. PAWAR Mr. SUYOG S. DODAL	177
52.	ABROGATION AND APPROPRIATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIAN ENGLISH	Dr. Shivnarayan Waghmare	181



# THE REFLECTION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES IN SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *THE OUTCASTE*

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## ABSTRACT:

The two concepts 'society' and 'culture' are closely associated and by and large used interchangeably. It is significant to understand the social structure to know one's social status, the culture, the customs, the religion and the social institutions to which he/she belongs. Since India's entire social structure is based on castes, the caste-system becomes an inexorable entity in the socio-cultural domain. The concept of casteism prevalent in India has different facets and connotations such as caste hierarchy, caste-discrimination, domination, sexual exploitation, injustices, undue humiliation, atrocity, utter poverty, perpetual hunger, starvation, caste based conflicts and its worse effects on the present generation. This paper is an attempt to explore and analyze the socio-cultural issues reflected in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*. It attempts to pinpoint the origin of Dalit life and how the Dalits have been treated inhumanely by the high caste Hindus by believing irrationally and prejudicially in falsely ascribed emergence of Dalits as Shudras prescribed by the so called Hindu religious scripture *Manusmriti*. Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* is emotionally violent autobiography reflecting series of inhuman treatment inflicted on the Dalits due to the Indian rigid social structure, cultural practices and undue exploitation of the dominant castes.

**KEYWORDS:** Socio-cultural issues, *Manusmriti*, caste hierarchy, caste discrimination, domination, utter poverty, sexual exploitation, caste based conflicts, *The Outcaste*

## INTRODUCTION:

The studies regarding the reflection of society and culture in Indian writing in English is a matter of great concern. It is pivotal to deal with the aspects of society and culture to perceive one's identity, religion, customs and the social institutions to which he/she belongs. Indian socio-cultural set up is completely based on the rigid caste system. The Indian caste system is multi-faceted have different overtones such as caste hierarchy, caste-discrimination, domination, sexual exploitation, injustices, humiliation, atrocity, utter poverty, hunger, starvation, caste based conflicts, etc. In view of this, it is worth studying the socio-cultural issues of Indian Dalit life specifically Sharankumar Limbale's autobiographical work originally written in Marathi as *Akkarmashi* (1984) and later on translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar as *The Outcaste* (2003). Prior to the analysis of Limbale's translated autobiographical work, it is essential to overview the social structure and caste system pervaded in India.

### Social Structure and Caste System in India: An Overview

The traces regarding the origins of Dalit life are found deeply rooted in the *Varna* system, its subsequent caste system and untouchability as an integral part of the Dalit life. The creators and supporters of the *Varna* system falsely ascribed the emergence of this system to God. It was falsely convinced that God himself created various *Varnas*. It was very cunningly affirmed that God Mahaprajapati brought the four *Varnas* that are, the *Brahmin*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaishya*, and the *Shudras* into existence. They said that the *Brahmin* sprang from the mouth of *Brahma*, the *Kshatriya* from the arms, the *Vaishya* from the thighs and the *Shudras* from the feet. Hence, the occupation of



the individuals depended upon the caste they belonged to. The *Brahmin* and the *Kshatriya*, being higher in the hierarchy of social order, dominated the other castes for several centuries.

The dominant castes who supported the four-fold classification of *Varna* system did not accept the Dalit as a human being. The religious documents like *Manusmriti* and others prescribed an inhuman and torturous life for the Dalits. In the tenth chapter of the *Manusmriti* Manu prescribes horrible kind of life and duties for Shudras. Manu writes that the *Shudras* must not be allowed within the limits of the village. They should be forced to live in isolated, frightening places like burial grounds. In order to be easily identified, they should bear certain marks on their bodies and should live on inferior professions. Their dwelling should generally be outside the main habitations of the upper castes and they should not have invaluable things except dogs and donkeys. They should eat the left-over food from broken mud pots. They should wear ornaments of black iron and should wander from place to place. No upper caste person was allowed to have any contact with them and their marriage relations should take place only among themselves. They were allowed to use clothes, beds and ornaments of the executed criminals and were allowed to use refused grains. Such was Manu's horrible prescription for the *Shudras* (Muller, 1886, p.301-04).

The most horrifying part of the whole thing was that Manu's prescriptions were followed, implemented and executed by the upper caste Hindus. Even today in several parts of India, such horrible and heinous treatment is given to the Dalits. The history of miserable plight of Dalit life in India compels to condemn Manu thoroughly because his *Manusmriti* is the root cause of the torture meted out to the Dalits. It is for this reason that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the emancipator of downtrodden and the father of the Indian constitution, publically burnt *Manusmriti*. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a voice of the Dalits attacked the *Varna* system and the religious texts on which the caste system was based. He asserted that the Hindu society must be reorganized on the basis of the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

#### Sharankumar Limbale: The Concept of *Akkarmashi*/the Outcaste Culture:

Sharankumar Limbale, born in 1<sup>st</sup> June 1965, in the village Baslegaon in Akkalkot taluka Solapur district of Maharashtra, is Dalit poet, writer and literary critic. He wrote more than forty books but he is immensely acknowledged for his autobiography *Akkarmashi* (1984) which was translated into English as *The Outcaste* (2003). Through this landmark autobiography, Limbale puts forth the readers an objective account of his life from his birth to adulthood, very carefully creating the reflection of his Dalit community in conflict with the contemporary social and cultural conditions.

At the very outset, in an *Author's Note* of *The Outcaste*, Sharankumar Limbale states,

My history is my mother's life, at the most my grandmother's. My ancestry doesn't go back any further. My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father in a mansion. Father is a landlord; mother, landless. I am an *akkarmashi* (half-caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate (Limbale, 2003, ix).

The word *Akkarmashi* is a humiliating word used in Marathi as an abuse. It is particularly used for a person whose birth is illegitimate because he is born of sexual relationship outside marriage. Sharankumar's father is Maratha, a high caste Hindu whereas mother is Mahar, a low caste Hindu. Therefore, he can neither be claimed as a complete Maratha nor a complete Mahar. Mahar community calls him *akkarmashi* because his father is a high-caste Hindu while high-caste people call him an untouchable because his mother is Mahar. He is recognized by so called Hindu culture as a half-caste, impure, incomplete, etc. Consequently, Sharankumar gets identity as the outcaste, a



curse being fatherless throughout his life. As an outcaste, he is ostracized, excluded from the society, deprived of his rights and privileges as human being and lives a life of untouchability.

#### Sexual Exploitation of Dalit women:

Sexual exploitation of Dalit women by the high caste Hindus was a common practice among village Patils. Sharankumar's mother Masamai was married to Ithal Kamble who was as a farm worker at Hanmanta Limbale in Baslegaon village. They had two sons named Dharma and Suryakant. Hanmanta Limbale was the village Patil. He used to extend help to Ithal Kamble but did not have good intention. He had an eye on Masamai. He planned such a way that he enforced Ithal and Masamai to take divorce and became successful to make Masamai his concubine. Masamai was given a rented house at Akkalkot where Hanmanta used to visit her frequently to gratify his sexual hunger. Later on, Masamai gave birth to Sharankumar as a result of illicit sexual relationship between Masamai and Hanmanta. However, Hanmanta denied taking responsibility of Sharankumar and did not acknowledge as his offspring. He started avoiding both Masamai and Sharankumar and kept on quarreling with her every day. Fed up with the quarrels, Masamai and Sharankumar came to stay with Santamai, Sharankumar's grandmother.

Sharankumar, in his narration, speaks of the plight of Dalit women. He says that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. His mother Masamai was beautiful and therefore became victim of the lust of high caste Hindus and suffered a lot. She was divorced by her husband Ithal and later on Hanmanta kept on having sexual exploitation of Masamai and deserted her when she gave birth to a child. In view of the sexual exploitation of Dalit women, Sharankumar comments painfully,

People who enjoy high-caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion, and inherent property, have exploited the Dalits of this land. 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. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil's whore... (Ibid, 38).

Sharankumar's mother Masamai represents every Dalit woman who is the victim of sexual exploitation by the high caste Hindus. Later on, when Masamai came to stay with her mother Santamai, she came in contact with Kaka, the Patil of Hanoor whose name was Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil. Kaka kept on doing sexual exploitation of Masamai. The illegitimate sexual relationship between Masamai and Kaka resulted into the birth Nagi, Nimi, Vani, Suni, Pami, Tamma, Indira, Sidrama. In this context, Sharankumar says, "We were all of one womb and one blood. We shared a common mother but different fathers" (ibid, 38). It clearly shows how Dalit women were fascinated, imposed to be concubine by the high cast Patils, cheated and exploited to gratify their lust. Such a dilemma of Dalit women raises question of the place of Dalit women in Indian society and culture.

#### Reflection of Varna System and Prescription of Manu's Manusmriti for Dalits:

Sharankumar Limbale's autobiographical work is quite evident of the practice of Varna system and implementation of the prescription of Manu which he had prescribed in Manusmriti for the Shudras. The Dalits narrated by Sharankumar shows that they mostly lived in the huts and outside the villages with very limited utensils. The Dalits used to do menial and subordinate jobs. Santamai, Sharankumar's grandmother swept the village street, worked as midwife, Dada Dastgir lit the street lamps and had to drag dead animals, skin them and eat their flesh. They used to wear worn out tattered clothes given by the high caste Hindus. They used to beg and collect leftover food from



high caste Hindus. Sharankumar narrates an event of school picnic in which high caste boys offer Sharankumar and his Dalit friends their leftover food. Moreover, when Sharankumar tells it to his mother, she interrogated him, "Why didn't you get at least a small portion of it for me? Leftover is a nectar" (Ibid. 3). Further, the Dalit could not stay long at one place. They had to move from place to place. It is seen in Masamai's life. She has to move from place to place for the sake of survival.

#### Utter Poverty, Perpetual Hunger, Starvation and Untouchability:

The portrayal of Dalits in the present autobiography shows their utter poverty. Due to lack of earning sources, The Dalits faced utter poverty, perpetual starvation and hunger. Most of the time, they had to beg for the stale or leftover food in the localities of high caste Hindus. However, the food collected by begging was not sufficient for their families. The Dalit women used to share begged food to the children and for themselves they used to drink water and went asleep. He had to beg whenever necessary. His grandmother had to tell lies for the sake of getting food from high caste people. The poverty makes them to eat what animals eat when there is no way to have food. Sharankumar's sister Vani is seen eating banana peel to satisfy her hunger. Santamai is seen picking up lumps of dung and on the way to home washed the dung in the river water, collecting only the clean grains. She then dried them in the sun and ground the jowar grains and prepared *bhatanis* which had the flavor of dung. This pathetic Dalit life compels to state that it is this rigid system of society, the social structure and culture supporting the caste-hierarchy, dominance and caste-discrimination which has indeed imposed poverty on the Dalits. They have been deliberately thrown to periphery which has almost been entirely mistreated.

#### CONCLUSION:

The present study attempted to explore and analyze the socio-cultural issues reflected in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*. It has pinpointed the origin of Dalit life and how the Dalits have been treated inhumanely by the high caste Hindus by believing irrationally and prejudicially in falsely ascribed emergence of Dalits as Shudras prescribed by the so called Hindu religious scripture *Manusmriti*. Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* reflects suffering of the Dalits due to the Indian rigid social structure, cultural practices and undue exploitation of the dominant castes. It has put forth Indian society based on caste system which raises socio-cultural issues such as the stigma of *Akkarmashi*, the outcaste culture, sexual exploitation of Dalit women, reflection of *Varna* system and prescription of Manu's *Manusmriti*, utter poverty, perpetual hunger, starvation and the evil practice of untouchability.

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