

**Delineating Alienation, Hopelessness, and Identity Crisis:
A Study of Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste***

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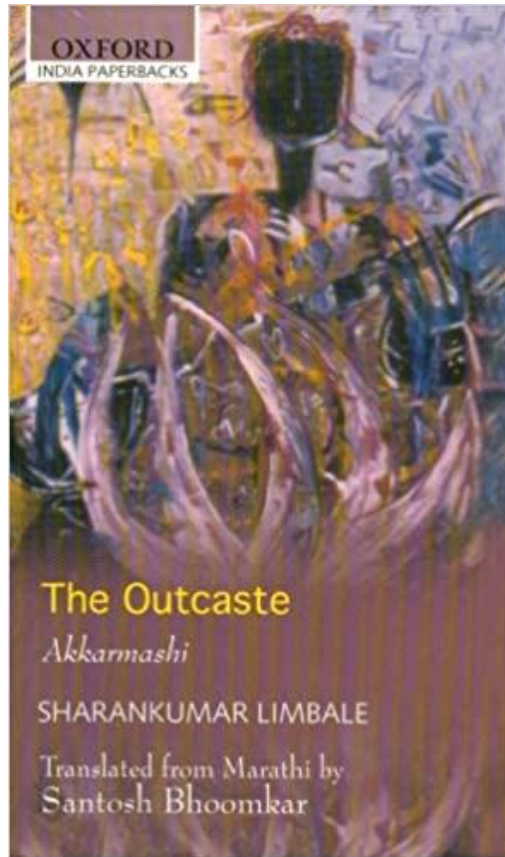
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Abstract

The paper analyses that how the downtrodden turn alienated as a result of the systematic exclusion of ages and how this ostracization results in nothing but hopelessness even after the provision of rights in the constitution in Independent India. It will show that how marginalization

and deprivation lead to a state of impossibility and how a section of the society feels alienated socially, economically, culturally, and emotionally. Besides, the paper focuses on the mental agony an outcaste undergoes throughout life in a search of his true identity.

Keywords: Limbale, *The Outcaste*, Alienation, hopelessness, identity crisis, downtrodden, ostracization, marginalization, deprivation, outcaste.

In his autobiography *The Outcaste*, Limbale presents the experiences of his family. In his childhood, he lived in Maharwada where about one hundred and twenty cottages of Mahars, lower-caste people were there. It was located on the fringe and was the most unhygienic place to live in. The village was characterized by deprivation, filthiness, and all sort of scarcity. They used to do the traditionally assigned roles like scavenging, removing the dead animals of the high-caste people, sweeping the village streets, all sorts of labour work, and begging alms. If they did not earn during the day used to sleep without eating in the night. Limbale's mother was married to Ithal Kamble who was a poor grass mower. She got divorced after having two children, thereafter; she had an adulterous affair with Hanmanta Patil, an upper-caste man who was the father of Limbale. His mother had seven children from another Patil named Kaka. When his mother Masamai got busy with her other children, Limbale was taken care of by Masamai mother Santamai in the Maharwada itself. Both his mother and grandmother ran separate liquor businesses to run their families. During school life, Limbale has discriminatory experiences and issues like his father's registration on the certificates. His grandfather does work hard as a porter at the local bus stand. Limbale experiences issues in the case of his wedding as they were not of pure blood.

The novelist depicts that the stigmatic practice of untouchability results in the alienation and isolation of the downtrodden in society. Not allowing lower-caste students to play games with the high-caste students in the school and assigning tasks like sweeping the floor and smearing the floor with cow dung only to the students of lower caste contributes to the feelings of inferiority. The statement of Shobhi, an upper-caste girl, "Mahars have become bold these days. They now dare to walk straight up to you. Can you see I am carrying drinking water? You touch will make it impure" (70). These words are addressed to lower caste boys Limbale and his friend Prashya. They turn revengeful thereafter and ask justification like why the river and crops get polluted on your touch. Whatsoever be the reasons, such arguments widen the ditch between the castes in this respect. Sharing another instance of caste-based discrimination, Limbale writes:

There was a small tea shop in our village owned by Shivram, where a separate cup and sauce were kept for Mahars and Mangs. I had seen the cups and saucer many times. We also had to move aside to make way for high-caste persons while passing on the road.

Everywhere we were condemned. Our houses were in places that other villagers used as latrines. We felt no affection for our village. Instead, we were scared and tense. Our caste had been thrust upon us even before we were born. (76)

Old people of the lower castes used to drink tea from that cup and saucer without any protest. Limbale says, “Rambaap used to drink water as well as 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 hands of the owner because for a Mahar or Mang to hand money directly to anyone was a sin” (76). Once Limbale and his friend Prashya complains in the police station against this practice as it is against the self-esteem of the downtrodden, Rambaap expresses that no one will come to his shop if serves in the same cups. In a way, the readers get acquainted with the mindsets of the people. When they reach home everyone in the village had known about the incident already and both of them get reprimanded for lodging a complaint against Rambaap. The elders convince them to live as per the norms of centuries. In this way, the rebels are turned towards isolation and the gap between the two keeps on increasing. Prohibition of lower-caste people from fetching water from the wells of upper-caste people that have been dug up by the lower-caster people itself (81) and getting refusals in getting a rented home as an employee in Latur reflect the mindsets of the people in society that develops a sense of alienation amongst the victims in society.

Thereafter, the novelist throws light on the role of abject poverty contributing to a state of alienation amongst the poor and isolating the economically sound people widening the chasm in society. During the picnic Limbale’s and other friends pining for the leftover food of the upper caste people (3), Masamai’s considering the leftover as nectar (3), Limbale’s bearing patched rags up to seventh standard (6), Santamai’s drying the kheer given by wedding homes for the future use (9), Santamai’s separating out the grains from the cow dung and eating *bhakarīs* of that flour (11), Limbale’s having bath in the river without soap, and scrubbing his body with the stone (16), Limbale’s eating banana skin (22), Ithal Lamble’s extremely weak health due to malnutrition (35), Gangoobai’s use of baby Limbale for begging (37), absence of money to serve even a cup of tea to the guest (44), Limbale using the used tea powder of the tea stall owner to make black tea for the family (45), and wearing used clothes after alteration by Limbale and his friend Mallya for college (83) are some of the examples that show their extremely poor economic conditions which leaves ineffaceable marks on their heart and mind as well. One more scene Limbale portrays in this respect when he writes:

Starvation was written in our lot from the moment of our birth. Most of the time all my sisters went to sleep without eating anything. Nobody woke them up for dinner, because there was nothing to eat. I at least ate something. Mother gulped only water. Dada

satisfied his hunger only by smoking bidies. At the sight of my sisters who had gone to sleep hungry, I lost my appetite and couldn't sleep. I felt like giving a portion of my food to my sisters. (21)

Besides the hunger compels the helpless people to take up different sort of ways for their survival that itself leads towards emotional dissociation from society. Masamai and Santamai start their separate liquor business to run their families. Limbale happens to witness many drunkards holding his mother who used to resist but customers being sources of income feel compelled to tolerate and periodical police raids create ironic situations for these women who attempt to provide food to their families. If we analyse the character of Masamai who has adulterous affairs with the men of upper-caste, no one can say that she does it for the sake of her physical hunger. Yes, hunger is the reason for accepting such men but it was the hunger of her stomach that compels her to do so. Hanmanta Patil diplomatically divorces Masamai from her husband, Ithal Kamble as he cherishes her beauty. Masamai was also helpless as Kamble was not able to provide two times meal a day and he was a bond labourer of Hanmanta Patil who brought Kamble to a juncture of divorce. Masamai's parents used to leave the stock of ration for her at Kamble's home. Thereafter, Masamai accepts Kaka Patil as her keeper and has seven children from her. She does it purely for surviving her family and to help her parents as Limbale writes:

Kaka never felt at home in our house. Mother was scared of Kaka, because she had given birth to six daughters, never a son. At least she had one. When she did have one she began to quarrel with Kaka, demanding some share of his property for the son. Kaka began avoiding her. Mother would demand, 'What would happen to my son after you die? Give me some share in your property. It is because of you I have borne seven children'. (56)

Hierarchical segregation of the natural resources reflects the domination of the powerful and the upper-caste people exploiting the weaker sections of society results in alienation of such people. After school, Limbale used to go to the river for swimming, he says:

The high-caste villagers filled their water pots and their women washed their clothes upstream. Downstream the kumbies and shepherds collected water in their vessels and carried them off. They also washed their clothes and bathed. Those who looked after grazing cattle washed their buffaloes and bathed themselves. The water at the lowest end was meant for us. (7)

The lower-caste people were not considered as human beings in this hierarchical system controlled by the upper-caste people, and even the animals of upper ones were considered

superior to the lower-caste people. They were not allowed to fetch water from the wells of the upper-caste people and here in the river, they were forced to take the filthy and polluted water by washing clothes and animals to their homes. All this contributes to a sense of inferiority amongst the lower-caste people and their social norms make them helpless, and hopeless resulting in their alienation and isolation.

Search for identity remains the most significant part of *The Outcaste*. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines identity as the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand someone or something (771). Limbale goes through tormenting experiences since his childhood as the name of his father becomes a question for him. When the teacher decides to enrol Limbale name in the register after attending regular classes for someday, he asks his father's name which Limbale did not know. Finally, the teacher registers Hanmanta Patil as his father in the school record. As soon as Hanmanta Patil who is Limbale's biological father comes to know about this, he reaches school with five rowdies along with his relatives and meets the headmaster and tries to bribe the headmaster with hundred rupees when a teacher's salary was seventy rupees a month, after being refused, he threatens the headmaster with a gun, but the headmaster does not give up and says clearly, "The mother of the boy will say who the father is, and I will register only that name in the record" (45). In this way, all attempts of Hanmanta Limbale prove futile and the credit for identifying officially Limbale's father goes to Bhosle, the headmaster of the school. After the identification of the father, the question of his identity becomes more complex for Limbale. Hanmanta Limbale has left his mother and she lives in the village with her mother and later stays separate from her mother. Limbale mostly lives with Santamai, his grandmother, and keep visiting his mother also or can say that he lives simultaneously with both. Kaka, her recent keeper keeps on visiting her and has seven children from her. Limbale gets perplexed in comprehending the web of relationships. He thinks his father is a Patil or belongs to upper-caste whereas his mother is a Mahar, a lower-caste woman, what would be his caste? If the offspring carries the heritage or identity of a father, then he ought to be an upper-caster person but the father does not acknowledge him emotionally, socially, and economically as well and he is compelled to live with his mother, even the mother has also increased her responsibility, therefore, grandparents take care of him. He gets confused that his grandmother is a Mahar whereas his grandfather is a Muslim, so what would be his religion? In this way, the questions of caste and religion remain unanswered to him, and he continues his quest. Limbale took admission in the eighth standard in the neighbouring village's school. Students were supposed to apply for the free ship when they enter high school. The application form was supposed to be signed by the parents and by the sarpanch [panchayat head]. After naming his mother as his guardian he goes to the sarpanch for signature with some other students. The sarpanch signs everyone's form but refuses to sign Limbale's. In the meantime, Bhosale, the teacher arrives there and by simplifying the case, he requests the Sarpanch to sign

the form. But he does not approve Masamai Hanmanta Limbale. Thereafter, the teacher proposes the name of Sanatamai which is also gets refused as he knew that she lives with a Muslim whom Limbale calls dada. Limbale writes, “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 father. I had neither a father’s name, nor any religion nor a caste. I had not inherited identity at all” (59). The sarpanch signs the form at Bhosale’s insistence. While submitting the form the next day, the teacher asks the name of his father whom he replies in anger that his father is no more. To overcome his confusion, Limbale used to ask his mother about his father: “What was his name? Where did he live? What did he do? Why didn’t he come to me? What was the relationship with Kaka? What was the relationship between Kaka and my mother? Who was Nagi and Nirmi’s father? What is my relationship with Nagi and Nirmi? And so on” (60). Limbale becomes more inquisitive about his relationship with the children born to his mother.

The above analysis shows the crucial role of the practice of discrimination based on caste and starvation-like conditions of the lower-caste people resulting in their agony, pain and sufferings contributing to the feelings of alienation and hopelessness. The upper-caste people enjoy a state of blissful solitude while performing certain socio-cultural norms in society. The circumstances and priorities of the characters widen the chasm between the upper-caste and lower-caste people. The question of Limbale’s identity psychologically haunts him tremendously and remains unanswered. He finds himself dangling in-between like a pendulum as experiences and realization of neither here nor there dominates his mind and soul.

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