



Comparative Analysis of the theme of illegitimacy in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* and Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds*

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Abstract:

Dalit autobiographies of Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* and Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds* portray the plight of the Dalit women and the issue of illegitimacy faced by their children born out of sexual exploitation of the men of the dominant caste. The stigma of illegitimacy creates many hurdles in the lives of the children of these women. The children of the exploited Dalit women suffer from the identity crisis. The present paper tries to make the comparative analysis of the theme of illegitimacy and its consequences.

Key Words: Dalit autobiographies, Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outcaste*, Kishore Shantabai Kale, *Against All Odds*, plight, Dalit women, illegitimacy, etc.

Introduction:

Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*(2003) is a translation of his autobiography in Marathi titled as *Akkarmashi* first published in 1984 when he was just 25 years old. In that sense the autobiography differs from the traditional autobiography which is usually written at the ripe age of life. The autobiography was translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar as *The Outcaste* is a Marathi word that signifies the meaning of illegitimacy. The protagonist Sharan brings to the fore the agony of the boy who has been bearing the stigma of illegitimacy till his youth. The self-narrative also portrays the plight of Dalit women who were exploited by the upper caste landlords sexually. The protagonist bears the brunt of fractured identity till the end of his narration. The narrator compares his plight with the plight of mythological characters like Karna and Jarasandha from the epic the Mahabharata. Speaking about his plight as an illegitimate child, the protagonist states his views in his author's note:

My history is my mother's life, at the most my grandmother's. My ancestry doesn't go back any further. My mother is untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes

of India. Mother lives in a hut, father in a mansion. Father is a landlord; mother, landless. I am an akkarmashi(half-caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate. (Limbale ix)

Hence, readers get the idea that the story of the protagonist will unfold the issue of illegitimacy in the course of narration.

Kishore Shantabai Kale's Marathi autobiography *Kolhatyache Por*(1994) translated into English as *Against All Odds*(2000) is a life story of a Kolhati illegitimate boy who was forsaken by his biological father and mother. The autobiography of Kishore was written at the age of just 24 but it cannot be considered as the autobiography proper that is used to be written at the old age.

Nowadays, few people started the trend of using the name of their mothers instead of using their father's name. This is a token of their respect to their mothers. However, the name of the mother used by Kishore Shantabai Kale after his name is not a fashion but a compulsion. In this way the protagonist puts forth the plight of fatherless Kolhati children who failed to get the love and name of their father as their mothers gave them birth without performing the proper ceremony of marriage. The narration of the story by the protagonist brings tears in the reader's eyes. Kishore Shantabai Kale in the prologue to the autobiography puts his miserable life in the following words, "Yes, my mother Shantabai Kale, was a tamasha dancer. I am her illegitimate son. My mother managed to free herself of the binding ghungroos, but I, like a little broken bell, was dropped, left in the care of Jiji" (Kale 2)

The present paper is written with an aim to make comparative analysis of the theme of illegitimacy portrayed in both these autobiographies.

The Concept of Illegitimacy:

Basically the illegitimacy is the act of not giving legitimate rights to the children born out of wedlock. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary gives the definition of the word illegitimate as: "1(of a child) born of parents not married to each other. 2. Not allowed by a particular set of rules or by law." (Oxford University Press 774). By this definition we get the idea that the illegitimacy is related to the child that takes birth from the parents who are not married as per law or not married as per rules exist in the society.

According to Manusmriti marriage is the most important institution by which the caste hierarchy could be maintained. Therefore, in Indian society, especially in Hindu Society marriage as an institution occupies the central position. Regarding the importance of the institution of marriage in Indian society anthropologist S.J. Tambiah remarks:

Marriage is at the heart of Hindu society. It is ...the most important event in a man's life; it is in the forefront of Hindu 'consciousness'; and it is a focal point of the social system. Marriage is directly integrated with caste which is at the basis of a Hindu's primary status position in his society. A man's caste is first of all decided by the status of his parents, and subsequently maintained or modified by his own marriage and sexual encounters. (Tambiah 223)

In India, the married men of the dominant caste take advantage of the vulnerability and disadvantaged position of Dalit women. They exploit them sexually without taking the responsibility of their children born out of their sexual union. Such children have to bear the stigma of illegitimacy as they are fatherless. Many of such children become object of ridicule for the society. They are not also accepted by their community as well as the community of their father. Such fathers go scot free while the onus will be put on the women who have been victimised and their children who take birth from such union.

Critical analysis of Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*:

Sharankumar Limbale brings to the fore the exploitation of Dalit women by the village Patils (Village Headmen). Patils keep extra-marital relations with Dalit women and when they give birth to a child, they abandon them without taking the responsibility as a father of the born child. Therefore, such children had to bear the stigma of illegitimacy. The mother has to take the sole responsibility of the children. Limbale says:

This is almost a tradition----a Patil always a big landowner, has a Dalit woman as his whore. There is at least one such house in every village. Children born to such a whore have no legal father because there is an unbridgeable gap between such a father and son. The prestige if the father is at stake. (Limbale 58-59)

Sharankumar Limbale's mother Masamai was sexually exploited by village Patil Hanmanta Limbale, a married man after her husband Ithal Kamble, a farm labourer on Hanmanta's farm., gave her a divorce. Hanmanta was the person behind the alleged divorce of Ithal to Masamai. However when she begets a son he didn't take his responsibility.

The Outcaste puts forth the complicated issues of caste, gender, illegitimacy, gender discrimination, poverty and hunger besides the trauma he has undergone while bearing the stigma of illegitimacy. He was humiliated by people by calling him 'son of a bitch', 'son of immoral relation' and 'Akkarmashi' (half-caste). All these derogatory appellations tormented him to the core. All these taunts and abuses had a great impact on his mind in his childhood. These taunts are due to the social inequality prevalent in Indian society. He ponders over the situation and asks himself, "Suppose I go to Basalgaon would my father allow me into his house? Would the mother there give me food?" (61). He doesn't get any satisfactory answer to arise in his mind. Then he puts forth the contradictory situation of his personal life in the following words, "My father lives in a mansion, my mother in a hut, and I on the street." (61)

Sharankumar Limbale raises few questions regarding the issue of illegitimacy and the discrimination by the society without the fault of innocent child. The child who does not know what sin is, looked down upon by the society as the fruit of the sin. Very painfully Limbale narrates the plight of being an illegitimate child. He says:

Why should a child suffer for the sin of its parents? So, whenever I look at my mother, I grow wild with anger. Why did she commit adultery at all? Why shouldn't I enter my mother's bed? Isn't she adulterous? Santamai and Masamai hadn't sold their bodies to appease their lust. Do we exist just for the sake of that hunger? (61)

Masamai was kept by Hanmanta for 8-10 years and later he abandoned her. Later she was kept by another Patil. Sharankumar Limbale considers it 'the tyranny of sex'. When Sharan went to take signature of Sarpanch on freeship application Sarpanch refused to sign when he saw the name Masamai Hanmanta Limbale on the form. However, due to the intervention of Bhosle guruji sarpanch finally agreed to sign the form.

Sharankumar Limbale was chided by his schoolmates as illegitimate. He was not even accepted in the community of his mother. No one in his community was ready to give their daughters in marriage to him as he was bastard. He was torn within and considers his fate like Jarasandha and Karna. So, he was accepted nowhere not in the community of his mother and not in the community of his mother. He suffers from the identity crisis. In Latur he hid his identity and took a room on rent telling the landlord that he was a Lingayat. He even avoided the company of his relatives and friends. In this way we can say that illegitimacy played a very big role in the life of Sharan. He feels close resemblance of him with the mythical character Jarasandh in the epic Mahabharata. The existential questions harass him leaving him clueless of his identity. He expresses his dilemma in choosing one identity for himself in the following words:

My father and his forefathers were Lingayats. Therefore, I am one too. My mother was Mahar. My mother's father and forefather's were Mahar, hence I am also a Mahar. From the day I was born until today, I was brought up by my grandfather Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar. My grandfather in the sense he lives with my grandmother, Santamai. Does this mean I am Muslim as well? Then why can't Jamadar's affection claim me as Muslim? How can I be high caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am untouchable, what about my father who is high caste? I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belongs to the village, whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected?(38-39)

Critical Analysis of Kishore Shantabai Kale's Against All Odds:

Against All Odds is an autobiography of Dr. Kishore Shantabai Kale, who as per the norms of society, the illegitimate son of a Kaikadi dancer woman Shanta. Shanta was given to Namdeorao Jagtap, the MLA from Karmala constituency with all the 'ceremony' of the Chira Utarna, the Kolhati ritual of selling a virgin girl by her father Kondiba. Namdeorao Jagtap left Shanta when she was pregnant. Kishore was the first born of Shanta and Namdeorao Jagtap; but on account of abandoning Namdeorao Jagtap the child born out of their union became fatherless and he had to attach his mother's name after his name. Against All Odds throws light on the pathetic situation of Kolhati women due to inhuman treatment by their fathers and brothers along with the patriarchal society that considers women as a commodity. The autobiography though written by Kishore Kale, became the voice of the Kolhati women who have been suppressed for years and which was unheard of.

Kishore Kale through autobiography portrayed the world of Kolhati community which was unknown to the rest of the world. The struggle of Kishore to become a doctor, the exploitation of Kolhati women by the rich landlords and their own kiths and kins is very poignantly depicted by him. We get the information of the social history of the Kolhati community and the origin of the dance form called lavani which is very popular dance form in Maharashtra.

Kishore Shantabai Kale's autobiography is the voice of a feminist male who fights for the cause of the uplift of the Kolhati women who were exploited not only by other men but also their kiths and kins. The exploitation of the Kolhati women was described by Kishore Kale in the following manner:

The Kolhati community forces its women to dance to attract male attention. Young, teenage virgins are given to men in a ceremony called 'chira utarna' with all the trappings of a wedding, but none of its sanctity. The man pays a prefixed price for her virginity. As long he visits her, she does no dance on stage and does not see any other man. But if she is abandoned by the man, she has to go back to the stage and earn money which is appropriated by her father and brothers. A Kolhati family survives on the money earned by the women of the family. The men consider any labour below their dignity. Their wives do not dance, but all other female relatives are made to step on the floorboard of the dancing stage. They are given no part of their earnings, in fact they are given nothing at all in return. (4-5)

The protagonist Kishore's mother Shanta was abandoned by Namdeorao Jagtap during her pregnancy. However, she didn't allow to take a rest by her father and brother and she had to dance throughout her pregnancy to feed her father and brothers. Kishore Kale narrates the plight of her mother in the following words:

Shanta started dancing again even while she was pregnant. If she had no returned to tamasha, her family would have starved. None of the men in her family, neither her father nor her brothers, thought of finding some work. They did not work in the fields that had been given to Jiji and it did not occur to them to even beg. So, Shanta continued to dance through her pregnancy. She toiled all night and travelled from place to place in bumpy bullock carts until she was eight months pregnant. (17)

The protagonist's Maushi (maternal aunt) was working with Chitra-Gulzar party at the Rasik theatre at Barshi, in Western Maharashtra. Nili, one of the dancers in the party was madly in love with a young college boy Mukesh. But her aunt was against this affair. Later, her aunt gave her to the man of forty-five for 'Chira Utarna' ceremony. Nili was just seventeen. Nili cried in protest but in vain. Mukesh still loved Nili. Finally, Nili sent him a note and asked him to marry a good girl that his family would find for him. The note written by Nili to Mukesh brings to the fore the plight of the Kolhati dancer women. She wrote, "We are dancing girls. We belong to everybody. We have no right to fall in love with any one man. If we do, then we must kill that love, otherwise our society won't let us live" (57).

If the dancer women were married and had babies, they would have no time to breastfeed them. The babies were fatherless as well as not entitled to get love they deserve from their mothers because of their busy schedule. Kishore Kale's Maushis(maternal aunts) Sushila, Baby and Rambha did not marry to feed their father and brothers who were lazy. Their children were also alienated from the love of their fathers. They were also deprived of getting proper education due to poverty and the shame they had to bear because of bearing the name of their mothers.

Kishore also hides his relation with Rambha maushi from his room partner so that he may not recognise him as a Kolhati.

Comparative Analysis between Sharankumar Limbale's Autobiography and Kishore Shatabai Kale's Autobiography:

After having an in-depth analysis of both the autobiographies we have found some similarities and differences between these autobiographies. They are as follows:

Similarities:

- 1) The exploited women are from the lower caste and the exploiters are from the upper caste.
- 2) The protagonists suffer from the stigma of illegitimacy.
- 3) Poverty is the cause of the exploitation
- 4) Illegitimacy becomes hurdle in the education
- 5) Education plays an important role in bringing consciousness and will change their lives
- 6) Both of them wrote their memoir at very young age.

Differences:

- 1) In the case of *Against All Odds* the kiths and kins hand over their daughters or sisters to the exploiter while in the case of *The Outcaste* the husband falls prey to the tactics of the exploiter. Here the ignorance of the husband to know the conspiracy of the exploiter becomes the cause of exploitation.
- 2) In *Against All Odds* the protagonist suffers from the stigma of illegitimacy. However, he does not suffer from the caste discrimination. In *The Outcaste* the protagonist Sharan suffers on both counts: from his caste and from the stigma of illegitimacy.
- 3) In *Against All Odds* there is no feeling of any shame in Kishore's mind about his mother's act of living with another man. Because he considers her as a victim and not as an immoral person. The protagonist Kishore doesn't label his mother as a prostitute. On the other hand he wants to change the destiny of other exploited women of his community. In *The Outcaste* we see an outrage of the protagonist Sharan against his mother and he calls her names. He even goes to the extent of calling her prostitute. Here the protagonist doesn't try to change the fate of the exploited women.
- 4) The protagonist Kishore doesn't want to hide his identity. There is only one occasion when he hides his identity as a Kolhati boy from his roommate. Thereafter, he never tries to change his identity rather he proudly attaches his mother's name after his name. The protagonist Sharan hides his identity and lives in the locality of the upper caste.

5) The protagonist Kishore wants to change the fate of the discriminated communities like Adivasis, Eunuchs, Dancer women and prostitutes. Sharan is caught in a whirlwind of identity crisis. He suffers a lot from the identity crisis; whereas Kishore goes beyond this dichotomy.

Conclusion: In this way both the autobiographies narrate the theme of illegitimacy to convey the underlying problems of the protagonists. These autobiographies are also the critique of Indian society that gives so much importance to the debate on the matter of illegitimacy and legitimacy that would prove to be detrimental for the growth of the society. These autobiographies also provide an insight to deal with the issues of the illegitimacy.

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