CHAPTER-II

AGONY OF BEING HALF-CASTE
SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE’S *THE OUTCASTE*
The Outcaste is an awfully candid account of a socially offended and physically exploited low caste woman - Masamai and her illegitimate son Sharankumar. It is a striking narrative which describes the wicked character of the Indian caste system that creates imbalanced power relations between high and low castes. Truly speaking, low castes in Indian were mercilessly enthralled by the high caste people for their personal benefits. It could happen because of the special socio-economic and political privileges granted to them by the caste system. The high castes were authorized as born superior and the most able agents to humiliate the low castes. They were powerful and their power was maintained with the socio-religious sanctions. It was the high caste power politics that crushed dalits socially, economically, physically, politically and psychologically. It was the result of iniquitous caste system which made high castes powerful and low castes powerless. This high caste power-politics destroyed the life of millions of dalits as they were often exposed to agonizing atrocities and physical assaults most often inflicted on them for no valid reason. Unfortunately, Sharankumar Limbale also fell the helpless victim of the malevolence of the caste tyranny which tattered his life, stamped him as illegitimate child - a bastard, and a half caste.

Indian caste system is an ideological construct which seems to be intentionally formed by the dominant group of people to subjugate the low castes by take all control over every means of progress. It made high castes all possessive and dalits as untouchables, deprived of everything. In the name of superior caste, the high caste people were allowed to castrate low castes and even use dalit women to extinguish their physical hunger. Their physical relations with low caste women were considered as their special right. It was somehow legitimate and a matter of pride for them. But, on the other hand, such victimized women and their children were treated
as adulteress, untouchable, illegitimate and bastard. Unluckily, Sharankumar underwent this dreadful execution of caste tyranny. In the present autobiography, he narrates how the malevolence of the caste tyranny and high caste power-politics penalized him throughout his life.

_The Outcaste_ is a yarn of the persecution of dalits by the high caste people. Hanmanta Limbale, a village Patil, by virtue of his caste and socio-economic power establishes physical relationship with Sharankumar’s mother –Masamai. He sexually exploits her and deserts her even before the birth of Sharankumar. This misconduct of the village Patil was socially accepted because of his high caste but the untouchable Masamai and her child was not accepted by the society. This was the great paradox generated by the caste system which made Sharankumar live an ostracized life full of poverty, hunger, exploitation and so on. At the very beginning of the autobiography, Sharankumar narrates the wicked paradoxical notion of the caste system which generated differences and tagged low castes with negative notions like untouchables, wrong doers, and bastards. He exposes the contrasts and contradictions created by the caste system through his own example. He says

My mother is an 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… My father had privileges by virtue of his birth granted to him by the caste system. His relationship with my mother was respected by society, whereas, my mother is untouchable and poor. (Limbale ix)
The caste system not only proved him illegitimate but also destroyed his identity. In Indian society, the grip of the caste system is so tight that it cannot be unscrewed from the minds of the people. It is a wicked ruse of the caste mechanism that it not only divided society into castes and sub-castes but also created caste hierarchy into different castes. The strict observance of the caste ties made Indian people more caste conscious and as a result of this each caste and sub-caste attempts to maintain its supremacy over the other caste. The wicked mechanism of the caste system engaged them in a tussle of maintaining their status at a given place by strictly following the customary practices and predetermined restrictions of the caste system. The dominant group of people had created such a social system which gives meaning to one’s existence only in relation to one’s caste. The caste system does not allow intermarriage. Any attempt of endogamy is unlawful and punishable. The same tragedy took place with Sharankumar. He suffered the twofold humiliation of being an untouchable and being a half caste. On the one hand, he fell the victim of his father’s domination and on the other hand, he fell the prey of the intact and rigid norms of the caste system. He was neither accepted by his mother’s caste-Mahars nor by his father’s caste - the Patils. He got humiliated at the hands of both the high and low castes. This double victimization of Sharankumar was result of the malevolence of the caste system. Consequently, his double victimization inscribed a permanent mark on his psyche which ultimately developed sense of inferiority and ‘Otherness’ in him. He narrates his predicament

The high caste people look upon my community as untouchable, while my own community humiliated me, calling me ‘akkarmashi’. This humiliation was like being stabbed over and over again. I have always lived with the burden of inferiority. (Limbale x)
In the caste ridden society, the force of discrimination manifests itself in various forms at various places including schools, wells, temples, and other places of socio-religious gatherings. Sharankumar started facing it right from his childhood. He narrates his early school life experience where he observed premature shades of discrimination between the high and low caste children. It was the beginning of the malevolence of the caste tyranny which followed him throughout his life. He recalls the event

Play over, we settled down to eat. Boys and girls from the high castes like Wani, Brahmin, Marwari, Muslim, Maratha, Teli, Fishermen, goldsmiths and all the teachers, about hundred or so sat in a circle under a Bunyan tree. We the Mahar boys and girls were asked to sit under another tree. The high-caste ones said a prayer before eating, which did not make any sense to us… The high caste boys and girls were eating together. The girls sat close to the teachers. They were all chatting and we sat like owls watching them. (Limbale 2-3)

The school is a learning place where human values are supposed to be inculcated in the young minds of the children but Sharankumar experienced that the seeds of discrimination were sown right at the school by his teachers and classmates. His teachers abused him by calling ‘You, son of a bitch’ (Limbale 4) and his classmates insulted him by calling a ‘Mahar’. Sharankumar experienced dishonour at school, village temple and even at the village river. He experienced the caste tyranny even in the school. He tells that low caste boys were not allowed to sit with high caste pupils. They had to sit at the threshold amidst footwears. He recalls humiliation experienced at school
Our school where the pupils come from high castes like Wani and Brahmin, was run in the temple of Ithoba. The girls sat in a separate section. Further, down the temple hall sat boys and girls from the cobbler community, and then at the entrance gate sat we, the Mahar boys and girls. (Limbale 4)

The delicate and vulnerable psyche of the low caste children was consciously tortured by inflicting degraded life experiences on them in the name of the caste system. Right from the early age, they were restricted to the thresholds and forced to be among the footwears. In a general sense, children are considered as beautiful flowers in the God’s garden but the caste system had never considered low caste children like flowers. They were left open to grow up in the company of “garbage heaps, dogs and pigs.” (Limbale 5) They were thrown into the dungeon of ignorance and insanity. They were exposed to the outer world just like “the garbage thrown out.” (Limbale 7)

Sharankumar experienced all this persecution and realized the worthless existence of the low castes. Sharankumar suffered the burns of casteism right from his childhood. He experienced everything which a dalit boy was bound to suffer in caste ridden Indian society. He could not experience love, comfort, care and warmth in his life. This persistent negation and hatred was the result of the malevolence of the caste tyranny and high caste power politics.

The low castes had been categorized as useless beings and thrown at the lowest rung of the four-fold social order. The dalits were physically strong but socio-economically weak. Their moral courage was intentionally damaged by the invariable physical attacks and socio-religious restrictions. They were frequently insulted,
demoralized and even attacked for no valid reason. These insults and attacks were the sources of self satisfaction and proving domination for the high caste people but, on the contrary, they severely affected the minds and hearts of the low castes. They were compelled to live under fear of attacks and death. Due to their caste restrictions, they were bound to bear it meekly. Sharankumar underwent such an atrocious attack by the high caste boys’ from his school. He narrates the incident

During the short interval the other boys threw stones at me and teased me calling aloud ‘Mahar’! That made me anxious. One day a group of boys crowded around me like a whirlwind. Mallya had already escaped. One after another they advanced towards me like charging bulls. I felt suffocated. It was like the sky pressing down on me. Ramya Jalote hit me in the face. My mouth opened, gasping for breath. After that the boys run away. For many days after this event, whenever I saw Ramya Jalote, I was scared.” (Limbale 7)

The dalits were lawfully pigeonholed individuals made to undergo innumerable atrocities at the hands of the high caste people. The caste system had stamped them as wrongdoers and attached all negative notions to them. They were always under suspicion for any mishap and were brutally beaten up without undertaking any investigation. The same kind of atrocities and murders are still being continued. This is the worst example of the malevolence of the caste system. Sharankumar recalls the violent attack on his community by the high caste Patils. He says

Whenever an animal in the village died, the villagers grew annoyed. They consider the Maharwada responsible for it. They tied us to a pole
and beat us like animals. They accused us for having poisoned the animal. Our women and children cried and shrieked. All the men in the Maharwada were very badly beaten. The village then ostracized the Maharwada for a few days. We wouldn’t get any work on the farms. We were denied any provision at the shops though we had the money and were ready to pay. We had reached a dead end. Such humiliation was agonizing. (Limbale 78)

The caste system had made every arrangement of crushing low castes under the saddle of inferiority, weakness, ignorance and high caste domination. The wicked system offered every right to the high castes with which they took everything good for them and left all filthy for the low castes. They persecuted low castes at different level and in different forms. They had created local hierarchies to dehumanize dalits. The caste system is a highly intellectual framework which denies access to the material sources to the lower castes and thereby executes socio-economic exploitation of the low castes. The complete domination over all resources of production and strict restriction to the means of self enlightenment made low castes live sub-human existence without having self-esteem, self identity and low social status. It is the main facet of the caste system that it eradicates the dignity of the low castes by deploying various mechanisms of low caste deprivation. Uma Chakravarti, a renowned scholar in subaltern studies, while underlining the most devastating effect of the caste system on low caste says, “Most reprehensibly, caste ideology denies subjectivity to the dalits by depriving them of dignity and personhood.” (Chakravarti 7)

They not only controlled village property but also ruled over natural phenomenon like water, river and plants. The upper stream and clean water of the
village river was for the high castes and the lowest end was for the dalits. They had to drink mucky water in which the high castes had washed their clothes, buffaloes, and shit. Restriction to use natural resources is the cruellest kind of discrimination one hardly witnessed in the world. But unfortunately, dalits had to face it. He recalls the incident

After school we used to go to the river sit on the sands to eat. Then we went swimming. The high-caste villagers filled their water pots and their women washed their clothes upstream. Downstream the kunbies and shepherds collected water in their vessels and carried them off. They also washed their clothes and bathed. Those who looked after the grazing cattle washed their buffaloes and bathed themselves. The water at the lowest end was meant for us.” (Limbale 7)

Sharankumar witnessed invisible lairs of the caste tyranny at school and even at the village river. As like the four fold caste pyramid, the low caste students had to sit at the threshold amongst the footwear and at the village river again they had to use lowest streams which usually carry the dirt and filth of the upper streams. It was the caste tyranny which fenced the life of the low castes. It filled their life with sorrows sufferings, humiliation, haltered and hopelessness.

Sharankumat was enforced to live a life of an untouchable. The caste system had stamped low castes as untouchables and alienated them from the mainstream culture, religion and social apparatuses. It was a premeditated formation of such a class which the high castes can look down upon. This malevolent practice was a misfortune for the untouchables but it was no doubt a good fortune for the high castes. It was so because it gave all comfort, rights and prestige to them. It gave them
pride and privilege. M. K. Singh, a renowned scholar, rightly points out the same. He says, “The system of untouchability sustains the natural pride of the Hindus and make them feel as well as look big” (Singh 135). This pride and privilege is the reason of long sustenance of the caste system. Moreover, as per the Hindu religious texts, caste was recognized as a legal institution. This religious and legal sanction made the caste system all pervasive and eternal. These were the powerful engines that made the tyranny of the caste system keep going. As a result of this, it exists even today too with its all evils and follies. Sharankumar raises the radical question about the relevance and need of such system which has eradicated his paste and made him an illegitimate half caste child.

The Dalit’s life was completely controlled by the immoral, illogical and irrational laws formed by Manu. As per the Hindu religious writings, the low castes were disqualified to pursue education and impure to enter the temples. They were strictly prohibited in the premises of sacred places and if someone dared to do so, he was callously beaten up. This tragedy happened with Sharankumar and his friend Parly. They had to suffer the same punishment when they secretly entered in the village temple. They both had to face fierce anger of Parlya’s father. The tragic part is that the caste system is sanctioned by religious writings and religion itself banishes off low castes out of its socio-religious regime. Its religious sanction has gripped the consciousness of the people that does not allow any disorder in the hierarchal restrictions. A noted economist and Dalit writer points out the effects of religious sanction of the caste system and its permanent consequences on social consciousness of Indian people in his autobiography The Outcaste. He writes

The caste system was disposed by mortals. It has such a powerful sanction behind it that no law, no reform movements and no revolution
will ever change it completely. It is so deeply embedded in our social conscience so securely implemented that even he has no choice, no ability and no power to mend it. (Jadhav 212)

It clearly implies that the religious sanction made the system sacred and it drastically affected the conscience of the people that they cast off low castes from the socio-religious mingling and entrapped them in the notion of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’.

The caste system had deprived low castes from all means of monitory gain and moreover they were strictly restricted from pursuing education. The lack of educational and economic resources compelled the low castes to do all menial jobs and accept all inflicted assaults meekly. The caste system entrapped the life of the low castes from all directions and enforced them to live with acute poverty, unappeased hunger and unmitigated slavery. The same tragedy took place with Sharankumar. The complete absence of resources of earning and well being made Sharankumar depend on the wills and wishes of the high castes. His poverty, hunger, sorrows, sufferings, pains, harassment, and humiliation were the result of the caste system. He was hatefully insulted and drawn away from functions and social gatherings. He narrates the wedding incident where all the Mahars from the village Maharwada were looking at the grand feast. The high caste people enjoyed delicious food and chanted names of Gods and all the boys from Maharwada desperately waited for a call from the high caste villager with growling stomach. When the elderly people saw them, they hatefully insulted and drove the boys away. The flames of hunger burning in his stomach made him realize that one has to do anything to fill the stomach. He admits, “A woman becomes a whore and a man a thief. The stomach make you clean shit, it even makes you eat shit.” (Limbale 7)
There are heart rending experiences of hunger in the autobiography. Rajesh, Kumar, a renowned scholar, rightly traces the dominant theme of this autobiography and says, “The Outcaste clearly shows how the lives of India’s lowest citizens are completely controlled by the high caste people around them. The dominating theme throughout the book is the Dalit’s constant battle with hunger. (Kumar 18-19) Sharankumar presents the reality of dalit’s life. It was the malevolence of the caste system that they were always blamed as wrong doers, sinners, and thieves but the reality of their life is completely different. Sharankumar attempts to present the reality behind their misdeeds. It is very true that the intensity of hunger cannot be understood until one remains hungry without having any source to appease one’s hunger. The burning flames of hunger ruins the boundaries of all rules and restrictions and enables a person to do anything to fill the empty stomach. It kills rationale behind every act and allows accept immediate source to extinguish the fire of hunger.

Being a half-caste and poor, Sharankumar and his family had to face acute poverty and extreme starvation. Very often, they had to sleep with empty stomach. Consequently, in order to appease their hunger, they had to steal food from the village market and if caught while stealing they had to bear the brutal beating from the vendors. Sharankumar narrates the story of his sister and her fight with hunger. She steals a banana from the market but unfortunately she was caught red-handed and brutally beaten up by the vender. Sharankumar draws our attention towards the rationale behind the punishable act of stealing food. Stealing is an offence for a person who gets full stomach food daily but it is a matter of life and death for those who are forcefully deprived of all sources of earning and made to live on the stale bread offered in exchange to the wage-less hard work. In such conditions, hunger
makes one insane and enables the hungry person to do anything to satisfy one’s hunger. This predicament and truthful sentiments of the poor dalits are hardly considered by the high castes. It was because they had never been the part of wretched life of dalit’s. Sharnkumar makes it clear that it’s the malevolence of the caste tyranny that deprived them from everything and enforced to face wretched life filled with poverty, hunger and sub-human existence in the society. The unequal division of labour and sources of income were the root cause of their poverty and misdeeds. Sharankumar presents his plea in the following words

Most of what Nagi and Nirmi used to steal from market were eatables.

In the evening everything they had gathered was pooled and we shared it. We knew we should not steal but then how could we feed ourselves? Who steals out of habit? The poor steal for the sake of hunger. If they had enough to eat would they steal? Black- marketers become leaders, whereas those who are driven to steal by hunger are considered criminals. (Limbale 21)

Sharankumar voices the unfulfilled hunger of the millions of dalits who were deprived of every means of earning and sustenance. Consequently, they had to choose unlawful ways to cope with their helpless conditions. Most of the times, they had to bear the heartless beating at the hands of the vendors. Sharankumar tells the painful episode of his elder sister. She was caught stealing banana and brutally beaten up by the fruit vender. She had nothing to eat. By the evening, to satiate her hunger, she collects banana skins which people had discarded after eating the fruit. She eats the skin. Sharankumar hits her for that and throws away the skin but after having unbearable flames of hunger he himself does the same. It is the worst repercussion of
the caste system that low caste people had to eat leftovers to satiate their hunger. He recalls the experience

Suddenly, thought, I changed my mind. I collected the banana skins and wiped them with my shirt as they were soiled. Then I went to the river, sat in a corner and sat eating them. When I saw our teacher approaching, I threw away the skins. It was as if I was throwing away my stomach with hunger in it.” (Limbale 22)

Sharankumar’s family was completely dependent on the little earnings of his grandfather. He was a porter at the village bust stop. For the sake of ten paisa he had to carry heavy loads of luggage. Sharankumar had to face acute poverty and hunger in his life. Dada’s daily earning was the only source of bread for the whole family. The whole family used to wait for the bus and help dada to carry heavy loads. Sometimes, there would be nothing to carry and they had to wait for the next bus with a hope for work. Unlit clay stove, empty bread basket and a bus that brought no money were their constant worries. Sharankumar recalls the burns of hunger

Most of the time we went hungry. Sometimes, there was only one bhakri in the basket. How could this one bhakri be enough for me, Dada and Shantamai? Shantamai’s face would then look as if she was staring at a graveyard. She made me eat and went hungry herself. I was the cause of worry on such days. I would give just water to my hungry Dada. He drank it as if he were pouring water in the radiator of a bus. (Limbale 41)

The cause of hunger and starvation was nothing but the tyranny of the caste system. It was the malevolent stigma of a bastard child that was imposed by the caste
system on Sharankumar. The caste tyranny ruined his life for having no fault on his part.

The multi-laired caste system had assigned all menial jobs to the low castes. Rather it was a lawful compulsion for them to serve high castes honestly and wholeheartedly. The Mahar (one who was appointed) had to sweep the village community hall, light village street lamps, and drag away the dead animals. Because of the harsh poverty and hunger they had to eat the flesh of dead animals. Sharankumar tells it frankly

If a calf died in the village one had to drag it away, skin it and sell the skin. For such a job the owner of the dead animal would give eight measures of jawar. Then everyone had a share in it and it helped to satisfy our hunger in a small way. (Limbale 13)

Indian caste system is a creation of illogical and irrational beliefs and practices. For the high caste Hindus, animals were so pious and sacred but a person of flesh and blood from low caste was untouchable. For them, cow is a mother goddess but when she dies it suddenly becomes polluted. What is the rationale behind it? Sharankumar asks this question by saying, “Hindus see the cow as their mother. A human mother is cremated, but when a cow dies they need a Mahar to dispose it off.” (Limbale 14) It clearly shows the hypocritical nature of the malevolent caste system and the trap of dalit’s subjugation.

The essence of the caste system lies in the division of labour and artificial classification of people based on one’s birth. The creators of this notion of the caste system played wicked tricks to vanquish the low castes. They created caste hierarchy in different castes and through which they generated alternate systems of subjugation.
of the different castes. Moreover, the low castes were restricted by knowing these tricks by denying them access to education. As a result of this, the low castes engaged themselves in maintaining their status at given places. They could not understand the real tricks. Their ignorance and lack of knowledge made them follow the system strictly. Sharankumar bore insult by the village barber. He tells the incident

The barber first looked at me and then at my head. He shouted, ‘Don’t stand here. I am not going to shave your head.’ I showed him my money in order to convince him. A customer from a different village who was getting his hair cut felt some sympathy for me. He asked me to sit down and take my turn. At that the barber, Isunath, got wild, ‘he is a Mahar. Let him go.’ How could this barber, who used to shave buffalo in the village, refuse to shave my head? (Limbale 22)

It’s a hypnotic effect of the caste system that generates discrimination in a disguised form to which the low castes surrendered and succumb it as it is for them. The devastating effect of the wicked caste system is that a low caste barber did not feel dirt to shave an animal but felt it degrading to shave a bastard son of a Mahar woman. In another similar incident, a low caste cobbler refused to repair his footwear only because of his low caste. The complete absence of education threw the low caste people into the dungeon of ignorance.

Sharankumr gives a realistic account of the inequity in the varied caste fractions and brings to the forefront the deep prevailing discrimination among the low castes. In the caste set up, Mahars consider themselves superior to Mangs. The Mangs and other lower castes were not supposed to mix with them. He recalls the
incident of a Mang boy. He says, “The biggest child was the sharp and long nosed golden vulture. Our playmates include a Mang boy who also was a ‘vulture’, but who, even as we played, kept his distance as he was not supposed to mix with us.” Even a touch of a Mang was a contamination for the Mahars. The caste crusade destroyed the human value. The caste superiority blurs one’s sight to see that the other is also a human being. It does not value friendship, relationship, or humanity. It is the malevolence of the caste system that detaches one from another and puts ‘Caste’ in the centre of all relations. It is a kind of contamination of mind. Sharankumar raises serious questions about significance of caste and its illogical purity-pollution concept. He recalls the incident

Thirsty, we entered my house and I drank water first before giving the cup to Arjya. Shantamai shouted, ‘Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the village to play with? Don’t give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he’ll defile it. Go away.’ I was upset because I couldn’t give water to a friend. Is one’s caste more important than one’s friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Wasn’t Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it? (Limbale 20)

Shantamai’s shouting at Sharankumar is the best example of the deep sunk caste bias in the Indian society. Even low castes too could not get escape from it. It is one of the most dangerous structures of oppression that high castes had formed to divide people and rule over them. The caste superiority gives feudal pride to the high caste and it restricts them from disclosing the underlying tricks of low caste’s oppression. Shantamai’s remarks precisely show the same. She says, “Are you born from the seed of a Mang that you keep their company? You are the son of the village
head. You must eat and play like a prince. You are the son of a Patil’” (Limbale 20)
The feudal caste pride could not enable her to realize the reality of Sharankumar’s life.

It clearly shows that how intact and concrete structure it is. It is a sufficient evidence to say that caste is a social milieu but it is more of a psychological stigma which creates mental barriers and accordingly determines one’s value. The artificial distancing from one another was a serious trick in disguise form that destroyed unity in the Indian society and helped some of the dominant castes to be the rulers of the low castes.

The present autobiography portrays a vivid picture of the sufferings and tortures of the Dalit community in the Indian, particularly of Maharashtra. It is often observed that in the caste hierarchy some so called high castes among the low castes believe that they are different from other low castes and feel proud of their caste identities. Sharankumar shades light on this serious problem of so called high castes attitude towards the low castes, sub-castes and half-castes and presents that this kind of inter-caste discrimination is as pernicious and painful as the discrimination of the high castes. He, further, indirectly asserts the need for serious introspection of the low castes biased attitude and unite to destroy all kinds of discrimination.

Hunger, starvation, malnourishment was the daily affair for the dalits. They would hardly get full stomach food as there were fewer resources of earning. Shantamai had to beg for food and only then the family members would extinguish the fire of hunger. Food was ‘like nectar’ for them. Sharankumar records his fight with hunger
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 smoking bidies. At the sight of my sisters who had gone to sleep hungry, I lost my appetite and could not sleep. I felt like giving a portion of my food to my sister. (Limbale 21)

Sharankumar’s hunger showed him the reality of life. One cannot understand the pangs of starvation until one remains hungry. It is hunger which makes one do anything to fill one’s stomach. It makes one blind and leaves aside the question of morality. His hunger gave him the maturity to understand its significance and its essence in one’s life. He describes hunger in simple words but its universal implication makes it quite significant to take a note of it. He describes hunger as

Bhakri is as large as man. It is as vast as the sky, and bright like the sun. Hunger is bigger than man. Hunger is more vast than the seven circles of hell. Man is only as big as a bhakri, and only as big as his hunger. 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. What about stealing and fighting? 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? The world is born from a stomach, so also the links between mother and father, sister and brother. (Limbale 50-51)
The reason of abject poverty and acute hunger was the lack of economic stability. It was not just the condition of Sharankumar’s family. The whole community had to bear the same flames of hunger. Sharankumar gives us a realistic account of their hunger. He says, “The Maharwada survives on just a few morsels of bhakri and a little water. That is their sample food.” (Limbale 25) The caste system had allotted all filthy and painstaking work to the low castes and they were not getting adequate remuneration for their work. Due to socio-economic deficiencies they had to work like the cattle with empty stomach. They were the real cultivators of the farm but were deprived of the benefits of their hard work. It was the malevolence of the caste system which had lawfully assigned the duty of high caste services to the low castes which exhausted their life physically and mentally. They had to work hard without food and with low wages or just for two times stale bread. The caste privilege made low caste men as the slaves of the high caste landlords and their wives as whores. This enslavement of the dalits has rightly been narrated by Sharankumar while describing his father. He says

Ithal Kamble was a farm worker on a yearly contract to a landlord. It was a job worth seven or eight hundred rupees. He worked hard day and night, on the fields as well as in the house of the landlord. He was one of the beasts that toiled on the farm. The animals in the shed he looked after were no different from this bonded labourer. Ithal Kamble’s poverty was his sad lot, like the yoke-inflamed shoulder of an ox. He worried perpetually about his food. His ribs look like marks of a whip on the skin of an ox. His stomach was so shrunken that it seemed to suck his back like a lap fly. His life had turned into a cattle shed. How was one to bridle one’s tears? How long can one munch on
an empty stomach? One had to toil like oxen at a plough. The water that sang in the farm-channels carried in it a restless drop of his sweat.

(Limbale 35)

It clearly denotes that the menial nature of work, the perverse notion of pollution and the economic inequality had made dalit’s life uncompromisingly miserable. The worst tragedy was that even after doing grubby work; they had to beg for food. Sharankumr’s grandmother had to face it every day. He remembers his grandmother’s begging. He says

Very early in the morning, after eating her bhakri and chutney, Santamai started her job of sweeping the market ground. I followed her carrying bags. We either begged or picked up whatever we could from the market. That was our only remuneration because the village council never paid us. (Limbale 24)

Social deprivations, economic perversity, complete absence of educational enlightenment and soon had thrown low castes into the dungeon of ignorance. They could not know the meaning of life and existence. In order to relish the stress of painstaking physical exertion, they got addicted to liquor and other stimulators. They became drunkards. Their localities were like dumping grounds. Sharankumar objectively observes his society and its decadence. He says “The scorching sun, dogs with their tongues lolling in the heat, utterly charmless children, an old hag smoking, holes in the crumbling walls of the houses, drunkards stumbling along. What else was there in our locality to interest one?” (Limbale 25)

*The Outcaste* throws light on the exploitative agents in the Indian society. It clearly shows that in caste hierarchy the members at the lowest strata are bound to
undergo persecution in a variety of ways at the hands of those who are placed at the higher positions. The dalits were enforced to live life of submissive and dutiful servants who were never supposed to challenge or even imitate their oppressors. Their every attempt was measured as per the assigned duties and any disobedience to it was a cause for trivial atrocities. They can never meet their basic needs even when they are dying for it. Sharankumar’s story tells the same predicament. He suffered the burns of malevolence of the caste tyranny from his birth which was further supplemented with innumerable physical and psychological scares throughout his life.

The fierce scar of caste tyranny he experienced when he was in deep love with a Mahar girl- Shewanta in his locality. They both had great affection for each other. It was the first time he experienced love and affection. He hand deep sentiments for Shewanta. When Sharankumar tells his grandmother about his desire to marry with Shewanta, she raises the fundamental question of caste. This was the first time he realized that an illegitimate child can’t marry even with a low caste girl. The caste system destroys the human sentiments of love and affection. Sharankumar tells his predicament in his own words. He says. “Shantamai promised that she would ask for Shewanta to be my bride. But how was it possible? I was an illegitimate child. How could we marry? (Limbale 27) The serious assault about his legitimacy restricted him to love. Such is the repercussion of caste system. It not only constrained low castes from mixing together but also fenced them from expressing their sentiments. What kind of system it is which stops persons from loving others. It is the cruellest repercussion of the caste system that it allows high castes to use low caste women for sexual trafficking but restricts low castes even from loving the girl of one’s caste.
Sharankumar shortly became aware of the triviality of the tyrannical caste system and observed every incident and experience in his life from humanitarian point of view.

The low castes had to adopt foul business and do odd jobs to survive. The question of survival was the basic question for them. Most of the times, the lives of the adults and the delicate childhood would get spoiled in such heinous activities. Sharankumar’s childhood was also tattered in the same atmosphere. His grandmother and mother had to adapt to liquor selling. Most of the time, their hut was crowded with drunkards flirting around his mother. Sharankumar’s childhood was groomed in such a deadful condition. He tells it helplessly

When the customers come in groups of twos and fours they continued drinking for hours. Cup after cup, they drank the liquor. They would ask me to get salt or salted gram from the shop. I obeyed them, as sometimes they give me a little chivda that they had on them. When they drank for long hours they would spit everywhere in the house. My mother would get annoyed. When they started flirting with my mother, she quarrelled with them. (Limbale 29)

Sharankumar and his family were tightly shackled in the clutches of caste system. It had not left any hope to escape out of it. It was the malevolence of the caste tyranny that shattered Sharankumar’s delicate childhood, youth, and even every moment of his life. It affected his vulnerable psyche and also led him and his young sisters to get addicted to drinking liquor. He honestly says, “Everyone in the house drank, including me. Liquor was like tea to us.” (Limbale 31)

Caste antagonism is ingrained in almost every aspect of Indian life. Caste has always been used for achieving and executing power and dominance. It is deistically
used in politics. Sharankumar highlights this issue with example of Bashakaka, a Muslim sarpanch, who was generous towards low castes and had given Shantamai a job of sweeper and Dada of lighting street lamps. But as the power of a Muslim sarpanch goes to a high caste ‘Wani’, he executes power to deprive both Shantamai and Dada from their jobs. Sharankumar puts it like

Later, Girmallya was elected as sarpanch of the village. He removed Dada from his work of lighting the street lamp because Dada happened to be a Muslim. Dada’s name was Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar. Girmallya, the new sarpanch, was Wani. He was from the opposite political party and did not want a Muslim Kotwal that is Dada, who had been appointed by Bashakaka. Even Santabmai was sacked from her job as a sweeper.” (Limbale 32)

The caste tyranny colonizes one’s mind. It tends to see everything from caste and discriminatory lenses. The high caste person gets defiled with the touch or a shadow of the low caste but the same low caste women do not defile them while making sexual intercourse. Sharankumar raises questions about this hypocrisy in the behaviour of the high caste people. He says “Drunkards accept liquor from a house of a Mahar but not water. They had affairs with Mahar women but wouldn’t accept the food they cooked.” (Limbale 35) It clearly shows the crooked mindset that the caste system develops in one’s mind.

The perverse notion of constant hatred and humiliation made Sharankumar seriously think of his life. He wonders if he is not accepted now, then what would have happened at his birth. If he is an illegitimate child then why did his mother give him birth? He expresses his agonies through some of the radical questions. He asks
Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me in to the world? Why did she put me with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow into the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated because they considered her a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendent? Whose son am I, really? (Limbale 37)

Sharankumar, with his trifling experiences and continuous harassment, started finding out the causes of his humiliation. He started raising questions about the relevance of one’s existence in such wretched conditions. He started observing the social surrounding and the status of different castes. He understood the wicked mechanism of the caste system which granted special rights to the high castes to persecute low castes, the way they want. He narrates the exploitative nature of the high castes in a realistic manner. He says,

People who enjoy high-caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion, and inherent property, have exploited the Dalits of this land. The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil’s whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are
considered the children of a Patil. What else can such a household expect? (Limbale 38)

The malevolent nature of the caste system protects rights of the high castes and makes every attempt of humiliation of the low castes legal. They were allowed to use low caste women as their keeps but not allowed to marry them or to accept their children. As per the norms of the caste system, it was an attempt of defiling the pure blood of one’s caste. It was the cruellest injustice done with the children of the low caste whores. They could not use any of the caste. They become illegitimate – half caste. Sharankumar suffered from this stigma. The tyranny of the caste system destroyed his identity. His mind got haunted with the question Who am I? Sharankumar narrates his predicament

My father and his forefathers were Lingayat. Therefore I am one too. My mother was Mahar. My mother’s father and forefather’s were Mahars, hence I am also a Mahar. From the day I was born until today, I was brought up by my grandfather Mohmood 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 the Jamadar’s affection claim me a 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, where as the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cod connected? (Limbale 38-39)

Sharankumar’s loss of identity and stigma of half-caste was like an incentive to his birth. Truly speaking, Sharankumar could not receive humanity and human
value in his life because off the tyranny of the caste system. Sharankumar’s story speaks of the malevolence of caste tyranny and also sheds enough light on the absence of humanity and its value in the contemporary caste ridden society. His family indirectly shows that a family can survive with love and affection without referring to any caste and religion. It is only true love and concern that matters. Sharankumar did not get mother’s love from his mother rather he received all love and affection from his Mahar grandmother and Muslim grandfather. His grandfather brought him up with unconditional love. It shows that neither religion nor caste can hinder true love. But the tyranny of the caste system does not allow it. Sharankumar realizes the anti-humanistic approach perpetuated through the caste system. He raises fundamental questions about the relevance of religion and caste in one’s life. He says

Is it man who is a hindrance to religion or is it the other way round? Is the premise of religion greater then 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?”(Limbale 12)

Along with socio-economic deprivation, low castes were entrapped deeply in the clutches of ignorance, blind beliefs and superstitions. Denied access to education was the main cause of all their sufferings. They had developed their own notions of beliefs, Gods and religious practices within the realm of the caste restrictions. They were bound with Hindu religion and their gods but just like them their goddesses were also located in extreme outskirts of the village. The caste based discrimination had created extremely powerful oppressive structures that bifurcated Gods and Goddesses of the high and low castes. The paradox is that the high castes worship their Gods with delicious offerings where as the low castes go on with begging and
asking for alms in the name of God. Santamai and other Mang women were carrying baskets during Dashra to seek alms and in a way appease their appetite. Sharankumar recalls Santamai’s begging

She went out with her basket to collect alms from houses. She started first with her own house and it was I who gave her alms. Next she went on Housamai’s house. She would stand in front of the house, announce her arrival and then loudly ask for alms. At some houses she received flour, at others they gave bhakaris. Soon her basket would be full of eatables. (Limbale 52)

The worst tragedy was that the low castes were not even allowed to enter the village temple. It was a serious crime as per the code of societal conducts. Their entry in the temple would make God impure. They were expected to say prayers from the steps outside. Sharankumar experienced this irritating notion of impurity of god when Parshya and he entered in the village temple. They received intense shouting from Parshya’s father. This insult and ban made Sharankumar challenge the very existence of God and relevance of religion. He raises radical questions about this discrimination. He says

God discriminates between man and man. He makes one man rich and the other poor. One is high caste, the other untouchable. 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, nor this country because they ostracize us.
Why are we ostracized? Why are we kept away from other human beings? Why are we kept out of our own selves? Why this discrimination between one human being and another? After all, isn’t everybody’s blood red? (Limbale 62)

Sharankumar’s agonizing questions are the challenge to the existing caste system which inculcated and perpetuated the poison of discrimination in Indian society. The agonies of Sharankumar are the agonies of millions of half-caste and low caste people who were and are being penalized on the basis of illogical social classification.

Sharankumar’s fight was multi-folded. It was the fight to create his space in the society. On the one hand, he had to brawl with the humiliation inflicted by high and low castes and on the other hand, he had to fight with an invisible but all pervasive, omnipresent caste bias prevailing everywhere through religious texts, language, words, practices, customs, traditions, minds, human psyche and so on. It was a kind of battle with the devil of discrimination.

The ignorance and blind beliefs in strange powers made the low castes scared of medical treatments. He remembers that whenever there was vaccination for cholera epidemic everyone in his house was scared of injections and Shantamai used to hide all children somewhere in the fields. Instead of vaccination she would put some ash or dust and then pray to the goddess, ‘Oh mother Ambabai please cure this child.” (Limbale 47) This terrified ignorant mental state of the low castes was the result of lack of education, to which the low castes were strictly prohibited. This blind following of the superstitious practices had completely ruined their lives and had degraded their social status. They were not able to understand the reasons of their
trivial social status and its causes. The slave-like existence of the low castes and half-castes was the best evidence of the dishonoured social status of the low casts. Sharankumar objectively observed the cruelties of the caste tyranny and revealed the reasons of his degraded social status. He pursued education and strived to demolish the tight grip of the caste tyranny and rise up in the society with education and knowledge. The present autobiography is the saga of the malevolence of the caste tyranny and Sharankumar’s struggle to reach to the central locus of all the disciplines in the society.

As Sharankumar grew up the nature of discrimination and harassment also changed its course. His constant harassment and detachment from the main stream life made him raise questions about this difference. When Sharankumar and his mother went to Kaka’s (the high caste father of his younger sisters) mansion to see his sick father, Sharankumar felt the difference between the luxurious and comfortable life in the mansion and desolated hunger stricken stomachs in their hut. Nobody in the family liked their presence and even Kaka hide him somewhere. The only hospitality they received was tea in the iron vessel. It was at the cost of constant sexual intercourses with Massamai. Sharankumar observes the controversy and helplessly asks the reasons of his besmirched social status. He asks

Are we ever going to be lucky enough to wear good clothes and have nice food to eat? What immoral link did we have with this mansion? In what way are we connected to the heritage of this mansion? Where do we stand in the line of this Patil caste? We were born to a Patil and yet we couldn’t claim to belong to this mansion. Why doesn’t this mansion accept us? Why is this mansion dumb? Why are its jaws locked? Why is its tongue tied? (Limbale 55)
The answer to all these questions is the malevolence of the caste tyranny. It is the wicked caste system which chipped off people into different sections and decided fortune of each fraction in relation to one’s birth.

Apart from such humiliation, Sharankumar continued his education with the help of kind teachers. He felt a grave problem of putting father’s name in the school application form. He was not a legitimate child of Hanmanta Patil and therefore the village sarpanch did not give him the certificate. Sharankumar severely suffered the burns of caste tyranny at almost every step in his life. He did not have a father. His mother was being shifted to other Patil. His grandmother was deserted by her real husband and was living with a Muslim man. From the social point of view, he was not linked to any single caste or religion. In the artificial web of the caste and religion a human body of blood and flesh suffers a heartrending persecution. Sharankumar suffered an intolerable humiliation in public which made him burst into tears. What can one expect from such a society which denies the value of the human body for the tag of caste and religion? Sharankumar asks the same question and narrates his predicament. He says, “What else did I have expect a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither a father’s name, nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all.” (Limbale 59)

Sharankumar and his mother suffered such serious burns of caste which should not come to anybody’s lot. It is extremely painful even to imagine the persecution, harassment and frustration they suffered at the hands of Hanmanta and Kaka Patil. They did not value the feminine sentiments of Masamai or the heartbreaking feelings of a naive child- Sharankumar. The Patil’s high caste privileges and socio-economic dominance made them use Masamai whenever they
want and whoever they choose. Mssamai was extremely agonized when Kaka tried to ‘persuade her to sleep with Hanmant’ again (Limbale 61).

Sharankumar had been observing the tragedy of his mother and realizing the causes of her worry. He had to bear varied kinds of humiliation and insults and the cause of it was his mother’s misbehaviour. He had to carry the burden of caste throughout his life. He was taken to task by the villagers and heartlessly often insulted by calling the son of a whore. This constant persecution did not make him curse his mother or hate her, rather it made him mature enough to understand the needs and desires of every human soul. Everyone desires love, care, concern, security and so on. Sharankumar underlines these unfulfilled desires of his mother and grandmother and presents their helplessness. He says, “They sold themselves to be loved and cared for by someone. They hadn’t sold their bodies to appease their lust. Do we exist just for the sake of that hunger? Beyond hunger lies a vast life.” (Limbale 64)

Sharankumar got humiliated by the high caste men as well as women. He was discriminated and demoralized by the high caste girl. It is the high caste privilege that inculcated sense of superiority in them. M. N. Singh rightly presents the same point while analysing the reason of the long sustenance of casteism and untouchability. He says, “The system of Untouchability sustains the natural pride of the Hindus and make them feel as well as look big.” (Singh 135) The superiority of the high castes had religious sanction and it was all made lawful through religious scriptures. It has the low castes at the lowest rungs of the social order. The low castes had no social existence and recognition as common human beings. They were synonymous with defilement and pollution. Mere shadow of the low caste was defiling for the high castes. The sense of superiority and dominance was deeply
rooted in the minds of the high castes. Sharankumar experienced it from a high caste girl Shobhi when they were crossing a narrow road. She shouted with all superiority at Parshya and Sharankumar and said, “Mahars have become bold these days. They now dare to walk straight up to you. Can’t you see that I am carrying drinking water? Your touch will make it impure.” (Limbale 70) This infuriating insult is the clear indication of the deep prevalence of the malevolence of the caste tyranny in the psyche of Shobhi. She was the dreadful symbol of the caste tyranny for Sharankumar. He says, “Her feet, her thighs, her arms, her face- everything was a part of the system she belonged to.” (Limbale 71)

Sharankumar faced a series of sever insults and discrimination throughout his life. He was always made realized his degraded status in the society. His delicate childhood was crushed in the inhuman forces of unfair practices. On the one hand, he suffered from the burden of half-caste and on the other hand, he faced acute poverty, hunger and superstitions. His upbringing was characterized with ignorance, blind beliefs, different addictions and so on. He was not exposed to the outer world and so there was no hope for any positive change in his dreadful surrounding. Until he reached Chapalgaon high school, he was fascinated with the religious concepts of namaz, prayers and mantras but his entry in the boarding school opened up a new world for him. He got the company of the other Dalit boys and the first seed of revolution and Buddhism was sown at the same place. Education sharpened his intellect and made him aware of his deplorable condition. He realized the strength of education. He realized that self esteem and social status can be brought up only with education.

Sharankumar took all tremendous efforts to continue education. Apart from having a series of hitches, he strived to be sincere towards his studies and
responsibilities. Due to poverty, he wore old clothes of his friends and damaged footwear found at the bus stand. Education made him confident and self reliant. He confesses it and says that “with education there grew in us a sense of pride.” (Limbale 9) Naturally, he developed self confidence and it made him restless to see the discrimination around him. He started observing the discriminatory agents in the society which made low castes untouchables. He recalls that the low castes were distanced at every place. They were restricted to enter the temples and public places. In the hotels, there were separate cup and saucers for them and the helpless dalits had to follow it unquestionably. He narrates one incident at Shivrama’s tea shop which highlights the malevolent nature of the caste tyranny. He says

Rambaap used to go to Shivram’s tea shop and drink tea from it. There was also an aluminium tumbler kept separately for us to drink water from. As we held the tumbler the water was poured into it carefully, without any contact between us and the giver. 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 a Mang to hand money directly to anyone was a sin. (Limbale 76)

How can a man of blood and flesh be an untouchable and the money of the same person be acceptable? What is the logic and what sense does it make? It is all about an intentional dehumanization of the vulnerable low castes. Sharankumar observed these irritating experiences of humiliation from humanistic point of view and revealed the reason behind it. The education provided him the insight to critically analyse his surroundings and set him to the task of dismantling the invisible
structures of low caste humiliation. He dares to file complaint against the hotel owner in the police station but there too he had to face the same abuse. Sharankumar’s act of rebellion is very symbolic. It signifies the commencement of a new journey towards self-enlightenment and emancipation. It was the beginning of the journey to break down the age old shackles of the caste tyranny and raise questions about the peripheral status of the low castes. It was an endeavour of marching towards the central locus from the periphery. The following quote adequately implies the changed nature of an educated Sharankumar

“Our forefathers used to be the security guards at this Patils mansion. Whenever the Patil had to go away to town on official work my forefathers would protect the mansion. Our forefathers were so naïve that they didn’t consider even once, the possibility of seeing the beautiful face of the Patil’s sleeping wife. On the contrary they sacrificed their daughters, wives, sisters, and daughters-in law to dark nights in the Patil’s mansion. They were sacrificed like animals are sacrificed at the time of laying the foundation stone of a building. Our forefathers were proud to be fed on the leftover food given to them by the Patils. This, my history, made me restless like the young Shivaji. (Limbale 79)

Sharankumar realises that it is only the caste tyranny that has made them slaves. He confesses it boldly by saying that “casteism made us bitter.” (Limbale 16) Education gave him the power to judge the situations and raise questions about the inferior status of the low castes. He narrates the example of Narayan Patil’s well which was dug up by the Mahars. The Mahars gave their sweat for it to dig deep till they found the source of water. But, after that, the well was banned for the Mahars.
The water mixed with Mahar’s sweat is not impure but the later touch of a Mahar would make it polluted. Sharankumar challenges this foolish notion of impurity and raises the basic question “What is so peculiar about our touch that it pollutes water, food, houses, cloth, graveyard, teashop, god, religion and even man?” (Limbale 81)

Sharankumar continued his education with great difficulties. Irrespective of having great difficulties he passed matriculation examination with first class and stood second in his class. He had to beg for money to continue college education but the high castes never acknowledged his yearnings and brilliance. The high caste Patils were looking at them only from the lenses of caste and lust. The mature mind of Sharankumar could not bear it. He wanted to rebel against such a humiliation. He narrates the incident

Santamai and I went to a moneylender. He was drunk. Shantamai and I stood at some distance from him. Shantamai’s blouse was torn exposing her breast. The moneylender kept staring at the peeping breast, but he refused to lend us the money. His look spread like poison in my heart. I wished that the blouse of this moneylender’s mother or sister was torn so that I could stare at their breasts. I burned within. Our poverty was detestable. I wanted to rebel against such humiliation. (Limbale 82)

It is very true that whenever a person gets education he starts raising questions about self and others. If the person is humiliated for one or the other reason, he starts finding its causes and sets to rectify them. Access to education paves a way to self and social realization and social recognition as well. The same happened with Sharankumar. The education gave him a new vision and new status.
He became conscious of his low esteem and the stigma imposed on his personality by the cunning controversies in the malevolent caste system. He felt its shame and became determined to get rid of it. He found out the main cause of his humiliation in the caste system. As a reaction against it, he challenged the whole notion of this tyrannical system and traced the illogical rationale behind the origin and development of this phenomenon. He says, “How is a person born with his caste? How does he become untouchable as soon as he is born? How can he be criminal by birth? From his feet Lord Brahma gave birth to a vast low caste community. Since then this community has been living as untouchables.” (Limbale 82) The realization of the root cause of low caste humiliation was the greatest insight Sharankumar got from education and Ambedkarite vision. It gave him inner strength to his willpower to challenge the oddities of human existence. Education inculcated self confidence as well as self and collective consciousness in him which made him associate his hunger, poverty and sufferings with his community. He says, “There are so many Dalit students like us. This pain of poverty was not just mine. We all existed like grains crushed in a stone grinder.” (Limbale 83)

Sharankumar was greatly influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s teachings. Education and active participation in social movements brought revolutionary changes in his nature and personality. His anger and rebellious nature was the indicator of his adaptation of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s preaching. He got energy to throw away all the clutches of slavery and assert a new meaning to his life. He found an immortal source of energy in Babasaheb. He owes his life to Babasaheb- the change maker and emancipator of his life. He expresses his deep attachment and sense of gratitude to him. He says
“I stopped saying ‘namaskar’ and started saying ‘Jai Bhim’ instead. I substituted Babasaheb for Ambedkar since it sounded less formal and more respectful. My youth has assumed a new meaning and significance. The blood flowed like hot lava through my body. My mind burned with myriad thoughts in silent protest. Babasaheb filled me with relevance. I felt I was meeting my mother of the last seven births. I burned within myself whenever I heard news about the atrocities against Dalits. It made me very impatient. (Limbale 86-87)

Sharankumar’s protest and rebellion against the dominance of the high castes was the result of education and revolutionary thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He understood that education is the only remedy to all kinds of deprivation and slavery. Education enabled him to reveal the religious tricks played by the high castes to make dalits submissive. He revealed the worst consequences of Manu’s innumerable laws which threw the low castes in the dungeon of ignorance. Therefore, he underlines the significance of education and the significance of the facilities for the low castes. He gets angry whenever he hears the discussion about stopping the facilities of the dalits. He advises them to experience the intensity of dalit’s sufferings. He writes

Those who say that facilities must be cancelled should first face casteism themselves. They must 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 is lying drunk beside you. They wouldn’t then protest against injustice. Why shouldn’t we be suspicious of you? Other higher-caste boys of my age addressed us derogatively, but I had to address them respectfully. My
tongue itself is circumscribed by Manu’s innumerable laws.” (Limbale 89-90)

Sharankumar realized that the malevolence of the caste tyranny made him sub-human. It ruined his social status and deprived him of everything. The caste tyranny not only detached him from high and low castes but it separated him from his parents and siblings. It destroyed the significance of relationships and valued everything on the ground of sex and caste. It is a matter of common knowledge that every individual needs love, care, affection and security for the emotional well being of a person but the caste tyranny deprived Sharankumar of these basic emotional needs also. He could not get love from his siblings rather they were detached from each other at the very early age. Sharankumars inner sufferings were more painful than the external humiliation derived from the malevolence of the caste tyranny. He blames the evil caste system for restricting him from loving others and even deprived of getting loved. He says

I am twenty-five years old now and can’t recognize my own brothers-nor my father. They are all alive. We may not recognize each other even if we happen to travel in the same bus. That’s what this journey of life is like. Our eyes are blindfolded and we wander not knowing where, like Dhritrashtra and Gandhari or Karna and Kunti or Eklavya and Ashwathama. On the battlefield of life we fight our own fathers, uncles, sisters, and mothers. We battle with ourselves as if we are our own enemies. All this is because we are controlled by caste. (Limbale 91)
Along with caste system, the traditions, customs, rituals, and beliefs immensely increased the agonies of the low castes as these things were purely based on nonsensical ideas prevailing only in the low castes. The caste system and illogical traditions and customs unitedly cleaned out the social status of the low castes. They had unjust customs like dedication of their children as the permanent devotee of the god. They would not understand that their ignorance and fear to disobey these customs would spoil the lives of the children. Such girl devotees would be used by the chosen guru or the priest and again their children would live the life of bastards. It was a chain of dehumanizing the low castes and even their coming generations. Unfortunately, such rubbish traditions existed only in the low castes. Sharankumar observes this intermingling of the serious and grave problem of low caste victimization and expresses his sense of anger for the differences created by the caste system. He raises the question of this difference and relevance of such humiliating customs. He writes

They [Low caste people] also dedicate their children as Potraj in the name of Goddesses Laxmi. There is also a custom of dedicating children to God Khandoba. A boy born as such is called Waghya and a girl is called Murali. I have never come across a Potraj among the Brahmins or a Waghya among the Lingayats, the high castes. Why are such customs laid down for Mahars only? (Limbale 92-93)

Sharankumar reveals the ring of victimization of the low castes through the destruction of their thinking faculty. They were made to obey the customs undoubtedly because they were sanctioned by the religious writings. This unquestionable acceptance of the customs and traditions had destroyed the lives of the present and coming generations also. Sharankumar focuses on the trivial customs
which makes a Murli a wife of a God but her child as a bastard and impure. He realized the need of rejection of these traditions and the acceptance of Buddhist principals which rejects discrimination and values human beings.

Sharankumar had to bear stifled kinds of insults due to his half-caste. He could not get a suitable girl from Mahar community as he was rejected for having impure blood running through his veins. He had to live with a hybrid identity which constantly made him realize his low status and worthlessness. He was treated like an animal of different species. With great difficulties, he could manage to settle his marriage with a daughter of a drunkard Maryappa Kamble. Sharankumar felt the injuries more severely of his hybrid identity during his wedding. His in-laws had printed photograph of Dr. Ambedkar but Kaka had printed photos of Hindu God Shiva and Goddess Parvati. He wanted his wedding ceremony conducted according to Buddhist rituals but Kaka insisted on Hindu rituals. The Hindu wedding rituals made the Mahar guests disappointed and he had to face the insult.

The present autobiography throws light on inter-caste as well as intra -caste discrimination. Sharankumar faced severe insults at the hands of Mahars in the name of impure blood or half caste. Can any one’s blood be impure? Why caste does destroy the common sense of man in order to feel the sameness of all individuals having the same colour of blood and human sentiments. The tragedy in Sharankumar’s life is that he experienced the invisible walls of bias against half-castes and sub-castes in the mind of Mahars. It creates a big question mark about the Mahars’ adaptation of Dr. Ambedkar’s ideologies. He records one incident of Dr. Ambedkar Birth Anniversary celebration in Ahmedpur where the Mahar leader insisted on him to be with them as the Mahars from the other end of the village were of impure blood. He writes, “Limbale sahib we are of pure blood. Those people
living down there are impure. Perhaps you don’t know that. Don’t be on their side at
the meeting tomorrow. The president for this celebration must be from our side and
not from the other.” (Limbale 106) This biased attitude raises serious question about
adaptation of Dr. Ambedkar’s ideology by the Mahars because even in the Jayanti
celebration they followed the same discrimination which was strictly rejected by Dr.
Ambedkar. Sharankumar does not make any direct statement about these follies but
the experiences narrated in the autobiography are sufficient evidences of the deep
rooted caste bias even in the low caste people. It asserts a serious need for self
introspection of the low castes and to rectify the very discriminatory mindset against
which they had been fighting.

The tyranny of the caste system shaped the minds of the people in such a way
that gives excessive importance to the traditions, customs and conventions rather than
the qualities, abilities and potential of an individual. Sharnkumar had to face caste
discrimination even after getting a good job. He had to face great difficulties to get a
room on rent to stay in Latur. He had to face bitter insults from the high caste house
owners as they directly denied to rent a room to the Mahars and Muslims. “They
would directly say”, Sharankumar narrates, “We don’t want to rent out our house to
Muslims and Mahars.” (Limbale 106) It clearly shows that the low castes were not
accepted even if they undergo intellectual transformation and achieve economic
stability. Sharankumar could never come out of the curse of caste. It is an unfortunate
truth in our society that whatever heights a man might scale, his caste is never cast
off. It remains as an inseparable part of his identity. It happened with Sharankumar
also. His caste always remained a cause of scorn and contempt and only the type of
humiliation changed. The caste system makes everyone caste conscious and corrupts
everyone’s mind. The caste tyranny followed Sharankumar like an enemy which
tends to create a sense of superiority in the high castes and alienate low castes. This persistent alienation, negation and abnegation detached them from the society they were living in. It made him think of the caste system and himself and ask a pertinent question ‘‘What is so particular about the touch of the low castes that make everything impure.’’ He asks this question to himself and says, “I used clean clothes, bathed everyday and washed myself clean with soap, and brushed my teeth with toothpaste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable?” (Limbale 107)

Sharankumar had to face multifaceted discrimination and a heap of insults. These discriminations against low castes are the reflections of the deep and strong sentiments against low castes. The atrocities against Sharankumar show the immorality of the caste system which justifies dissimilarity between high and low castes and bring disadvantages to the lowly people.

Along with caste conflict Sharankumar raises strong voice against religious rivalry. Sharankumar got father’s love and support from a Muslim irrespective of his religion. Dada provided all support to him but in the social context it was not acceptable. In the traditional social structure a person form particular case and religion should be limited to one’s own caste or religion. He can’t transcend the boundaries of caste and religion and if he dares to do so he is liable to suffer heinous assaults and ostracism. The tyranny of the caste and religion had corrupted the minds of the people that do not accept an individual as a human being and rather account him only in terms of caste and religion. Sharankumar raises voices against this discrimination and says
Hindus and Muslims are both born in this country. Both are human beings. The blood of both people is red. Only their religions are different. Yet they are after each other just because they have different religions. In the name of religion there is bloody carnage, riots and crusades. They don’t show any humanity to a human being from another religion. If you cut out his religion a man is still a man. So why doesn’t a human being from one religion love a human being from another? Why does religion hinder them? Why is man imprisoned by conventions? (Limbale102)

Sharankumar records very serious and grave repercussions of caste and religious biases in the society which decides every ones place and even burial ground on the basis of one’s caste but what about the half castes? They had to suffer humiliation at the hands of both high and low castes throughout their life. They are not accepted by any caste but what will happen to them after their death? Sharankumar concludes his autobiography with pointing out the futility in the caste and religion base discrimination and raises question about who has and why has he created these oppressive structures which destroy eternal value of humanity. He expresses his fear about the last rites of his Muslim grandfather and Mahar grandmother. He says

Who will undertake Dada’s funeral after his death? Will Muslims attend his cremation? What will happen to his corpse? Where would they bury his body? In which graveyard will they cremate him? Would people come for the rituals after Santamai’s and Massamai’s death? Why this labyrinth of customs? Who has created such values of right
and wrong, and what for? If they consider my birth illegitimate what values am I to follow? (Limbale 113)

The Outcaste is one of the masterpieces in contemporary Dalit literature. It is a painful narrative of an untouchable, a half-caste child and the heinous atrocities inflicted on him by the social system. Broadly speaking, after Indian independence, the doors of education were opened for everyone and especially, after Dr. Ambedkar’s enlightenment of dalits, many of the dalit youngsters pursued education and became self aware. They got new insights to look at themselves and the world around. They started raising questions about the relevance of the prevailing customs and traditions and started challenging the whole socio-religious mechanism of the caste system. The present autobiography is a product of one of such self enlightened dalits who marked the devastating effects of the malevolence of the caste tyranny and boldly puts forward the socio-psychological harassment of a son of a whore of a high caste Patil.

The caste tyranny made him out caste. It entailed him to innumerable miseries. It destroyed his identity and destroyed his history as well. He helplessly states that, “my history is my mother’s life, at the most my grandmother’s. My ancestry does not go back any further.” Sharankumar rebels against this wicked system and attempts to dismantle the pillars of rigid social order by refusing its religious sanctions. Vasudev Mulate, an eminent writer and a renowned critic, points it out rightly. He says

Every individual getting birth in a caste based society gets birth with some or the other caste. It comes with birth and lasts till the end of his life. His happiness and sorrows get shrunk under the tough crust of caste. However, his whole life gets restricted to his caste. Obviously,
to release one’s life from these restrictions and discrimination, one has to throw away the religion and the same zest of throwing away religion to discard discrimination is reflected through Akkarmashi” (Mulate 1999)

His sufferings loudly raise voice for freedom, equality and fraternity. It asserts the need for driving out and dispelling the malevolence of the caste tyranny and wiping out the inhuman practices like untouchability. He raises voice to aware the low castes to strive to get education and reach to the central locus of all the disciplines of life.

While reading the autobiography one finds a number of irritating incidents of insult, discrimination and social relationships and with the intensity of the humiliation one finds that the narrator should be boiling with anger. But the remarkable thing is that he nowhere loses his control over language or became violent in the entire narrative. This shows his maturity and at the same time affinity developed towards Buddhist preaching introduced by Dr. Ambedkar. He implies his affinity towards Buddha while narrating the long history of injustice. He says, “My agony is not limited to myself. Injustice done to me is not just today’s phenomenon but had a long history. The roots of the injustice were deep into history, for many thousands of years my agony was also the agony of Lord Buddha” (Limbale 79)

One of the special features of dalit autobiographies in general and this autobiography in particular is that it transcends the boundaries of personal sphere and assimilates itself with the experience of all the low castes. The readers find their similar sentiments in the writer’s personal experiences and the writer gets subjective inputs from the society around him. This intermingling of experiences could happen
because the cause of their victimization is the same. Sharankumar expresses his agonizing feeling about persecution of dalit women while presenting the persecution of his own mother and confesses it boldly. He says, “I grow restless whenever I read about a rape in the newspaper. A violation anywhere in the country, I, feel is a violation of my mother” (Limbale ix-x)

Sharankumar strived to wipe-out the stigma of being half caste and at times he raises voice to eradicate the malevolence of the caste system. In his interview taken by Jaydeep Sarangi, he records the devastative nature of the caste system and his ideological construct. He says, “The caste system is inhuman which divided humans on basis of discrimination.” And therefore, further he adds, “Our ideology is anti-caste.” (Sarangi, Interview)

The present autobiography sheds light on the devastating effects of the tyranny of the caste system on the low castes. It presents how millions of low castes fall the victims of the wicked nature of the caste system and how they suffered from the stigma of being Outcaste. Whatever sufferings, insults, physical and psychological scares Sharankumar bore, are the results of high caste power politics. The high caste Hindus, being dominant groups in the society, manipulated their ideas through different institutions and used power to dehumanize dalits.

While revealing the varied lairs of the tyranny of the caste system, this autobiography makes us- high and low caste peoples- introspect and tend to reassess our course of action and intellectual enrichment while dealing with crucial issues like caste and its repercussions on dalits. It at times asserts a need to understand the multifaceted victimization of low caste, sub-caste and half caste dalits which
diversely and more adversely affect their life. At the same time it strongly asserts the need for creating casteless society without any discrimination.

Limbale invalidates the existence of the caste system in the Indian society. The Indian caste system is extremely powerful and deep-rooted but through his unremitting fights against all inequitable social practices, he attempts to exterminate evil trends in the caste ridden Indian society. Being a self-aware and enlightened individual, Sharankumar Limbale, boldly fought with the existing dominant ideological structures of the caste system and disobeyed the extremely powerful and exploitative structure of caste.
Works Cited


Sarngi in interview with Sharankumar Limbale (http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=content&sd=ArticelD=15011#sthash.q1DqRjCwL.dpuf)