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### Bold Assertion of Dalit's Rights in the Poem "White Paper" by Sharankumar Limbale

Abstract:

This paper tries to fathom the pain of being rejected and outcast by Dalits in the society which is equally belongs to them. Interestingly Dalits are not foreigner in the Hindu society. At the same time, they have not done any harm to any upper cast in India. Still they met with utmost hatred and disrespect by other members of the society. One cannot understand this reality with one's rational mind. In this paper, we shall try to realise what exactly they want from us.

Keywords: Dalit, Subaltern, Dalit Consciousnesses, Catharsis.

Sharankumar Limbale (शरणाकुमार लिंबाळे) is a Marathi writer, poet and literary critic. He was born on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1956. He has penned more than 40 books, but is best known for his autobiographical novel *Akkarmashi*. *Akkarmashi* is translated in several other Indian languages and in English. The English translation is published by the Oxford University Press with the title *The Outcaste*. His critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* (2004) is considered amongst the most important works on Dalit literature.

The poem "White Paper" appeared in 1992 as a part of an anthology *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Marathi Dalit Literature* by Arjun Dangle. It was originally written in Marathi by Sharankumar Limbale and later translated in English by Priya Adarkar. The poem like all other Dalit literature is not just an aesthetic pleasure but also a social document. It is a reflective poem which forces us to ponder on that part of the India which belongs to those wretched people whom we call Dalit.

The term 'Dalit' is basically taken from Sanskrit word '*Dal*' which means crushed. Dalit includes Harijans, neo-Budhists, Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses, neomadic and criminal tribes. Thus, the term denotes those unfortunate people in Indian social and cast structure who are denied even the basic rights of humanity. Whereas Dalit literature is precisely that literature "which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits" (Limbale 30). Dalit literature protests against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. It has not been recognised as a literature till 1970 but now its name is being heard all around the world.

This poem stands apart by its revolutionary quality of bold assertion of Dalit's rights. Most of the time, Dalits only regret on their plight, make plea for their rights; but never waged war against their oppressive society. The title of the poem "White Paper" is apt to its content. White paper is used in two main spheres: government and business-to-business marketing. A white paper is "an authoritative report or guide helping readers to understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision" ([WWW.Google.Co.in, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ White\\_paper>](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_paper)). Thus, the title here denotes that it is like an authoritative document which helps the readers to understand the problems of Dalit, at the same time offering a solution. It is full of 'Dalit consciousnesses.' Dalit consciousness is basically "the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognising the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness" (Limbale 32). It makes Dalits conscious of their subaltern status. It is sort of catharsis which is the main quality of Dalit literature.

In the poem Sharankumar Limbale expressed his deep felt desire to be treated as a human being. He rejected all the pleasures and temptations of this physical world. The poem suggests the horrible and pathetic condition of Dalit people. For them the other gratifications of body are unthinkable because they are deprived even from the very basic rights of life.

In the first stanza he rejects all the physical, material, religious and sensual comforts of life that are available to high cast people for centuries and in return just asks for his basic human rights, which are essential for any human being for their existence. He says he desires for nothing. He does not want sun or moon from sky symbolising high ambitions of life. In the second line he discards material wealth of the world—the land, farm, big houses and mansions. After rejecting high ambition and material wealth in life he rejects religious and

sensual comforts. “His entire life he had watched religion tear people and families apart, and he wanted no part of it” ([WWW.Google.Com, <http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2005/BOO KREV.htm>](http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2005/BOO_KREV.htm)). He cast off all the high status of high cast, superior sects and religion, at the same time he rejects lust by rejecting woman in his life. Then he finally expresses his earnest desire to be treated as a human being. He wants nothing but only his status as a human being.

Here what is so remarkable is the deepest yearning of a man who wants nothing from life but only wants to be treated as a human being. The intensity with which this simple desire is expressed is a candid proof of that heinous deprivation which Dalits face in their day-to-day life, which is beyond words. For them dreaming big is out of question because it is considered sin for them. Especially when they are not even considered as a human. Because if they will start dreaming than they will start asking for their human rights which are denied to them under high cast people’s craft.

The first stanza was in a form of yearning while the next stanza was in the form of warning or cautionary. He made clear that he wants his rights not as a beggar but as a rightful recipient. He says that each breath from his lungs is proclaiming violently for his rights. His voice is echoing everywhere; in their texts, tradition, hell and heaven. Under this fear, the upper cast people are trying their best to silence them. They are destroying their homes, beating them, plundering them. Thus, they are trying their best to break them emotionally. But now he has learnt how to make his words immortal and perpetual. Now he has started expressing himself through writing and his words have become eternal like a sun.

Limbale says that his rights are in the nature of contagious disease, which will soon spread from city to city, village to village, man to man. Dalits are now well aware of their rights. They have reached their awakened state. This is an incendiary situation. They will not get satisfied less than their rights. Does not matter how high-handedly they were silenced or suppressed by high cast people? He is all ready to replace the old system. He says he will uproot the scripture like railway tracks, burn the lawless laws that discriminate against them. In the closing line he compares his rights to rising sun. He challenges high cast people that how they will deny the power of this sun.

The structural device that is used in this poem is illustrative. Tone is optimistic which asserts the better equitable world for Dalits. The feeling of the poem is genuine and sincere. Indeed the whole Dalit literature is genuine and revolutionary. Language is simple devoid of

any ornamentation, euphuism, or figures of speech; which are the natural consequences of translation.

The message that Limbale wants to convey is that—we cannot deprive people from their just rights on the bases of cast, class or colour. Poem has a distinct aesthetic, which lies in its genuine feeling. It is in an autobiographical mode, which is a common feature of all Dalit literature. Actually the whole Dalit literature is written in a cathartic mode. It is nothing but the outpouring of Dalit people's deep sufferings suppressed thoughts and painful experiences. Dalits have been the most degraded, downtrodden, exploited and least educated in our society. They had been subjugated and marginalized by high caste people through three thousand years of history. Though the practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by constitution of India in 1950, but it is still in practice. Despite all the laws and constitutional rights, people in general do not have genuine respect for them.

Limbale is a man, who is 'Dalit among Dalits.' He is a victim of double jeopardy. First, he is Dalit and secondly, he is an illegitimate child. He himself said in his autobiographical novel *Akkarmashi* that he was treated as someone inferior in his own cast because of his illegitimate birth. *Akkarmashi* works as the mouthpiece of the community, it depicts their togetherness in triumphs and tribulations as "the self belongs to the people and people find a voice in the self" (Butterfield 3). "*Akkarmashi* in Marathi means eleven it needs another one to complete itself, to become twelve, a dozen which signifies completeness" ([WWW.Google.Com](http://WWW.Google.Com), <[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com) *The Criterion An International Journal in English* ISSN 0976-8165 Vol. III. Issue. IV 2December2012>). Limbale suffered from this trauma of being outcasted throughout his life, which became the depiction of all Dalit's community simultaneously and is reflected in all his work.

Limbale's autobiography is a good quick read that would interest any students taking a course on modern India. It is an objective work that shows little bitterness or remorse. The author includes an excellent introduction that introduces the caste system to the Western reader. We can experience the humiliation of the Dalit community at the hands of an unthinking privileged class and the hopelessness of the situation of people born in lower castes. ([WWW.Google.Com](http://WWW.Google.Com), <<http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2005/BOOKREV.htm>>).

This distinct position of writer gave him a talent of distinct expression in his writing. “White Paper” is one of such expression, where a man wants to be treated as a man first anything else afterwards.

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