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Interrogating Casteism: An Althusserian Reading of Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi The Outcaste*

Ashly Thomas

Lecturer

PG Department of English(SF)

Alphonsa College, Pala

Kottayam, Kerala

Akkarmashi, the autobiographical work of Marathi writer Sharankumar Limbale, is a poignant narration of the anguish of his own status as an outcaste and of the Dalit community in general, under the yoke of caste hierarchy prevalent in India for centuries. This study is an enquiry into the ingrained status of the caste system within the Indian society, based on the theoretical framework of Louis Althusser. The study follows the Althusserian premises like Ideology, RSA, ISA, Interpellation, Over determination, Social Formation, Subject, Supersession, and Support. Thus the attempt is to reveal the true colour of the seemingly natural and pre ordained state of the caste, by laying bare the way it is constructed, which accounts for its traces remaining within the Indian psyche.

Introduction:

Man's impression of his world, as a pre-ordained one, underwent a sea change through his gradual initiation into the world of structures. Then on, he started to question everything earlier thought to be of essential nature. And this quest led to the rupture of several notions and standpoints that earlier acted as the foundation of human life. From that juncture, he realized the constructed state of everything around him, even of his very existence. The caste system prevalent in India is one such belief system of Indian society. This article entitled "Interrogating Casteism: An Althusserian Reading of Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi The Outcaste*" is an attempt to trace the path of construction of the caste system deep rooted in Indian social order, with the support of Althusserian concepts, which played a decisive role in unraveling the basic rudiments of society as a construct.

Louis Pierre Althusser was one of the most influential Marxist philosophers of the 20th Century. There are scores of coinages that he contributed to the world of philosophy which had the effect of changing the outlook of the human thought. Among them, the terms like Ideology, Repressive State Apparatus, Ideological State Apparatus, Interpellation, Over determination, Social Formation, Subject, Supersession, Support etc. For Althusser, "Ideology is the 'lived' relation between men and their world, or a reflected form of this unconscious relation"(FM 233). It recruits individuals and transforms them into subjects by persuading them to occupy a subject position it has prepared for them.

State Apparatuses render hand for Ideology to work. They are Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). RSA is singular, works by violence and exists in the public domain, while ISA is plural, functions primarily by ideology though may resort to repression as a secondary means and it exists in the private domain. Among them, ISA proves to be more effective. It includes various branches-Religious, Educational, Family, Legal, Political, Cultural etc. Interpellation is the non coercive process by which a subject is called upon by a particular social formation to misrecognize themselves as a subject and thereby forget that they are constituted by

society rather than constitutive of society. 'The existence of ideology and the 'hailing' or interpellation of individuals as subjects is one and the same' (Althusser, *FM* 250).

Overdetermination means that, every situation has more than one determining factors. It is a situation where multiple, often opposed forces are active at once in any political situation, without falling into an overly simple idea of these forces, being simply contradictory. Social formation is the structuralist conception of social life according to which social relations as such, determine what happens within the societies. Here, a complex of concrete economic, political, and ideological relations are bound together and given their particular character in which the role of economy is determinant. Subject is an individual who is believed to be the independent origin of his own thoughts, actions and emotions. But in reality, it is the ideological social relations that impose a form of a subject on every individual agent. The individual is 'always already' subject, even before he is born and as such, always already enmeshed in the practices and rituals of ideological recognition.

Supersession arises from the realization that our recognition as a subject only gives us the 'consciousness', not the knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition. It can be defined as the process of historical development by the destruction of an old historically determined situation, at a higher level in a new historically determined situation. Support is a term developed from the insight of history. The biological men are only the supports or bearers of the guises assigned to them by the structure of relations in the social formation. The real protagonists of history are the social relations of production, political struggle and ideology. These ideas can be clearly proved on the basis of caste system prevalent in India, the evidence of which can be traced from Dalit literature.

Dalit literature can be defined as writings about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness. Dalit Literature, according to Limbale, is "that literature which artistically portray the sorrows, the tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits, the anguish and the burning cry of untouchables against the injustices of thousand years, collectively expressed" (*Towards An Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* 15). A great deal of Dalit writing is in the genre of life writing. They use biographical or autobiographical form to narrate Dalit experiences, in an authentic way, through minute chronicling of the smallest detail of daily life in a language that is crude, impure and uncivil. They can be described as 'social epiphanies', expressions of a never before mentioned intensity.

Sharankumar Limbale, one of Maharashtra's pre-eminent Dalit writer-activists, is an author of twenty four books including the autobiography *Akkarmashi*, novels *Upalya*, *Hindu*, literary criticism-*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. *Akkarmashi* (*The Outcaste*), Limbale's groundbreaking autobiographical work, was published in 1984 at the age of 26. Originally written in Marathi, it was translated to English in 2003, by Santhosh Bhoomkar. The Marathi word 'Akkarmashi' means 'outcaste', which signifies the condition of the author, a half-caste – born of a high caste Marathi Patil and an untouchable Mahar woman – condemned by both the high caste and the Mahar community. *The Outcaste* is an emotionally violent autobiography of a half caste, growing up in the Mahar community, and the anguish he suffers from not belonging fully to it. Apt to the mental agony and pain of the writer, *The Outcaste* has no chronological direction or structure and instead is a rumble-jumble of Limbale's experiences, at times yoked together by two recurring images- 'rape' and 'hunger'. Time has little meaning, as he flits through birth, childhood and youth in less than a page, leaving the reader gasping for breath. The most memorable element in Limbale's life story is his attitude to women, with a remarkable understanding of their situation.

The Outcaste also serves glimpses of recent history, the Dalit Panther Movement, and the troubles during the renaming of the Marathwada University as Babasaheb Ambedkar University. In its exploration of the reservation policy, of men masquerading as members of higher castes, the book raises a series of questions, for which there are no ready answers.

This study is an attempt to unfold the creation of caste system with reference to the Althusserian notions described earlier. The exploration is done in three sections, “Demystifying Destiny”, “Subject / subject”, “The Negation of Negation”. The first section deals with the operation of Ideology in the formation of caste hierarchy, effectively interpellating the subjects with the help of Repressive State Apparatus and different Ideological State Apparatuses- Religious, Political, Family and Educational. The next section analyses the effects of the ideological interpellation, leading to a particular Social formation, enslaving both the upper and lower castes to the whims and fancies of the dominant ideology, making the life of Dalits miserable. It explores how they turn out to be mere subjects, with special reference to the condition of women. The third section gives an account of the attempts of Supersession on the part of the enlightened Dalits, to bring about a positive change in their social status and living conditions, making use of the creative weapons and ideas available to them with the realization of their role as mere Support. This study will be helpful to read the text in a perfectly new way, throwing light to the dark realities of Dalit life. The present study also renders a better understanding of the condition of the Dalit community and an enlightened outlook on life in general, and on the life of marginalized in particular.

Demystifying Destiny

“Ideology has no outside, it is nothing but outside”- Althusser (*For Marx* 131).

Ideology is a necessary pre-requisite for the creation of a structure, especially in a social situation. The case of creation of caste is not different. Historical evidences state that the caste was a product of Aryan invasion of the Dravidians. In order to ensure their hegemony, the Aryans created a division based on occupation and entitled the menial jobs to the subservient Dravidians. For the guarantee of propagation of the system, they moulded an ideology named *Varna* system on the pretext of religious sanction with ample support of Vedic texts. The Vedic belief holds that the distinction of four *Varnas* dates back to the origin of mankind and that the Brahmins were born from the mouth of *Purusha*, thereby gaining ultimate authority over words, the Kshathriyas from his arms accounting for the supremacy of power, Vaisyas from the thighs thereby entrusted with business and Sudras from the feet destined to be the servants of all others. The core of Sudra or Dalit materiality is untouchability. This ideological stance provided the ground for the caste hierarchy as we see today. These ideas were further perpetuated through texts like *Purusha sukta* and *Manusmriti*. An addition of *Karma* theory also supported the argument by propagating the idea that one is born into a particular caste according to his Karma in his previous birth and the only way for better life in the next birth was to conform to the rules with utmost obedience and without any resistance. The mixing of caste, *Varna Samkara* was considered the highest crime because it had the potential to threaten the very existence of caste system.

The lives of India’s ‘lowest’ citizens are completely controlled by the society around them, and the caste acts as a powerful tool for social segregation and the caste identity is the occasion only for victimization. The manifestations of the caste system can be seen to pervade all walks of life including heredity, marriage restrictions, profession, dietary rules, and hierarchy. That is why Limbale says, “The caste of a Hindu Indian

determines everything about his life-dress, marriage and even food”(TADL 25). The stratification was effectively utilized by the upper caste, for not including Dalits into the mainstream of society. This accounts for the Althusserian argument “bourgeoisie ideology dominates other ideologies” (PSPS 30). Traditional Indian society did not allow the low caste people to realize their ‘self’, as their self identity was a threat to the smooth functioning of social, political and religious institutions. So, they created obstacles in the path of self thereby deviated them from positive growth. Swami Vivekananda therefore observes caste “as a crystallized social institution, which fills the atmosphere of India with stink” (qtd in Panikkar 16).

The autobiography under discussion, *Akkarmashi* can be considered as the chronicle of millions who suffered under this chain for centuries. The protagonist Sharan bears the stigmata of the horrible reaction of the society to those who tread beyond its rules. Limbale was tortured by the accident of birth. The very title ‘Akkarmashi’ itself points to the identity crisis of the author, as he was an offspring born out of *Varna samkara*, a socially unacceptable relationship. His mother Masamai, who belonged to Mahar community, had him out of the wedlock with the Patil (chief) of a village Baslegaon, Hanmantha Limbale who belonged to the high caste Maratha community. The birth itself turned out to be a stigma. That is why he says “my first breath must have threatened the morality of the world” (36). Since his father was not a Mahar by caste, Mahar people viewed him as a bastard, half-caste (akkarmashi) and as his mother belonged to Mahar community, he was an untouchable for the high caste village people. Thus he became unacceptable, alien to all. He suffered not only through caste system, but also through the pain of not even being allowed into the caste system. The lack of inherited identity became his real identity.

The perpetuation of caste was effected through both the State Apparatuses- Repressive as well as Ideological. Repressive measures included different kinds of inhuman torture for those who tried to cross the caste borders and rules even unknowingly. These callous methods were indeed aimed at the unquestionable and uninterrupted continuation of the caste hierarchy. Later, even when the ideological counterpart took up the task, the repressive forces provided required support on its part. Limbale gives evidence to this from his account when he says:

Whenever an animal in the village died, the villagers grew annoyed. They considered the Maharwada responsible for it. They tied us to a pole and beat us like animals. They accused us of having poisoned the animal. Our women and children cried and shrieked. All the men in the Maharwada were badly beaten. The village ostracized the Maharwada for a few days. Dalit women were badly insulted. Some farmers even harassed them sexually, pulled them into the crop, and raped them. Such humiliation was agonizing. (78)

However, Repressive State Apparatus alone proved unable for the continuation of Brahmanic hegemony as it had to face strong resistance. So they devised a new method – Ideological State Apparatus, which effectively enfolded the Dalits within its clutches. The advantage of ISA was that it was able to cajole the Dalits to submission by seemingly providing space for them within it. Althusser elucidates this idea in his work *Lenin and Philosophy*: “Each mass ejected out *en route* is provided with the ideology that suits the role it has to fulfill in the society: the role of the exploited, the role of the agent of exploitation, of the agent of repression, or of the professional ideologist” (147). ISA works with the help of its several components, namely religious, familial, political, educational etc. which together compose the mindset of the subject to follow the ideological planning of the dominant class.

Among the components, Religious ISA played the most significant role in the promulgation of this dominant ideology. For India, religion was the part and parcel of its social being. Caste was even an instrument of unity for the upper caste. “The untouchables formed the glue of the Hindu order although they were despised and marginalized, because the principle of untouchability provided the single point of unification for the touchable but otherwise fragmented Hindu caste” (Bhagavan and Feldhaus 89). Theories of *Varnashram* and *Karma* together governed the social psyche enticing it to blindly follow the norms. The *Varna* system created a powerful symbolism, rationale and mythology of its own, while *Karma* theory dissuaded the untouchables from undertaking any revolts against their oppressors, making them believe that if they performed the prescribed duties, which were ordained by Providence, they would be born into a higher caste group in their next birth. Limbale gives account of the effect of religion on their lives. He says, “My tongue itself is circumscribed by Manu’s innumerable laws” (90). These laws include denial of their entry into the temples-which would lead to the pollution of the premises-, various superstitious practices like Devadasi system, black magic, exorcism, the practice of the village head (Patil) having a woman from Dalit caste as his whore, the unfailing belief in the power of Fate in determining one’s life etc. Even, they had to worship Gods with names different from those used by the uppercaste, though they too were part of the same Hindu religion. For them, Krishna was Kandhoba and other Goddesses were called Ambabai, Laxmi, and Yallamma. They were forced to have inauspicious names instead of God names as adopted by the uppercaste.

Another major ISA at work was Family. In fact, the seeds of Casteism were sown in the young minds by the family itself. For Dalits, the family atmosphere and the elder members trained them in such a way as to accept the tyrannies of caste ungrudgingly. It became a firm ground of indoctrination and socialization to accept caste as a norm. In the case of our protagonist, whenever he tried to protest against any inhuman treatment inflicted on them by the uppercaste, his grandmother Santamai and mother Masamai made him accept that it was their destiny. Moreover, he became aware for the first time, of his status of being an outcaste, through his experiences from his family itself. His father lived in a mansion, mother in a hut and he on streets. His father always tried to avoid him, and he could not acknowledge Sharan as his offspring. This made Limbale to call his autobiography “the chronicle of a fatherless being” (27). He always regretted the destiny to bear the fault for the sin committed by his parents, and of not having pure blood. He was insulted even by his siblings, they being born to his mother from another man. His Dada was a Muslim, grandmother, a Mahar woman. So he could not make out his real identity from his own lineage or family tree. Limbale says:

My father and his forefathers were Lingayat. Therefore I am one too. My mother was a Mahar. My mother’s father and forefathers were Mahars; hence I am also a Mahar. I was brought up by Mahmood, who lives with my grandmother, Santamai. Does this mean I am Muslim as well? How can I be high caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am an untouchable, what about my father who is high caste? I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belong to the village, whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? (39)

In school records, he got the surname ‘Limbale’ after many struggles with his father and the uppercaste community, with the support of his teacher. As he grew older, his love and marriage proposals were broken down, due to his mixed origin. Thus, he tasted the bitterness of his social position within the family itself.

Political ISA is another powerful source of caste discrimination. That is why Jyotirao Phule critiques caste as “the political unconscious of Hindu society” (Kothari 64). Even today, caste is decidedly fostered by a combination of Indian social relations, European driven colonialism and global capitalism. There is a paradox in the political status of the Dalits that, the political identity remains attached to their victimhood and therefore they lay fettered to the very thing they seek to destroy. An attempt to reform hegemonic culture in turn always threatens to assimilate the critique to its own cultural rhetoric. Even the post colonial State is criticized for perpetuating the archaic inequalities and sub species distinctions of caste by incorporating them into its developmental schemes in the name of positive discrimination, though it provided benefits for the Dalits. State agencies often abet rather than ameliorate the lower order’s difficult conditions. Limbale gives evidence to this political dichotomy in his writing, where he describes caste as a tool for the political domination of Brahmanic society. The imposed segregation by the high caste asserts their domination over the lower caste. The high caste presumes sameness, excluding differences. So the lower caste being different was excluded at all levels. The violence meted out to women, by the upper caste was a weapon to inflict political lessons. When Dalits protested, the high caste used retaliatory violence as a weapon to assert power over them, ratifying the Althusserian idea of “violence as a secondary tool of ISA” (LP 145). In fact it was a kind of relation between the colonizers and the colonized, where the colonizer uses oppressive methods to politically subjugate the colonized.

Impurity was forcibly attached to them through the division of labour. They were forced to kill and eat animals, collect leftover food by begging, take up the cleaning jobs, and other menial kind of works. And for the sake of stomach they started to steal, sell liquor and even themselves. Even though they dug the well, they could not take the water. Thus they were denied the share of the fruit of their own sweat and blood. The intensity of political manipulation became manifold, when there started a caste hierarchy within the low caste itself, effectively preventing them from uniting to resist the domination. Thus a miniature of caste system was established within the lower castes, with innumerable sub castes each divided again and again, including three thousand major units rigidly exclusive and claiming superiority over the other alien in the social life. They practiced untouchability among themselves. Limbale gives evidence to this while recalling an incident, when his grandmother scolded him for giving water and mingling with Arjya, a friend who belonged to Mang community which was even below Mahar. He was deeply touched by this and asked:

Different parts of the river bank were reserved for Mahars and Mangs. Even water was its own enemy here. Our minds were divided like separate reservoirs of water. Our minds were not only divided they were also contaminated. (20)

Even economic or political progress, could not support their social up gradation. Even if one was economically forward, politically strengthened and enlightened by education, he could not claim the status of social forwardness. Even though one forgets his caste identity, those around him do not. Limbale became aware of the fact, when he was segregated on different levels by the high caste, after his graduation and even after he got a permanent job, and became economically well-off. Therefore, he was forced to hide his identity even when he was transferred to city, a space which was presumed to be neutral in caste considerations.

Educational ISA also played a significant role in imposing caste distinctions within young minds. More than the lessons taught within the class, the behavioural patterns supported by the system in an informal way were rudimentary in this. It becomes

paradoxical that instead of its function as a tool of enlightenment, education performed its role as an ideological instrument by planting the poisonous seeds of segregation in the tender soil of young minds. Limbale most painfully describes his school days, as those experiences might have stamped an acerbic impression on his tender mind. At school, the Dalit children were kept away from the noble ones; even the games played were different. In the class, they were forced to sit at the entrance, along with others' chappals. The leftover food by the high caste children was like elixir for them. Even they had to take up the cleaning of the school premises, as they belonged to the Mahar caste which was entrusted with the task of cleaning. The high caste children often teased and threw stones at them. At first, Sharan could not accept the logic of humiliation and wondered what sin he had done for being exposed to such experiences. They were considered polluted, even by the teachers. So they had to suffer the injuries and soars caused by the discriminations on their mind and body and were subjected to the atrocities perpetuated by caste Hindus, with a sub animal status imposed on them. Thus, the different forms of ISA were instrumental in effectively interpellating the Dalit subjects within the confines of the dominant ideology.

Interpellation occurred in the sense that, the caste system not only determined the individual's social station on the basis of the group to which he was born, but also differentiated and assigned occupational and economic roles. It thus gave a place to every individual from the highest to the lowest, making them mere subjects. It first tried to erase the untouchable other's existence, and then to contain it. "The caste system not only divided the work, but also the workers" (Kumar 21). According to Althusser, "We fulfill our different roles in the system of production relations, which is a system of exploitation, without arguing or imagining- indeed positively disbelieving- that there could or should be any other system of relations. Within ideology, although apparently free and responsible agents, we are in reality precisely the opposite- we are thinking as we are told to think, and acting as we are told to act, in the interests of the economic dominance of the ruling class. (LP 169). Limbale says that the community considered their situation taken for granted, hardly daring to question it. This can be seen in an incident, when an elder of the community, Rambaap advised Sharan to conform to the tradition by saying: "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 customs?"(76). Thus the Dalit themselves became the subjects to be freely interpellated by the dominant ideology leading to their own ultimate doom.

From the above observations, it follows that the Althusserian concept of Overdetermination is relevant here. It is a situation where multiple forces are active at once in any social situation. As already seen, the economic, political and ideological practices together determine the constitution of caste as a social system as is in the case of Overdetermination. Ambedkar gives evidence to this, when he says, "caste distinction is the result of overlapping social, political and economic antagonisms held in tension through the commandments of Hindu law" (Kothari 56). The victory of the dominant ideology was that it seemed so natural that its secrecy became transformed as the norm, being amply supported by the strong pillars of religion, politics, education and family which together overdetermined and interpellated the society according to the tune of the ideology.

Subject / subject

"Our minds were not only divided, but also contaminated"-Limbale (20).

Subject is an individual who is believed to be the independent origin of his own thoughts, actions and emotions. But in reality, it is the ideological social relations that impose a form of a subject on every individual agent. He is subject in both senses: free Subject with free will, and a mere subject being stripped off all freedom. Thus he becomes the victim of the particular social formation which subject him to the core. For Althusser, “what we conceptualize as society is in fact a social formation in which economic, political and ideological relations bind together, with the economical component as the major defining feature”(FM 34). The creation of caste system also follows this norm. Arjun Dangle makes it clear when he traces the origin of caste by stating “A tradition is born and lives on the strong foundations of thoughts and principles which sustain the tradition. The established class always tries to establish a convenient tradition that does not damage its vested interests and the weaker groups in the society get tied to this tradition”(Kumar 45). The menial nature of work, the exclusion from the forms and institutions of learning, the perverse notion of pollution attached to the occupations in which they were engaged, and the perpetual economic inequality, all of which continued to exist for centuries, made the life of Dalits a relentless story of suffering.

It is beyond doubt that the economic condition provides a firm foundation for a particular social formation. Limbale, through his work *Akkarmashi*, gives special emphasis on the crucial role economic situation plays in the life of Dalits as well as the entire humanity. He explains it with the term ‘hunger’ as the basic driving force behind every action of society raising it from mere physical level to a higher plane:

Hunger is bigger than man. Hunger is vaster (sic) than the seven circles of hell. Hunger is more powerful than man. A single stomach is like the whole earth. Hunger seems no bigger than your open palm, but it can swallow the whole world and let out a belch. There would have been no wars if there was no hunger. If there was no hunger, what would have happened to sin and virtue, heaven and hell, this creation of God? If there was no hunger how a country, its borders, citizens, parliament, constitution come into being? (50)

The economic condition led to the pitiable social condition of Dalits, which in turn forced them to take up menial jobs that accentuated the social stigma. So it has direct connection with the social formation. In fact, caste is all about denying means of production to certain sections in the society. For Dalits, hunger was not merely a physical need; instead it was a struggle for survival. The detestable poverty forced them to live in limitless pain and agony. The entire Maharwada survived on a few Bhakari (bread) and a little water. And this pathetic condition was a social construct, which enabled the high caste to force them to do menial labour and thereby declaring them to be polluted and untouchables. For this pitiful labour they were given meagre wages in the form of leftover food. In order to fill their stomach, they took up the task of removing the carcasses of cattle, which provided them enough meat, even though it subjected them to further humiliation. Deprived of money, land, work, education, they had to depend wholly on the high caste for their survival. This pathetic condition is explained by Limbale’s comparison of Maharwada to “a heap of Jowar grains gathered at the resting place of a corpse” (12), and its representation as the “garbage that the village throws out” (72). He reveals the extend of poverty they were in, with an instance of Santamai, eating the stinking Bhakari made of the grains taken from the cow dung. Limbale observes ‘hunger’ as the sole reason for their pitiable plight. He says:

God endowed man with a stomach. Since then man has been striving to satisfy his stomach. Filling even one stomach proved difficult for him. A

woman becomes a whore and a man becomes a thief. The stomach makes you clean shit; it even makes you eat shit. (8)

As mentioned earlier, social formation is a structuralist conception of social life, according to which social relations as such determine what happens within the societies. This social formation was manifested at different levels.

At the societal level, the Dalits were relegated to the lowest rung of society and were dubbed as anti-social elements. The instances of villagers throwing stones at Maharwada, barbers refusing to shave the head of a Mahar, imposing dreadful rules of untouchability – all can be viewed as the reflection of the Dalit's precarious existence. They were not properly paid for their labour. Their only remuneration was stale food or ragged clothes. They sometimes poisoned the cows of villagers for the sake of food, since they were entrusted with the task of burying the cows. Even women and children turned out to be sellers of liquor and in turn drunkards and wayward. Limbale describes his own experiences as being one among them. The silly fights they undertook between them, was in fact a release for their pent up feelings and stifling miseries which can be evidenced in the quarrels between Masamai, Chandamai, Santamai etc. Some engaged in adulterous relationships in order to satisfy at least one of the cravings of their body, as the gratification of physical hunger was beyond their wish.

Religion provided liberal ideological platform for the social formation, making Dalit's life more severe. With a Subject par excellence, the individual realizes himself as a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject. Their ignorance when combined with the religious zeal, gave rise to several superstitions. For instance, cholera spread due to their unhygienic living conditions, was dubbed as Mariai's wind, the curse of the Goddess. Instead of taking preventive vaccines, which they considered fatal, they resorted to Black magic as the ultimate cure. Devadasi system was another practice. There, a girl dedicated to God, is never allowed to marry but was exploited in various ways. Thus "a religious colour was given to the ritual prostitution" (Murahari 305). If they married, children born to them were considered outcaste. Child marriage added fuel to the fire, leaving behind a large number of child widows and discarded young wives.

The political dimension was also significant. The double standard and exploitation imposed by the high caste were beyond description. The high caste people were the major customers of the liquor sold by the Mahars, though they considered the water touched by them as polluted. They had affairs with Dalit women, which surpassed the tenets of untouchability, but would not accept the food they cooked. Their exploitation was manifold, by subjecting the Dalits under the yoke of bonded labour with heavy load of work and no apparent remuneration which can be seen from the slavish life of Ithal Kamble, the first husband of Masamai, Sharan's mother. Limbale describes Kamble's life as "no different from that of the animals he looked after. His poverty was like the yoke-inflamed shoulder of an ox. His life had turned into a cattle shed" (35). This was not the story of a single person. It was the woe of millions, over centuries. In addition, Dalit women's body was used as a tool to inflict political lessons, whenever the suppressed tried to raise their voices. Masamai's life –shattered by Hanmantha Limbale, the Patil-can be seen as the best example for this.

Thus we find that the social formation was ably supported by the multiple forces-economic, social, ideological and political- leading to the deprivation and denial of the vital status, role and even the basic rights of the Dalits, in the society they were part of. The book under discussion, can be evidenced as the playground of Althusserian notion of Social Formation as the moulding hand of social hierarchy.

In fact, the social formation takes place, by the creation of a subject who is forced to take up the roles thrust upon him. The subjection occurred in dual ways suggested by

Althusser, “subjecting them to a Unique and Absolute Subject, God and as subjected beings who submit to higher authority and therefore stripped off all freedom except that of freely accepting the submission” (LP 169). This is exactly true in the case of Dalits who were ‘hailed’ to occupy a subservient position in the society. Limbale reveals the subjected state by narrating the experience of Dalits in general, his own individual role as a subject as well and the subjection of women in detail. The social stratification and injustice arising out of the concept of caste attached to the accident of birth points out the state of “individuals as always already subjects” (LP 170). Limbale makes it clear when he says “Our caste had been thrust upon us even before we were born” (76). The unquestioning acceptance of their state made them slaves of the fate submitting themselves to hard labour and humiliation, sacrificing their women to dark nights in Patil’s mansion.

Their subservience becomes clear through an incident where the entire Maharwada united against Sharan and his friend for complaining at the police station against the discrimination done by Shivram, who had kept a separate cup for the Dalits, in his hotel. The community questioned Sharan by saying that everyone from Maharwada was drinking from the cup for years and prevented him from further protest by narrating much more severe nature of the injustice they had willfully suffered earlier. Even with education and political power, residues of low caste past remained embedded “in accents, manners, and the experience of discrimination” (Bhagavan and Feldhaus 56) which tried to push them to the subject position. As an individual, Sharankumar Limbale was unable to cope up with the situation he was in. When he was a child, he could not make out the sense of his humiliation at home and locality –being called ‘akkarmashi’-and at school being tortured by other children and even teachers. Gradually, he understood his positioning as a subject when he became aware of the fact that the status of an individual is determined by his birth, and it had nothing to do with individual talent, aptitude or abilities.

The question of subject acquires immense potential with reference to the experience of Dalit women. Women are the gateways of caste system and crucial pivot on whose purity- sanctity axis, the caste hierarchy is constructed, and the women themselves are the worst sufferers of the system. When it comes to Dalit women, the problem becomes more complex. To be a Dalit woman, is a great calamity in Indian society. According to the famous Dalit activist Ruth Manorama, “Dalit woman suffer discrimination-not single, double but of triple fold- class, caste and gender” (Bhagawat 5). Dalit women constitute a distinct social group, and cannot be masked under ‘women’ or ‘Dalits’. They are the Dalit of Dalit in Indian society, being the oppressed victims of centuries old social, political, economic, cultural, and religious pressures inflicted by the collective forces of feudalism, casteism and patriarchy. Being illiterate, superstitious and victims of social torture, they suffer first in family as a woman and then have to face the society as a Dalit. Even though they are the bread- winners, they have no right to the money and are obliged to do domestic work in addition. The social discrimination they face is due to their vulnerable position in the male social order in general and the Indian cultural life in particular. With most formidable occupations, and lifelong suffering and torture, they face more harassment, oppression and exploitation than the upper caste women.

Limbale depicts the women as the subjects at various levels- subjected to the sexual and exploitative hunger of the high caste, oppressive and looting subjugation by the low caste men, the shackles of customs, the physical hunger that force them to hard work and social degradation, and their own yearning for a better life with love and care. Women from the lower castes were considered too low and degraded in life that their

body was a free terrain of colonization for the upper caste. “Even in caste conflicts, Dalit women fell as the first victim, to be a political lesson of subjugation” (Dasand Chaudhary 261).

The high caste men used crooked ways to satisfy their appetite, as exemplified by Limbale through his own mother's life. Masamai's happy life with her husband Ithal Kamble was destroyed by Hanmantha Limbale, their land owner, owing to her attractive beauty. When she was desolated and helpless, Hanmantha worked out his plan, lured her, and enjoyed her for several years. When Sharan was born from their alliance, Hanmantha came to his true colour and left her life forever. This kind of illegal temporary marriage was common among them. The woman, the prey of this trap was stamped as a prostitute or whore, while the upper caste men saved their face. Patils followed a tradition of holding a Dalit woman as their whore. That is how Sidramappa Patil, came to Masamai's life. Thus she subjected herself to the curse to be born beautiful among Dalits and to the tyranny of sex, mortgaging to one owner after the other. In this way, she was burdened with a roll call of children and their upbringing, in which the caste Hindu father was reluctant to shoulder the responsibility. But Limbale does not attempt to criticize his mother; instead he views her as the victim of social order, which makes Dalit woman an easy prey to the upper caste.

The Dalit men too have played a significant role in making women's life miserable. “When the low caste men were denied their urge for assertion and domination, owing to the oppression of the high caste, they try to fulfill their desire of assertion and revolt in their family and most probably on the women”(Ahmad 27). They try to express their male chauvinism through drinking liquor and beating their wives and children. The community gave them right to marry as many times as they want and to discard the wives on trifle reasons or without any. It is evident from the lives of Santamai, Limbale's grandmother and Masamai, his mother. Marriages were broken up like a game of dolls, leaving behind a large number of deserted young wives as was the fate of Limbale's sisters. Extra marital affairs and polygamy fell on women as a burden, thereby turning their own husbands as their worst enemies. The utter poverty and the family responsibility forced them to sell their bodies in exchange of bread. Thus the life of Dalit women was ‘always already’ decided by ‘fate’.

They were also subjected to the shackles of superstitious customs. Devadasi system, child marriage, possession of spirits, etc. are the most important among them. In their struggle for survival, they could not even dream of education and its prospects and this ignorance aggravated the level of exploitation and superstitions that encircled them. They had a rare predicament to rise above the gendered roles of a submissive and male dependent entity because of their partner's inability or irresponsibility; but still were condemned for transgression.

Above all, they were ruled by the desire for a better life. And this quest gave them sheer perseverance and made them strong fighters. They had a desire for normal, happy life which led them to different paths for its fulfillment. Limbale states it clearly when he says “they (Dalit women) sold themselves to be loved and cared for by someone, not to appease their lust” (64). This hunger for love can be seen from Santamai's grief at the death of her husband, - who discarded her, married another woman and threw her life to miseries- and from Masamai's devoted nursing of her sick husband- who had left her accusing her as unfaithful and was responsible for her pitiable existence- when he returned after many years to atone his wrongs. They were ready to starve in order to feed the children and were ready to put themselves out to give education to the children. This refusal to surrender themselves to the degrading conditions, desire to live and move

forward gave them a sense of tragic dignity, which is evident from Limbale's depiction of the women characters, including his mother Masamai and grandmother Santamai.

Thus, it can be seen that the seemingly natural course of caste system moves forward with the help of different forces at work, leading to a particular social formation making the members of the society mere subjects who are forced to act according to the whims and fancies of the system.

The Negation of Negation

“It is not possible for literature to be larger than revolution”-P.S. Rege (*TADL* 79).

The realization of the constructed nature of the situation one is in, is sure to revolutionize his attitude to the dominant discourse, thereby effecting a Supersession intended to bring about a 'sea change'. Althusser borrowed the term supersession from Hegel to indicate “negation of negation- a process of historical development in a new historically determined situation, by the destruction of old historically determined situation” (*PSPS* 67). With reference to the Dalit community, supersession was at different planes-political, social, ideological, cultural and aesthetic. The reflection of this change can also be seen in the life of Limbale as an individual.

In the political realm, the leaders like Jyothirao Phule and Ambedkar played a significant role in the consciousness raising of the Dalit community, especially Mahars. This made them better equipped to fight against the injustice, which Eleanor Zelliot underscores when she says, “Among the Scheduled Castes in India, the Mahars of Maharashtra has used political means most consistently and united in their struggle to better their condition” (15). Dalits turned the very weapon of discrimination, a structural and ideological base for political mobilization, through which the caste identity became the principal media of political participation.

Limbale describes their politically oriented activism, from his own personal experience. The formation of the militant group Dalit Panther Movement in 1972 and his active participation in it find vivid description in the book. The objective of the movement was to create an atmosphere of a counter culture and to bring a separate identity to the Dalits in the society. They raised a protest to rename Marathwada University as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar University and succeeded in the venture. Instead of greeting with the word Namaskar, they used Jai Bhim to pay reverence to Ambedkar. There were numerous attempts to create specific Mahar institutions within Hinduism. Since the rules of Hindu religion appeared fetters, they raised a campaign for mass conversion to Buddhism, which treated its followers as equals. The growth of the cities and the migration from the villages, the spread of education in rural Maharashtra, increased employment opportunity, the rise of political awareness among the marginalized and the latent caste spirit equipped them for the use of political means.

The social field also witnessed positive changes in the lives of Dalits. Due to the contact with the city relatives and Mahar propagandists, the Mahars in the villages began to discard both the duties and the caste practices associated with their low status. Education gave them a new vision. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they were held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the past.

The changes in the socio- political layers directed them to reverse the dominant ideology, exhume the past, in order to find out the real nature of the 'truth' regarding their existence, which opened before them several shocking realities. Phule brought forth the history of Aryan domination and argued that the real reason for their stigmatization lay in their refusal to accept Brahman hegemony. For Ambedkar, “the caste distinction was the result of historical evolution, a product of overlapping, social, political and economic

antagonisms held in tension through the commandments of Hindu Law”(Babu 4). For him, Buddhism was the forgotten agent of history which functioned as the most significant political and ethical adversary. Brahmanism had appropriated it by including Buddha as an ‘avatara’ of Vishnu, because they perceived a threat to their entrenched position from the popularity of Buddhism. Their conversion to Buddhism freed them from the smothering customs of Hinduism like prevention of entry into temples. Limbale questions the Hindu religious ideology in a sharp language:

What kind of God is this that makes human beings hate each other? We are all supposed to be the children of God, then why are we considered untouchable? We don't approve of this God, nor this religion because they ostracize us. Why is man imprisoned by conventions? Is it man who is a hindrance to religion or is it the other way round? Is the premise of religion greater than man's? Is religion made for man or man made for religion? Does man cause religion to degenerate or is it religion that degenerates man? Can't man exist without religion and caste? (62)

For Dalits, Buddhism provided its shade of compassion and equality. Limbale who was attracted to this shade converted himself to the new way. In the case of the writer, even his marriage was delayed being a half caste. But Maryappa's (his father-in-law) words that there was no high born or low born in Buddhism presented him with a new life through his wife Kusum, Maryappa's daughter. At the very end of the text, he repeats the question lingering within the minds of millions. “Why is this labyrinth of customs? Who has created such values of right and wrong, and what for? If they consider my birth as illegitimate what values am I to follow?”(113).

The revolution created its reverberations in the cultural arena also. The reservation facilities for Dalits rendered them access to higher education and government jobs. Limbale uses strong words to justify their situation to those who oppose reservation policy:

We are educated only because these facilities exist. If these facilities are cancelled give us our Dalitsthan. Those who say that facilities must be cancelled should first face casteism themselves and share the life of the untouchables. Let them live outside the village, ostracized like us. They should experience what it means to study while your father lying drunk beside you. Then they wouldn't protest against injustice. (90)

Thus they became ready to wage war against every obstacle they faced, with a conviction not to surrender. They changed the rituals in their life including marriage, shifting from Hindu tradition to the Buddhist one. They came to the realization that they were not untouchables since there is nothing unclean about them and status is all about the attitude one has towards life.

This change in attitude found its utmost expression in the field of aesthetics. Dalit aesthetic practice signified the capacity for the newly constituted lower orders to project a distinctly new sensibility through aesthetic expression and have it reach beyond their own socially circumscribed domains. Far from remaining corporeally abstracted or socially distanced, this aesthetics addressed an interrelated sphere of the body, emotions and everyday sociality.

The poetics shifted back and forth between the embodiment of particularity and the imagining universality superseding the current hegemony. It drew its energy not from the hegemonic religious forms but from the unique lived experience of the artists. Through a new ensemble of words and actions, it projected new possibilities in civil society with its primary aim being not aesthetic delight but social transformation. In his work *Lenin and Philosophy* Althusser says: “What Art makes us see is the ideology from

which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes to” (221-2). Thus Dalit aesthetics becomes the embodiment of what Althusser conceived as Art, by making us see the ideology of its birth, nurture, detachment and allusion- the ideology of protest and supersession.

The possibility of representing Dalit self also required to challenge ideas of autobiographical interiority, individualism, and most importantly authenticity, since Dalit literature was primarily concerned with community identity formation. The literature thus created, emerged from the domination- subordination relationship and became an integral part of the political struggle to overturn it. Through Dalit literature, the Dalit subaltern now appeared as a speaking subject, but this speech was not interpellated by the dominant group’s voice. The literature aimed at promoting equality, freedom and justice and it awakened the concept of self respect. It fulfilled its aims through various aspects of writing like language, expression, allusions, symbols and philosophy.

With regard to language, Dalit writers rejected the class of standard language because it was arrogant. There was even an attempt on their part to evolve a new aesthetics because they felt that the genteel expectations of the existing elite literary standards could not do justice to the quality of the life they knew and rendered in writing. Dalit writers attempted to be true to their experiences and felt that their visions and responses must be translated into art honestly, in its raw, undistilled form, without euphemism. Not only was this language a medium of aesthetic effects, but also a metaphor for a radically altered social order. Limbale proved faithful to this notion by using simple, terse language to narrate his own heart rending experiences.

As for expressions, the force of this literature was embedded in its form, its sounds, and its extra- referential discourse and the meaning was to be experienced initially as potentially transformative bodily sensation. Instead of using the existing symbols and metaphors of Hindu sacred literature, they constructed new ones.

Limbale is a master at framing expressions apt to convey the sentiments he intend. The expressions like “our stomachs were greedy like a beggar’s sack”(3), “I stood like an unwashed plate”(10), “Eating stinking bhakari was like pushing garbage into furnace”(11), etc are strong enough to convey the extreme hunger the community as a whole underwent. There are expressions which indicate their barren existence like “The bus came and went like the foetus of a barren woman”(41), “I sat in the corner like a barren hen trying to hatch an egg”(44), “The problem was like a baby obstructed in the womb, refusing to come out”(45). Their attempt to conceal their despicable identity is expressed as “we hid ourselves like a leper hiding patches of rash on his skin” (105). Their status in the society is revealed through the words “we are the garbage that village throws out” (6), “Maharwada was a heap of jowar grains gathered at the resting place of corpse” (12). Their outlook towards life was bleak and hopeless as depicted in words “the life itself seemed to be a porter’s job”(54), “Man is but an effigy”(110). Even emotions like sorrow and love are expressed using unusual and shocking images like “My eyes flowed like a leaking roof”(21), “Our love spread like a patch of rash on a leper’s skin” (27).

Allusions and symbols also perform a specific revolutionary function in Dalit literature. The historicity of Dalit experience is conveyed through the allusive nature of Dalit writing, with its strategy to liberate certain figures of history and myth like Ekalavya, Ravana, Shambuka from the demonizing prison-hold of upper caste literature and to use them to connect the present with the past. When the writers employed religious symbols, it was to deconstruct them, infusing them with new meaning and purpose which can be seen in *Akkarmashi* also. Here, Limbale uses the figures Jarasandha and Karna to signify his alienated and divided self. “I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belong to the

village, whereas the other half is excommunicated” (39). “Many times, I felt like Karna myself, because like him, I too was drifting with the flow of the river” (60). His mother Masamai’s banishment from her first husband is compared to Sita’s state, when lost in Dandakaranya. Her dispassionate treatment of Limbale is compared to that of Kunti’s attitude to Karna. Limbale considers Santamai’s narration of stories of injustice to him, as equal to Jijabhai’s telling of stories of valour to young Shivaji making him (Limbale) “restless like Shivaji” (79).

Philosophical insight is one of the most significant features of the text. It is a shattering experience to see in Limbale’s graphic depiction of the want and the woe, with a saintly forgiveness, compassion and detachment. That is why G. N Devy in his introduction to the text says, “This outburst is not of a hungry man bounding for the meals; it is more a saint’s quest to understand the meaning of the world” (xxv). Even after suffering innumerable miseries, he asks philosophical questions in an angelic tone: “How has man lost himself under this huge tree of caste, religion, breeding, family? Why is this labyrinth of customs?” (105). It is this detachment, and the ability to turn away from the personal, that makes *Akkarmashi* a disturbing life narrative.

As an individual, Limbale performs his part in the collective resistance of his community. From childhood onwards, he started to question the irrationality of customs that chained him.. The enlightenment effected by education enabled him to question the injustice meted out to them. It started from questioning the segregation practiced by a shopkeeper Shivram. Later the protest led him to convert to Buddhism. He conducted his marriage rites in Buddhist tradition though he had to face the absence of his own family members from the ceremony for defying the Hindu tradition. His protest reached its pinnacle, when he named his son ‘Anaarya’ openly declaring him to be low born.

Thus the Dalits took up the revolutionary path in order to effectively supersede the shackles thrust upon them for centuries. This insight dawned upon them with the realization of their role as mere Support in the process of their own identity formation in society. The Althusserian concept of Support is based on the notion that the real protagonists of history are the social relations of production. The biological men are only the supports or bearers of the guises assigned to them by the structure of relations in the social formation. This realization when forms part of the individual makes them ready to take up arms against this irrational slavery imposed on their life.

In the text, there are several instances where the protagonist realizes this status as mere Support. Instead of viewing his mother Masamai as an adulteress, Limbale considers her as “the victim of social system” (ix). He faces the despairing situation of losing his lover Shewanta –for the sole reason that he is a half caste- with courage, due to this recognition. Instead of showing aversion towards the various activities like selling liquor, begging, the Maharwada undertook, his response was sympathetic and humane by saying, “We did all this to satisfy our hunger” (65).

Thus the stark reality of their role as a mere Support ushered in the minds of the Dalits led to a massive revolution in their way of life, thereby making an epochal alteration in the basic tenets and constitution of the society. Their struggle had far reaching consequences for the dominant ideology and their propagators, when fought with the tool of the negation of negation. Thus the Dalit attempt of Supersession became a trumpet of change in the form of a whirl wind which shook the very foundation of the Indian society as a whole.

Conclusion

“Who has created such values of right and wrong and what for?”– Limbale (113).

The value system of a society acquires its status as a result of the aspirations of the dominant discourse for its perpetuation. Gradually it becomes deeply entrenched in the psyche of both dominant and subservient classes. Therefore a revision of its basic doctrine may receive wide protest from both the perpetrators who see it as a threat for their existence and from the sufferers of the system who mistake their distress as destiny. This is what happens in the case of caste system in India, which accounts for its continuation even after numerous attempts to exterminate it from society. The article entitled “Interrogating Casteism: An Althusserian Reading of Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmashi The Outcaste*” was aimed at analyzing the constructed state of caste system, using a Dalit autobiography, seeking the help of Althusserian terms. Thus, this article achieves its objective by affirming the caste system as a constructed curse on society and its assumption as natural is only a disguise for its structural edifice. The systematic plantation of an ideology on the strong foundation of the society, accounts for its retention for centuries.

Even after decades of Indian Independence, in spite of numerous efforts and legislations to prevent the tyrannies of casteism, this social evil still has its strong hold in the government machineries and other socio- cultural spheres. The recent upheavals based on caste stand testimony to the detrimental potential of caste as a dominant ideology and its iron grip on modern Indian life. The curse of casteism cannot be eradicated unless and until all the members of society realize the fact that caste is not a God given entity, but a construction of past as a socio- political tool of hegemony. It requires a broadened outlook and enlightened mind to recognize the mistakes of the past and to step into a new world of total transformation, which forms the basic intension of this academic effort. And this realization is sure to lead to an egalitarian society upholding the humane values of justice, liberty and universal fraternity.

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