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Politics of Orphanhood: Discourse, Power, and Resistance in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)*

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Abstract

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* is an autobiographical work which delineates Limbale's harrowing life in an obnoxious social order. Several factors are liable for his awful condition, among them his orphanhood has a remarkable role in intensifying disconsolate events in his life. This paper probes the operation of power relations, discourse, and resistance in Limbale's *The Outcaste*, in order to elucidate exclusionary mechanics of orphanhood. Limbale, the narrator of *The Outcaste*, was born out of wedlock, after his birth his father has disowned him, and these have resulted in his doleful orphanhood. Limbale as an orphan has been socially excluded and this paper endeavours to explain the ignoble status of Limbale by utilizing Foucault's intricate scheme on power, discourse, and knowledge. According to Foucault, though the power relation subjugates individuals, the power relation can also enable the resistance. Limbale's *The Outcaste* can be considered as a site of resistance against social exclusion and stigmatization of orphans, moreover, the resistance has materialized by the power relation which has caused the uncritical marginalization of orphans. By using Foucault's scheme on discourse, power and knowledge, this paper attempts to destabilize prevalent conception about orphans.

Keywords- *Orphans, Foucault, Discourse, Power, Resistance, Knowledge*

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* is an autobiographical work which discloses Limbale's woeful life in an abhorrent social order. Several factors are accountable for his deplorable condition, among them his orphanhood has a tremendous role in intensifying dejected events in his life. This paper utilizes Foucault's model of discourse and power relation in order to unfold orphanhood in Limbale's *The Outcaste*. The term orphan is

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an open-ended word, since various organizations and studies have assigned variety of definitions for it and its implications fluctuate in accordance with cultural contexts. It is extremely difficult to develop a single comprehensive definition for orphan, so in order to explore orphanhood this paper examines some of the popular assumptions about them.

UNICEF and global partners define “an orphan as a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death” (“Orphan”). In this definition a child who has lost either one or both parents is considered as orphan, moreover the definition also points out the death of one or both parents as criteria to be identified as an orphan. However, in certain cases a child who has living parents are also branded as orphan. Various social contexts, cultural representations and sociological studies have employed the term orphan in order denote a child who is separated from either one or both biological parents or he/she has deprived of parental care and protection. Cheryl L. Nixon in his *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and Body* argues that, “In both law and literature, the term ‘orphan’ is often used loosely, encompassing many types of children: the unfortunate child victimized by death, the child sent away from the biological family to live with others, the abandoned child left to his or her own devices, the foundling taken in by a replacement family or institution, and the illegitimate child marked by bastardy” (5). Nixon identifies a wide variety of children under the label of orphan and they may have or have not the living parents, while they are all deprived of parental care and protection. Here he considers an illegitimate child as an orphan, hence the narrator in Limbale’s *The Outcaste* can be considered as an orphan.

Limbale, the narrator of *The Outcaste*, was born to Masamai and Hanmanta Limbale, Masamai belongs to Mahar and Hanmanta Limbale belongs to Lingayat, moreover, he was born out of wedlock. Hanmanta Limble denies the fatherhood of Sharankumar Limbale and that have paved the way for his wretched orphanhood. Limbale has spent his childhood with Massamai in a patriarchal society without the care and protection of his father. Unwritten norms in the patriarchal society has deepened the marginalization of orphans, thus as an orphan Limbale has faced great deal of injustice. In a patriarchal society, father is considered as a person who has all the right over a child, moreover, it is considered that father figure has a role in determining the identity of a child, Limbale asserts that, “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” (59). In Indian context a child is owes to his father for his/her address, religion, and caste, while in the case of Limbale he has been disowned by his father, thus he considers himself as a person without an identity. Moreover, in his work, Limbale concedes that caste system has played a significant role in his repression and social exclusion, whereas this paper attempts to go beyond exclusionary mechanisms of caste system and look deeply into the notion of orphanhood.

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This paper employs Foucault's scheme on discourse, power, and knowledge in order instigate a subversive understanding about orphanhood. Foucault's reflection on power is notable and his convictions on power have made a remarkable modification in the predominant interpretation on it. Traditional studies have often visualized power as something repressive, and this trend has led to undermine multidimensional aspects of power. Foucault, in his *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* argues that power is not simply a repressive force, whereas it is a force which is integral in all relations (94). Foucault considers every relation contains power, in addition he highlights the productive aspect of power, and hence his analysis on power goes beyond the repressive facet of power.

The power relation has steered the marginalization of orphans and it is discourse which is instrumental in the maneuver of power relation. In various cultural contexts there are variety of discourse regarding orphans which has produced and propagated prejudice and negative stereotyping about them. Orphans recur in various cultural products, from myths to modern visual media, and these representations have attributed diverse traits for orphans. Some of the cultural representations have stigmatized orphans as criminals, anti-social, and immoral. In contrast to dominant discourse, Limbale's *The Outcaste* is a site of resistance and it disputes with normalizing discourse. According to Foucault, power operates through discourse and it is normalizing discourse which frames the identity. In Indian context, the prevailing social order is based on family system and one of the social norms for an individual to be considered as normal is that he/she must have caring father and mother. A child with protective father and mother is considered as the normal and if a child lacks either one or both may be treated as deviant. As an illegitimate child, Limbale has been marginalized, the following statement shows to what extent he is deviant from social norms, Limbale admits that, "after my birth the mansions of the Patil community must have become tense. My first breath must have threatened the morality of the world" (36). As Limbale's birth does not conform to social norm, people consider him as deviant. He was born out of wedlock and has been abandoned by his biological father which causes him to be excluded from mainstream.

Power constitutes knowledge, further knowledge is essential for the maintenance of power, thus power and knowledge are mutually interrelated (*Discipline and Punish* 27). The following discourse unfolds prevailing knowledge about orphans, Limale states, "But the news that Shivaji brought the next day pierced my heart. Mallya's parents had refused the proposal because I was not of pure blood. These people love conventions more they do human beings" (Limbale 92). Limbale hasn't much choice in the matter of his marriage and so many times his marriage proposals have been rejected, since he is an orphan. In a patriarchal society, an orphan who is born out of wedlock and has been disowned by his/her father is considered as impure. Intricate relationship of discourse and power has constituted

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the knowledge about orphan, thus these sort of knowledge about orphans unfolds the existing power pattern which marginalizes orphans.

Foucault challenges the notion that power is possessed by a particular individual or group and they exercise it upon the powerless. For Foucault, nobody possesses power, whereas power operates from multiple points. An interesting dimension of Foucault's perspective on power is that "power comes from below" (*The History of Sexuality, Volume I* 94). Foucault admits that power can also be exercised by those who are in the lower strata of the society. Foucault's project on power unfolds the intricate relation of power, discourse and resistance. Foucault asserts that, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (*The History of Sexuality, Volume I* 100-101). Here Foucault divulges that it is discourse which produces and propagates power, along with he argues that it is discourse itself challenges the power. Foucault doesn't detach power from resistance, so he claims that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*The History of Sexuality, Volume I* 95). Foucault argues that exercise of power leads to the emergence of resistance and both resistance and power are interrelated. Resistance challenges the prevailing power structure, moreover, it is discourse which facilitate both power and resistance.

In Limbale's *The Outcaste*, the power relation has marginalized him due to his orphanhood, whereas within the power relation the resistance has emerged. As an orphan Limbale questions the social order which is liable for his injudicious discrimination. Limbale asks, "What exactly is our fault? Why should a child suffer for the sin of his parents?" (Limbale 64). Limbale questions why does a child to be humiliated for the unlawful relation of his/her parents. These questions are resistance against the uncritical marginalization has imposed upon him due to orphanhood. Though the power relation has marginalized Limbale, the resistance against the discrimination has emerged within the power relation. According to Foucault it is undoable to escape from the power relation, while he admits that it is viable to reverse power relation in order to challenge the social order which subjugates subjects (Taylor 178). It is not possible to confront stigmatization of orphan outside the power relation, whereas it can be challenged within the power relation. In *The Outcaste* there is an attempt to navigate the power relation in order to defy the subjugation of orphans.

Through his autobiography Limbale mocks the social norms which have been belittled orphans, hence the autobiography *The Outcaste* can be considered as a resistance against the subjugation of orphans. Further, ironic statements in the autobiography satirize the social order and institutions. Limbale, as an orphan has written the autobiography within in a power relation which has discriminated and victimized orphans. Here the resistance has

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emerged from power relation, thus it could be said that power is not possessed by a particular person or group and has exercised on powerless, whereas it is exercised from multiple spaces.

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