

DEFIANCE AGAINST THE ODDS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S HINDU

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Abstract

Dalit women are awfully susceptible to violence mainly by the people from higher strata. Due to patriarchal status it effectively legitimizes upper caste men's exercise power and force over women from lower strata. Exercise of power to dominate women is explicitly manifested in their attacks on Dalit women. The paper showcases not only the weaker side of the women but it also focuses about the upsurge from the women.

Key words: - Untouchability, Dalit revolution, Dalit literature, gender, patriarchy, domination, societal hegemony, protest, freedom, respectability.

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INTRODUCTION

Before discussing about the major theme that I want to bring to the fore through this paper which is the situation of female character in the select text who belongs from lower caste, it is imperative to discuss in brief about the term Dalit and Dalit literature as it will help us to understand the paper in a better way. The word 'Dalit' symbolizes the pain and sufferings of people from lower caste which is inflicted upon them at the hands of upper caste people. Broadly speaking, the word 'Dalit' is a political term coined by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar which symbolizes the relatively new identity of a group of people who were earlier known as untouchables. Untouchability is the result of casteist society which differentiates people on the basis of their birth and religion. Untouchability is a hurtful social practice which was abolished when the Indian Constitution came into effect in 1950. In spite of its legal abolition, untouchability continues to be practiced in different forms and degrees in almost all parts of India even today. Thus, the term Dalit clearly suggests that caste as a social system is still prevalent in India. Dalits are struggling hard to reclaim their human dignity and self-respect.

The etymology of the term 'Dalit' can be traced to the root word 'dal' in Sanskrit, which means to crack, split, be broken or torn. It was Jotibarao Phule, one of the pioneers of the non-brahmin movement in Maharashtra, who was supposed to have used the term 'Dalit' to describe the condition of the outcastes and untouchables as oppressed and exploited who were not treated well by upper caste people. After Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Dalit movement used this term in his Marathi speeches and in his writings. Ambedkar took the fight one step further by making it a national issue and dedicated his entire life to fighting against it. Whenever and wherever he smelt exploitation, he raised his voice against it.

Ambedkar rejected the claims made by brahmins that the caste system was divinely sanctified by the gods. Instead, he offered new interpretations of these Hindu texts based on historical evidence. Ambedkar in his famous book, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchable?* (1948), states that the untouchables at one point of time belonged to Kshatriya communities. Since they carried out menial and manual labor, they were looked down upon by the brahmins, and were relegated to the margins and became the untouchables. Thus, Ambedkar's life-long struggle was to fight against caste system to build an egalitarian Indian society.

With the rise of Dalit movements across the country and the emergence of Dalit literature, Dalits started to protest against all the oppressions that they were facing. They became more organized and came together to demand their rightful place in Indian society. An early example of this was seen in Maharashtra when Dalit activists and writers came together in 1972 to launch a united Dalit movement famously known as the Dalit Panther movement. J.V. Pawar, Namdepo Dhasal and Raja Dhale were the founder-members of the Dalit Panthers. With the formation of Dalit Panthers the term 'Dalit' became commonly used in the public sphere, first in Maharashtra and later all over the India. Babasaheb has a definite life-affirming and realistic position on literature. Babasaheb believed that literature should not only promote social and human progress, but also foster values. A literature that supports inequality is not only unacceptable to him, in his view; there must be a mass movement against such literature. He took the position that literature must enhance equality and destroy inequality.

Dalit literature conferences began to be held from 2 March 1958. Dalit literature has evolved through events such as Buddhist literature conferences, Dalit theatre conferences, Dalit literature conferences, Asmitadarsh festivals and many such more programs. Since the 1970s number of writers in the different genres from Dalit communities in various Indian states have been producing literary works which is enlightening and awakening people belonging from all the communities. These are broad themes which accommodate many other thematic categories Dalit writers are concerned with.

SPEAKING ABOUT THE TEXT

The novel which I have selected for the study incorporates the aforementioned themes and the same have been dealt lucidly. Sharankumar Limbale's *Hindu* reflects modern conflicts in India. *Hindu* (2010), is set in a village in Maharashtra where Panchayat elections are due. Influenced by the new Ambedkarite jalsa, Tatyia Kamble portrays the Dalits' role in their own enslavement. Dalits stand up for their self-respect and turn to political participation. Under the rules of reservation of seats in politics, the post of the village sarpanch falls to their share, and a Dalit candidate is successfully fielded by his upper caste employers, leaving the upper castes frustrated and angry. What happens to caste relations, the new political consensus that emerges slowly, if violently, are delineated perceptively.

Hindu doesn't deal about protagonist's past memories, family conflict, growing-up pains, romance that are the usual plotting devices of a novel. *Hindu's* propelling event is the murder of a Dalit activist, Taty Kamble by a group of higher caste villagers because had become too big for his boots in their eyes and through his Ambedkarite theater was threatening the established order by inciting his caste members, Mahars to convert.

Marathi Dalit writer, Sharankumar Limbale, in his novel, *Hindu*, presents a powerful portrayal of India's social upheavals during the last decade and a half from a Dalit perspective. Based on Dalit and savarna conflict in a village in Maharashtra, *Hindu* takes a measure of India's success and failures as a Nation in terms of the situation of Dalits in contemporary India. The paper's main issue is portrayal and depiction of the pathetic situation endured by women. They had to face a lot of pain and trauma due to the turn of fateful event which barged into their village because of devious means of some villagers.

In the novel we observe century old practice of suppressing women's voice through different oppressive ways. As discussed earlier, Dalit women are doubly marginalized and are forced to lead their lives in great pain and trauma which are inflicted on them due to their gender and then due to their belongingness from a lower caste. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) depicts the way Dalit women are forced to endure atrocities because of the conventional principles of Hinduism. She asserts

"The entire community had sunk deep in the mire of such dreadful superstitions. The upper castes had never allowed this lowly caste of ours to acquire knowledge. Generations after generations, our people rotted and perished by following such a superstitious way of life. Yet, we kept believing in your Hindu religion and serving you faithfully" (37)

In the text *Hindu*, the writer of the respective works has portrayed the pathetic condition of women in the Indian society. There are numerous instances in the text which tell us the dismal condition of women. Female protagonists of the text, that is, Sonali suffers at the hand of patriarchal society thus depicting the condition of women and emphasizing the 'Dalitness' of women. According to me Dalits are all those who are relegated, marginalized and pushed to the corners regardless of their social strata and their gender, should be called Dalits. In the below mentioned passages I have portrayed the few incidents from the text where the female protagonist is subjugated and dominated.

Although, Sharankumar Limbale's *Hindu* is based on the murder of Taty Kamble and political fiasco interwoven around it, one cannot ignore the gender oppression depicted in the novel. Sharankumar Limbale lucidly depicts the pathetic condition of women through women characters. *Hindu* not only deals about the murder, political scenario of the village Achalapur, revenge, government machinery etc but it also portrays the position of women in the society. When we see the story through the eyes of Sonali it let us know about the ordeal that a woman has to undergo. Sonali is a sufferer of gender oppression. In the novel readers see her witnessing the massacre from the terrace, seeing her spouse and his associates killing Taty Kamble. Shattered Sonali is ordered by her spouse to clean his blood-stained clothes. Taty Kamble's blood begins to flow on the restroom floor, making her very uncomfortable.

"Rambhau took off the bloodied clothes from Sudhakar's body. Sonali took the clothes in the bathroom and, using a bucket, started to pour water on them. Taty Kamble's blood began to flow like a stream on the bathroom floor. Sonali was overwhelmed with horror." (56)

The incidents in the novel tell us that the woman was not free to move in the village and had to confine themselves in the house. Human Beings' innate nature is to roam free, to think freely and exercise all kinds of comforts which are accessible. On the contrary, it has been observed since ages that women

are not treated like human beings. She has been devoid of freedom and this could be easily traced in the lives of women who reside in the village. Sonali wanted to be free as she was coming from a different background where she was sent to college. After getting married to Prabhakar Kavale her life was put behind the cage. "The bara seemed like a jail to her. Its high walls made her feel claustrophobic. She felt she had been cut off from the world. She remembered Hangman's Hill, the ghosts lurking there." (46).

Another incident which highlights the pathetic condition of women in our society is when Sonali was not allowed to watch the jalsa performed by the Mahars of the village Achalapur. Women are not even allowed to entertain themselves by doing things which they like. We expect them to fulfill all the duties towards our male dominated society but in return are not given consent to exercise their freedom. Through the portrayal of Sonali's character, the author tries to narrate the pain and tribulation that women had to undergo in their life. The following excerpt depicts the above mentioned trauma endured by women in their own backyard.

"Sonali was completely engrossed in the jalsa. Sudhakar was trying to repeat the dialogues he heard. Suddenly, Prabhakar Kavale came up on the roof and burst out angrily at Sonali: 'Watching the Mahars dance! Are you a Mahar too?' Frightened, Sudhakar went down running. Sonali was on the verge of tears. She felt like one of the trapped wild Partridges" (49)

A bird is free only when she is flying without any restrictions. Since time immemorial we have witnessed the life of women who are bound follows the rules of the society without question the same. And if they try to raise their voice against such atrocities they are immobilized at the hands of the society. Their feathers are cut down and are left stranded to lead their lives in utmost pain and horrific conditions. Sharankumar Limbale depicts the same trauma through the portrayal of Sonali's helpless condition when she dared to spread her wings against the set rules of patriarchal system which doesn't allow women to exercise their liberty.

RAISING THE VOICE

In the novel author has tried to depict the courage and resilience of female protagonist amidst oppression and subjugation. Although, Sonali faces a lot of difficulties at her in-laws's house yet she tried to come out of all those by showing true valor and courage.

Sonali has always been dominated and was pushed to corners as depicted in the previous passages. But we could observe that there are numerous instances in the text which tell us that the female protagonist have stood up against the atrocities that were inflicted on her. Sonali was imprisoned inside her in-laws's house. She didn't get the opportunity in that house to exercise her freedom. She was caged like a bird and this often used to shake her up from within. She was in deep love with Rohit and wanted to see him at any cost but could not do so because of the constraints. But one fine day she thought of leaving the house and decided to go and meet Rohit. It is insane on the part of Sonali to do this. As daughter in law of a house, especially in the village, she was not even allowed to step outside the verandah. But her desire to meet Rohit took over the restrictions that were imposed on her. "Sonali went almost insane, pining for Rohit. She found her agony unbearable. She decided to leave home and came out of the bara under the cover of darkness. She was out on the road. All she wanted was to meet Rohit just once." (84).

Sonali, having come from the city, used to live freely without being interfered with and questioned. After coming to the village Achalapur her life came to a complete halt. And the things got worse when her husband killed a dalit and was put behind the bars. Sonali was feeling disgusted as she realized that she is being left alone. And her love towards Rohit did not let her live peacefully. She was frightened about her future in the absence of her husband and thought of breaking the set norms of a village by going against it.

"What will I do if Prabhakar is sentenced? What am I to do until he comes out of jail? Sonali asked. Read books, knit sweaters, Parvatibai said. I can't bear it, I can't. I can't just sit here waiting for him until he is acquitted or comes back after serving his sentence, Sonali said. So what do you intend to do? Rambhau asked. I will do whatever I feel like, Sonali responded. Will you go to Maharwada? Yes, I will. (86)

In the novel the female protagonist is having a torrid time due to bad relationships with their husbands. In our society wives have to perform duties irrespective of their condition whether bad or good by not raising their voices. They are implicitly on house arrest and are not allowed to do what they want. They are caged like a bird inside the four walls of a house. The pathetic condition of Sonali underlines the dismal condition of Dalit women who are coaxed to have a life where they cannot exercise their own freedom. Sonali wants to move out of a relationship where she foresees that her future is not secure. Above all Sonali wants to spend her life with Rohit whom she loves a lot. This thought of her moving out from the existing relationship requires a lot of courage and fearlessness because our society doesn't allow women to do the same. Sonali is not wrong if she wants to have a secure future and spend life with her beloved Rohit. She is breaking the 'norms' of the society which is not liked by others, especially her in-laws who are frightened of losing their respect in the village.

"If one could not live the way one wants, what was the use of this life? Sonali's heart revolted. She went up to the roof with the intention of jumping from it. She looked at the ground below, and, for a moment, was frightened of death. Once again she hardened her resolve and lifted her hands to dissolve herself in eternity. At that very moment it seemed she could hear Rohit declaring his love for her. ... She wanted to jump down the roof and run to put her arms around Rohit". (120)

CONCLUSION

It is very heartening to learn that Dalit women are trying to make their own mark in the male dominated society. We could read and observe that gradually the scenario for the women is changing. The above mentioned instances vividly inform us about the courage and boldness that Dalit women are showcasing. I am not stating that condition has improved drastically for the women from lower strata but we cannot disagree as well that situation has not improved for the same. Texts like these foregrounds not only the pathetic condition of the women but it also underlines the brave steps taken by a women especially from those women who belongs from the lowest rung of the ladder.

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