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## Rethinking Caste Conflict in Sharankumar Limbale's Novel *Hindu*

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### ABSTRACT:

This study aims to rethink caste conflict in Indian society through the Marathi Ambedkarite writer Sharankumar Limbale's Marathi novel *Hindu* published in 2003 and translated into English by Mukherjee. It has depicted the conflict between upper caste and lower caste people in small village of Maharashtra due to their higher and lower status decided by caste system. The history of caste is very unjust and brutal in Indian society which has rejected the rights of livelihood of lower section of the society in pre-independence India. However, it is still in post-independence India raising ugly head and making lives of lower caste people awful. The story of the novel revolves around the murder of Taty Kamble who belongs to Mahar community and fights against the unjust activities of upper caste people through his Jalsa (revolutionary songs) and the upper caste families who directly involved in the murder. Sahankumar Limbale as an Ambedkarite writer raised many questions on caste based society in his novel *Hindu*. The present paper interrogates the status quo of suppressed and oppressed people of society in current scenario and tries to explain their predicament in post-independence era. Although, Indian constitution has abolished caste system but injustice always remains an integral part of the lives of innocent people of lower section of the society. Basically, Limbale's novel depicted various issues of lower caste people in the state of Maharashtra, which are enough to show whole structure of Indian society. Thus, main idea of this novel is why people of lower caste communities remain marginalised and kept away from mainstream society. This paper will discuss different issues of lower caste people in modern society and anarchies between both upper as well lower caste people regarding their status.

Dr. Ambedkar has emancipated lower caste people from untouchability and these following his revolutionary path, which was direct threat (in the form of conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism) to upper castes. Therefore, they are making themselves strong in the form of Hindutva and directly or indirectly giving threat to Ambedkarite (follower of Ambedkar) forces. So, here is need to discuss caste system through modern perspective reach to main destination.

**Key Words:** Dalit Literature, Caste, Suppression, Oppression, Politics of Identity

### Introduction and Context:

Sharankumar Limbale's novel *Hindu* (2010) delves into the deep-rooted caste conflict in Indian society, offering a compelling critique of caste hierarchies and oppression. Limbale, a prominent Dalit writer and activist, uses his narrative to expose the structural violence inherent in caste-based discrimination. His novel reflects the lived experiences of Dalits while raising significant questions about identity, politics, and social justice. Sharankumar Limbale's *Hindu* is a searing indictment of caste-based violence and the enduring inequities within Indian society. By exposing the brutality of the caste system and the struggles of Dalits, Limbale compels readers to confront the realities of caste conflict and reimagine a more just, equal society. The novel becomes a powerful assertion of Dalit identity and resistance against systemic oppression.

According to Limbale, the novel is

"an important document in the social history of contemporary India...The novel is not a whodunit and it moves away from the genre of autobiography and memoirs. It presents to us a politically, socially and culturally laden work which...challenges the claims of universality made by mainstream high caste writers and its critics by pointing out that they either ignore Dalits altogether or misrepresent them" (Limbale xv).

The novel revolves around *the life of a Dalit protagonist* and his experiences of discrimination, humiliation, and resistance. The story reflects the deep-rooted caste prejudices embedded within society and highlights the *struggle of the Dalit community* to assert their dignity and identity. Limbale portrays how religion and caste intersect to oppress marginalized groups and sustain societal hierarchies. The novel focuses on *social injustice, caste politics, religious hypocrisy, and human rights violations*. Through the protagonist's perspective, Limbale questions the role of religion in perpetuating inequality and challenges the societal norms that dehumanize Dalits.

### Caste as a System of Oppression :

The novel, begins with the murder of Taty Kamble, an Ambedkarite Jalsa artist and an ardent Dalit activist. Taty Kamble's activism centered on the Dalit Liberation. For that, he used the traditional art form of the Mahars and Mangs for bringing awareness among the caste oppressions and it provoked upper caste of the village of Achalpur. Taty Kamble became a threat to the age old social order. Taty Kamble believes in conversion to Buddhism. He appeals to his fellowmen to convert on Dhamma Chakra Parivartan day.

In the meeting, he bluntly criticized the Hindu religion,

“Why do you stay in a religion that doesn’t allow you to enter the temple? Why do you stay in a religion that doesn’t acknowledge your humanity? Why do you stay in a religion that does not allow you even water? A religion that forbids the treatment of human as humans is not a religion but naked domination...” (51 Limbale)

The horrendous murder took place immediately after the speech. The novelist described the scene through Sonali’s eyes. The murder was witnessed by Milind Kamble and Gopichand and Manikchand. The scene of murder was immediately followed by a rape of Dalit woman by Manikchand and Gopichand in their farmhouse. The rape of the Dalit woman took place in front of the narrator Milind Kamble, a well known Dalit activist of the area. But he didn’t have the courage to oppose the rape nor he had the courage to become the eyewitness of Taty Kamble’s murder.

Through the character of the Milind Kamble, the writer wanted to bring before the reader the internal enemy of the Dalit Liberation movement. After the murder of Taty Kamble, the tension between Dalits and the non-Dalits loomed large in the village and which was used as a trump card by the power mongers. Professor Rahul Bansode, who is known as an honest Dalit activist, took advantage of the situation and used Taty Kamble’s murder for building his political career. Whereas, businessman and contractor Manikchand and Gopichand started playing shrewd political game by taking advantage of the rising tension between Dalits and non-Dalits in Achalpur. They had the upperhand in this dirty political game since Sandanand Kamble, younger brother of murdered Taty Kamble worked as domestic helper and watchman in the farmhouse of Gopichand and Manikchand. Immediately after the incident, they made Sandanand Kamble as the village Patil of the Achalpur. Gopichand and Manikchand utilized his power for their selfish needs. Whereas, Sandanand Kamble became mere puppet to them. Despite becoming the village Patil, he was devoid of any power and respect.

As Devid Payeng stated that,

Caste system has become a very potent weapon in the politics of the country. It is because caste identity is rooted in the psyche of the both upper caste and the lower caste. After the death of Taty Kamble, the enmity between upper caste and the Untouchables worsened. A tension between the both parties loomed large in the village and the Dalit colonies. This aggravated tension was used by the power mongers for their benefits (Payeng, 68).

Caste-based violence persists, including attacks on Dalits by dominant castes. Such incidents often involve disputes over land, inter-caste marriages, or assertions of Dalit identity and rights. Many cases occur in Maharashtra highlighted the brutal reality of caste violence, where a Dalit family was lynched by dominant caste members. Sharankumar Limbale as familiar such harsh realities of the society and thus he has depicted such caste based atrocities in his novel *Hindu*. Maharashtra has been a cradle for anti-caste reform and revolutionary thought, it remains a region grappling with the systemic realities of caste oppression. Continued activism, legal reforms, and awareness are key to dismantling these entrenched structures.

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## Conclusion:

Sharankumar Limbale’s *Hindu* emerges as a critical work that challenges the deeply entrenched caste hierarchies within Indian society. By presenting the brutal realities of caste conflict, the novel lays bare the social, economic, and psychological marginalization experienced by Dalits. Limbale’s narrative transcends mere storytelling and becomes an act of resistance, urging readers to confront the systemic injustices that persist despite constitutional safeguards and modern reforms. What makes *Hindu* particularly powerful is its uncompromising portrayal of violence not only physical but also structural and symbolic that sustains caste oppression. The novel insists on rethinking caste as a conflict rooted in power dynamics rather than mere social stratification. It exposes the hypocrisy of religious and political systems that claim to uphold equality but covertly reinforce caste hierarchies.

In critically engaging with *Hindu*, one recognizes that the novel is not simply a reflection of caste struggle but also a call to action. It compels readers to question their complicity, privilege, and silence in the perpetuation of such inequities. By giving a voice to the marginalized and documenting their lived realities, Limbale redefines the space of literature as a site of social and political struggle. Ultimately, *Hindu* serves as both a narrative of pain and a manifesto of hope. While it documents the scars of caste-based violence, it also emphasizes the resilience and agency of those who resist oppression. As readers and scholars rethink caste conflicts through this powerful novel, it becomes clear that caste is not a relic of the past but an urgent issue demanding collective awareness, resistance, and reform in contemporary India.

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