



## SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S *HINDU*: AN ANECDOTE OF THE CHAOTIC INDIAN SOCIETY

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper depicts the atrocities endured by Dalits at the hands of the elite Caste Hindus. Sharankumar Limbale's Hindu is a timeless creation because factors such as socio-economic and socio-political issues are still prevalent which is imperative in any society but have become the basis for subjugation and domination of last rung of the people. The paper tries to find the commonalities of the issues present in the text juxtaposing with the condition prevailing in our society. The paper deal with how the stigma of untouchability is still prevailing in our society by depicting numerous incidents from Limbale's Hindu.*

*Keywords: Dalit, Conspiracy, Revolution, Cultural Identity, Egalitarianism.*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Marathi Dalit writer, Shrankumar Limbale, in his novel, *Hindu* (2010), presents a powerful portrayal of India's social upheavals during the last decade and a half from a Dalit perspective. Based on Dalit and Savarna conflict in a village in Maharashtra, the novel *Hindu*, takes a measure of India's successes and failures as a nation in terms of the situation of Dalits in the society.

Before diving deep into the intricacies of Limbale's *Hindu* which depicts a Dalit life enduring atrocities at the hands of the upper caste it is imperative to know in brief about the term Dalit. The word literally means „ground down“ or „crushed“, and thus effectively signifies Dalits understanding of themselves as an oppressed people. Sharankumar Limbale himself defines Dalit in the broadest possible way to include the dispossessed and oppressed of India. He says:

Harijans and neo- Buddhists are not the only Dalits. This term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm laborers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also to be included.(11)

Arun Prabha Mukherjee, the translator of Limbale's *Hindu* into English from its original Marati edition, asserts “The term „dalit“ is the product of an organized social struggle”.(xiii) *Hindu* by Sharankumar Limbale is not based on excavations of the protagonist's past memories, family conflict, growing-up pains, romance that are the usual plotting devices of novels but it portrays the organised social struggle of the Dalits. *Hindu*'s propelling event is the murder of Taty Kamble, a Dalit activist by a group of higher caste villagers because he had become too big for his boots in their eyes and through his Ambedkarite theatre was threatening the established order by inciting the Mahars to convert.

*Hindu*, thus, is not a typical murder mystery novel where the entire plot is devoted to the deferred revelation of the actual murder. In *Hindu*, we find out the identity of the murderers who swarmed and killed Taty Kamble in cold blood and with a precision. Indeed, such murders of Dalits, a more appropriate word would be lynching, happen as routinely in modern India as they did in Ambedkar's lifetime. The situation has not improved for Dalits

in modern India. We are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the sad part is that Indian society doesn't seem to have evolved or moved on from caste-based oppression and violence. Dalits, formerly untouchables, across India have been threatened, abused, beaten and killed for seemingly mundane reasons, highlighting that how vulnerable the community is in the country. Some of the incidents that have taken place in recent times will validate the reality of our merciless society. A Dalit farmer identified as Kishorilal Jatav, was burnt alive allegedly by four men in Bhopal district when he opposed their attempt to encroach on his land on June 22. The incident took place at Parsoria Ghatkhedi in Berasia tehsil on 21 June. The 70-year-old farmer succumbed to injuries before reaching the hospital. In another incident three minor Dalit boys were stripped, beaten and paraded naked in a village in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district for swimming in a village well. The video of the assault went viral on social media and then the authorities swung into action. As soon as locals, mostly upper caste men, heard about boys jumping into the well to beat the scorching heat, they gathered in large numbers and forced the boys to strip and parade them naked around the village.

Tatya Kamble's murder is carried out on 14 October, an important day in Dalit history as it was on 14 October 1956 that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism to fulfil his vow that although he was born a Hindu, he would not die as one. Tatya Kamble is beckoned by his murderers to the village square from the Dhammachakra Parivartan celebrations where the Mahar community is gathered together to listen to speeches exhorting them to convert to escape the curse of untouchability. Tatya Kamble is murdered, but the murder takes place, he has spoken the words that have upset high caste Hindus ever since the Gandhi-Ambedkar battles of the 1930s:

Why do you stay in a religion that does not allow you to enter the temple? Why do you stay in a religion that does not acknowledge your humanity? Why do you stay in a religion that does not allow you even water? A religion that forbids the treatment of humans as humans is not a religion but naked domination. A religion in which touching of animals is permitted but touching of humans is prohibited is not a religion but an insanity. (50-51)

In fact, Tatya Kamble's words are infused with Ambedkar's influence. *Hindu*, indeed, is a continuation of the epic debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar where one insisted that Dalits were Hindus and the other vehemently denied it. *Hindu* thus probes a painful nerve in India's body politic: the ongoing violence against Dalits and the Dalit threats of conversion to other religions.

We hear of Tatya Kamble's plans to contest in the village Patil's post in the coming elections through a casual, roadside conversation of three Dalit friends. Within two hours, we see his brutal murder in the village square through the eyes of one of his friends Milind Kamble who is riding in the car of two shady high caste characters, Manikchand and Gopichand, going towards their farmhouse for a night of drinking, dining and womanizing. The car does not stop. The occupants do not use their cell phone to call the police, but go on to their farmhouse where they gorge on fried mutton and then drag and rape a Dalit woman, hiding in their fields with other Dalits in the aftermath of Tatya Kamble's murder and rape.

Limbale writes: "Murder! Shouted Manikchand. Tatya Kamble's blood-soaked body was twitching by the roadside. Get the car moving. Manikchand shouted at Gopichand, and the latter speeded up and drove to Kavale's bara". (11)

They murdered Tatya Kamble to teach a lesson to the Dalits. Dalits have been murdered for thousands of years. Injustice and atrocities are committed against them daily and yet why doesn't anyone speak against this terrorism? The murder was just the intimation to the Dalits that if they try to raise their voice against the atrocities which are inflicted on them since centuries they would be killed and trampled under the boots of „leather“. Even the law and order was not able to create enough fear in the minds of the higher caste people. They have



always bribed the authorities and same happened in this context as well.

Manikchand speaks: "They will go to jail. The law is on the Dalits" side now. When they are arrested under the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act, they won't even be able to get bail. They will be acquitted by paying money". (12-13)

This reply from Manikchand presents a reality of the law and order machinery which is used at the hands of the upper caste people for their own convenience and comfort. They say that everyone is equal in the eyes of law but since centuries we have observed the cruel game of the upper caste people who consider law and order as a puppet at their own hands. Although some laws are implemented for the safeguard of Dalits and Dalits" rights but the same are made mockery by cunning and devious means of upper class people like Manikchand and Gopichand. Upper caste people think that they are above the law and order and have always tried to enforce their own rules and restrictions on lower caste people. An incident which took place in Madhya Pradesh showcases the violation of law and order by a village Sarpanch. A 30-year-old Dalit man identified as Dayaram Ahirwar was allegedly beaten up for riding a motorcycle past the house of a sarpanch in a village in Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh. The victim, Dayaram Ahirwar, in his complaint alleged that on 21 June, the village sarpanch, Hemant Kurmi, his brothers and one of their neighbours beat him up severely after objecting to his riding a motorcycle in front of their house. The men also hurled caste abuses while thrashing him.

Later in the novel we see Taty Kamble"s funeral procession becoming a political football and turning violent. We see the manufacturing and staging of events by devious manipulators who exploit Dalits for their own selfish gains. Indeed, Manikchand and Gopichand manage to turn Taty Kamble"s murder into a lucrative business opportunity for themselves. Sharankumar Limbale focuses on the process of the building of new homes and the political drama surrounding it. The frequent visits of the bureaucrats, the activists and finally the arrival of the minister"s entourage for the inauguration. He focuses on how the high castes prevent the Dalit Sarpanch from hoisting the national flag on Independence Day lets he pollutes it. We see how the same high caste villagers who had been complicit in the murder of Taty Kamble and who do not allow Dalits into their temple welcome the Dalit minister with the Hindu ceremony of arti, obviously not polluted this time. Vemula Yellaiah in his interview with K.Purushotham and J.Bheemaiahentitled, *Our Exit from the Left was the beginning of Dalit Writing*" asserts that the lower caste people have always been fooled by the politicians. On a surface level it seems that they are fighting for our cause but if we observe it is not the case. By devious and cunning ways they try to fulfill their selfish gains by using the helpless condition of Dalits. Conspiracy is their mainstay weapon by which they use Dalits as their cadre.

One of Sharankumar Limbale"s goals is to assess the successes and failures of the Dalit movement. Limbale says about the current impasse in the movement :

"Milind Kamble is a brutally frank portrait of a Dalit activist who has betrayed the movement for the sake of the scraps that the Savarnas throw in his way: liquor, restaurants meals and sex. We cannot blame everything on outsiders. We have to look at our own faults. Milind Kamble and his types needs to be exposed for the sake of the health of the movement" (xxi).

Through the novel *Hindu* especially through Milind Kamble"s first person narrative and interior monologues, Limbale takes us into the nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen and shows how they unite and function in causing a great loss to the Dalit communities.

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