

## Ambedkar's influence on awakening of Dalit consciousness and interrogation of caste in Sharankumar Limbale's *Hindu*

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### Abstract

*Hindu* as a novel is informed by the dalit history and culture of Maharashtra, the struggle waged under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for dalit emancipation. Nationalist historical discourse and literature with its narrowed and singular focus on ant-colonial struggle have underwritten dalit struggle for self-assertion. Sharankumar Limbale's novel is a testimony to India's successes and failures as a nation state in safeguarding the interests of dalits in contemporary social and political climate. It documents the social history that transpired in the 1990s and half a decade following it. In the beginning dalit writers preferred the genre of autobiography as they laid more emphasis on the authenticity of lived experiences to lay bare the reality of dalit life to non-dalit readers. On the other hand, with the genre of novel the dalit writers ran the risk of that effect being mitigated by its fictional nature. In this regard, *Hindu* breaks new ground in dalit literature along with Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat* or *The Stepchild* (1986), the first dalit novel in Gujarati and Limbale's earlier novel *Upalya* (1998).

**Keywords:** casteism, untouchability, discriminatory practices, ambedkar, religion, conversion, politics

### Introduction

Dalit literature is unique in the sense ex-untouchables are now using the traditionally denied weapon of literacy to highlight and foreground the degraded conditions under which they have lived as well as repudiating the Caste Hindu institutions responsible for their perpetual subordination through the preservation of caste hierarchies in the hegemonical social order. The term Dalit is used to denote that segment of Indian society that is socially, culturally, physically and psychologically subjugated in the hierarchical social ladder of Hindu society. Such kind of subjugation is a result of ritual pollution commonly termed untouchability. As a practice, untouchability finds endorsement from the canonical texts of Hindu religion that are still propagated and perpetuated in the contemporary society. Hence the title *Hindu* signifies the protest against identities that fixate and impinge on one's attempt at emancipation. The search for identity is the main thrust of Dalit literature and culture. The difference between Dalit and non-Dalit writing is that the former insists on the literary values whereas the latter on values of life.

*Hindu* is centered upon the murder of a dalit activist Taty Kamble by a group of upper caste men who according to official category belong to OBC (Other Backward Classes) as he attempts to subvert the established order of the village Achalpur by inciting and encouraging his caste members Mahars, to convert and to give up their assigned and predetermined traditional jobs. By portraying acrimonious and conflictual relations between the OBCs and dalits, Limbale seems to align himself with writers like Chandrabhan Prasad who opine that the contemporary animosity against dalits is directed largely by the OBCs who as a caste have succeeded in empowering themselves both economically as well as politically. In general though, all upper castes have remained hostile to dalits attempt at subverting the social conventions and their attempt towards upward mobility. As mentioned earlier, *Hindu* as a novel is not

universal in its appeal in the strict sense of the mainstream high caste writers and critics who either are culpable of misrepresenting dalits or ignoring them altogether. In this regard, Limabale's observation on dalit aesthetics is insightful where he suggests:

In modern Marathi literature, Dalits have been portrayed from a middle class perspective, which expresses sympathy for Dalits from a reformist-liberal standpoint. Because the middle class, upper caste writers' world of experience is limited, there is no realistic representation of Dalits in their writing. In those writers who have portrayed Dalits, there is compassion, but there are no images of Dalits with self-pride. (2004: 27)

Limbale's lamentation over the absence of dalits in mainstream literature is articulated by Joseph Macwan who observes about Gujarati literature that there is, "no dearth of literature about the higher castes in Gujarat but most of the life experiences of the common people find no reflection at all." (2004: vii). Similarly, Omprakash Valmiki also shares these views when he critiques Hindi literature in his autobiography *Joothan* :

How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn't an epic poet ever write a word on our Lives? (2003:23)

Dalits writers by pointing out this inherent absence of Dalit subjectivity in the canonical literary texts, suggest that the universalized story of human condition portrayed by the upper castes is reductive in nature as it focuses only on experiences of privileged sections of the society. Therefore Limbale claims dalit literature to be unique as it portrays "the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradations, ridicule, and poverty experienced by Dalits." (2004:30)

Another striking feature of *Hindu* is its commitment towards the collective aspect of dalit literature as the name of dalit youth

who work with Taty Kamble, for instance, Rohit Kamble, Kabir Kamble, Siddharth Pagare, Kashinath Polke, Sandeep Polke and Mangesh Kamble are named collectively which stands in stark contrast to the novels by mainstream writers where individualism replaces the collective identity working towards a common goal. In this regard, Limbale's own analysis of dalit aesthetics counters the charges of dalit literature being inimical to individualism as he states:

The experience described in Dalit literature is social, hence it is articulated as collective in character. Therefore, even when the experience expressed in Dalit literature is that of an individual, it appears to be that of a group. (2004:36)

*Hindu*, then, is not so much centered on revealing the true identity of the actual murderer but it portrays how it is an act of collective caste conscious violence directed at dalits which has been perpetrated for centuries and still continues in contemporary times. Taty Kamble, a dalit activist, is murdered on 14 October, which is an important date in dalit history as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar converted on this very day in 1956 to Buddhism to fulfill his vow taken at Yeola during a speech in which he proclaimed that he was born a Hindu, but will not die as one. Hindu, at the level of narrative, seems to be an extension of the polemic between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi where Gandhi claimed dalits to be part of the Hindu fold whereas Ambedkar considered them to be outside the Hindu fold on account of them being marginalized. Indeed, Ambedkarite interrogation and instigation is ingrained in Taty Kamble's words when he speaks at Dhammachakra Parivartan celebrations exhorting the Mahar community to convert and escape the scourge of untouchability:

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? . . . A religion that forbids the treatment of humans as humans is not a religion but naked domination. (*Hindu* 50-51)

*Hindu*, as a novel, also interrogates one of the major political controversies in contemporary times pertaining to conversion of dalits. And it becomes all the more relevant when one considers the Hindu right wing's recent attempt at *gharwapsi* or bringing the converted back into the Hindu fold. Many dalit characters in the novel are either already Buddhists or are planning to convert to Buddhism but the novel also foregrounds the anxiety of dalit youth in the 1990s as they longer feel Buddhism as a viable option for escaping the menace of caste system and they engage themselves over serious and heated debates over converting to Christianity or Islam. However, Kabir Kamble voices his concern:

We have to depend on the savarnas for our daily bread even after conversion. Our God will change, our rituals of worship will change but the questions regarding dal roti won't change. Complete transformation is not possible until the economic slavery of the dalits is destroyed. (*Hindu* 82)

And Kabir Kamble's concern is reiterated when we learn, "dalits may have received new homes but they were still dependent on the village to make a living. . . . They therefore had no other alternative except entreating the villagers" (*Hindu* 81). Interestingly, Ambedkar was well aware at the time that if dalits were to convert to Christianity and Islam as by doing so they will be running the risk of getting denationalized as these

religions were considered of foreign origin. And many Hindu leaders did not consider Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism as moving out of the Hindu fold as they considered Buddhism as an off-shoot of Hinduism. And Limbale seems to be well aware of it as he echoes the concern of the dalit youths in the narrative:

We wanted to convert to Buddhism. We still do. However, converting to a religion related to Indian culture brings about no change in our status in the eyes of the Hindus. It is for that reason that we are converting to a foreign origin religion. It is only then perhaps that the mentality to degrade us will change. . . . The Hindu religion that considers us untouchable is not acceptable to us. (*Hindu* 112)

The religious scriptures of Hinduism preach the subsistence and observance of the caste system; they are responsible for the degradation and degeneration of the untouchables. Hinduism, does not allow even slightest of hope for the untouchables which quite explicitly means that if untouchables adhere and believe in Hinduism, then, they have internalized the eulogized divine dispensation and accepted their status as untouchables compelling them towards eternal servitude and a degraded life. A society based on the caste system, cannot be a real community as it violates the respect and dignity of individuals. According to Ambedkar, on the grounds that Hinduism is inconsistent with the self-respect and honor of the untouchables is vindictive of their conversion to another nobler faith. In addition to it, conversion is a paradigmatically migrant act, one that destabilizes fixed categories of ethnic and social belonging. In Ambedkar's terms religion signifies a process of universalizing social values that, "brings them to the mind of the individual who is required to recognize them in all his acts in order that he may function as an approved member of the society" (*Away from the Hindus* 409). Ambedkar exhorted the untouchables to regard their religious identity as something they had the right to exercise their will, rather than a function of fate or pre-destination to which they are irrevocably doomed. Hence, religion is not a supernatural phenomenon or a divine dispensation but a social law.

However, when Shivashakti members gathered at the temple raising concern over the conversion issue, they exhibit the same paternalistic attitude displayed by Mahatma Gandhi and other Hindu social reformers who who considered untouchability to be a problem internal to Hinduism and therefore conceding active agency to caste Hindus by providing them the onus of reforming it:

The satyagraha for the removal of untouchability should be carried out by the savarnas, rather than by the untouchables. Since this social injustice is perpetrated by the touchable Hindus, it is fitting that they should bring about the change. It is the responsibility of touchable Hindus. (*Hindu* 113)

But for Ambedkar, the change of heart and maintaining cleanliness were inadequate means of abolishing untouchability and required an alternative religious framework that does not preach caste as a principle or in other words caste is not endorsed by it, that treats untouchability as a moral violation and propagates rationality, justice and proper conduct. Ultimately, finding untouchable agency through the process of conversion suggests alternative conceptions of nation and community that resist being subsumed by pre-existing forms of state and its institutions. Gauri Vishwanathan's observation in

her book *Outside the Fold* (2001) pertaining to Ambedkar's conversion which acts as a trope in *Hindu* is insightful in this regard. She argues:

The translation of moral laws into political rights, for which conversion functions as a trope, is more completely worked out as a strategic maneuver of dissent, which required Ambedkar to go through a separatist route to attain a nation committed to the Universalist principles of justice and equality. (239)

Critic Vijay Bahadur Singh argues in *Hindu: Dalit aandolan ke bhatkav ka dastavez* that:

Limbale wants us to focus on social terrorism that has made the lives of dalits and backwards perilous. Dr. Ambedkar fought for dalit emancipation not only socially but politically as well and also converted for the same, but power politics with its double standards and savage savarna groups because of their hegemonical and exploitative character adopted subversive strategies and disguised themselves. The novel [*Hindu*] unravels them and essentially attests to the fact that contemporary Indian society is terrorized by such politicking [Translation mine]. (Vijay Bahadur 180)

Such claims are further reinforced when we learn that the hostile attitude of caste Hindus and Hindutva forces is not circumscribed to dalits alone but it even takes minorities in its wake as we learn that Shivashakti members force the Muslims walking on the road to chant a couplet and dared them, "*Is desh mein rahn hoga, to Vande Mataram kahna hoga* ( If you want to live here, Vande Mataram you must utter)" (*Hindu* 97).

*Hindu*, as a novel does not portray a romanticized version of a dalit being wronged and his attempt at redemption. Instead, it attempts to look objectively at the socio-political ramifications of the category of dalit as a community. Albeit, it has a love story of Sonali, an upper caste girl and a dalit boy named Rohit Kamble who is also the son of Tatya Kamble, but it is used as a backdrop to reinvigorate the larger casteist social milieu where Sonali's education is put to an abrupt end because her father, Baliram Patil suspects her of having an affair with a dalit boy and the "idea of a dalit boy having danced with his daughter riled him" (*Hindu* 40), rather than allowing it to assume the centrality and as a result the story doesn't have a protagonist in the traditional sense. We are made aware of Tatya Kamble's political ambitions of contesting the village patil's post in the forthcoming elections through the conversation of Milind Kamble and Kasbe Guruji. And within no time we learn of Tatya Kamble's cold blooded murder in the village square and the "killers had erased the identity of the village as 'Jalsakar Tatya Kamble's village' forever" (*Hindu* 12). The entire opening sequence is narrated in the first person by Milind Kamble who is in the car at the time of the event with two corrupt high caste characters, Manikchand and Gopichand, who are moving towards their farmhouse for a night of drinking and womanizing. But they exhibit apathy towards the incident even though they had seen Parbhakar Kavale who had murdered Tatya Kamble in the crowd, and instead of informing the police they start feasting in their farmhouse and Manikchand tries to console Milind by stating that:

These injustices and atrocities aren't just going to disappear in a day. It will take time. Don't get so upset. (*Hindu* 15)

And both Manikchand and Gopichand later rape a dalit woman who was hiding in their fields with other dalits to save their lives as their houses were being burnt down in the aftermath of Tatya Kamble's murder. Interestingly, Milind Kamble was the name of the college founded by Ambedkar to educate dalits but here the dalit character Milind is mired in sexist, opportunistic and self-serving mannerisms epitomized by Manikchand and Gopichand. The apathy of these characters is juxtaposed with the murder of Tatya Kamble. Though Milind is well aware of his inaction and perversion when he confesses:

I should become a witness, make Tatya Kamble's murderers wear handcuffs, file a police complaint against the rapists, Manikchand and Gopichand. But why did I feel so scared? Why did I always step back at the decisive moment? Because I was not prepared to pay the price of my deeds. I was afraid of the consequences. I was a parasitical plant attached to the movement. . . . There are many middleman like me around the fringes of the movement. And there are many contractors like Manikchand and Gopichand helping the movement. (*Hindu* 21)

But soon after Milind Kamble self-reproaching and self-justifying first person narrative gives way to omniscient narrator. The omniscient narrative takes us back to the pivotal event of Tatya Kamble's murder shown through the eyes of Sonali, who is herself a victim of gender oppression and is married to Prabhakar Kavale, the murderer of the dalit activist as it "seemed to her that the parting in her hair was not red from vermilion but from Tatya Kamble's dripping blood" (*Hindu* 52). Later she is asked by her husband to wash his blood-stained clothes and the blood flowing on the bathroom floor makes her uncomfortable. Having different characters react to a single event and by juxtaposing their voices the narrative succeeds in portraying multilayered nature of events which gives insight into the minds of different sections of the society. We then experience, how Tatya Kamble's death becomes an occasion for political gains by different people concerned, for instance, Professor Rahul Bansode demanded that "We will take the procession towards collectorate and demand that the criminals be apprehended by the collector" (*Hindu* 26), but dalit leader Rohidas Nagdive "did not like the stunt performed by the professor. Worshipping the corpse to attain political mileage, he felt, was stretching things a bit too far" (*Hindu* 26). And Manikchand and Gopichand turn Tatya Kamble's murder into a viable business opportunity for themselves as they demand money for saving Madhukar Kavale, brother of Prabhakar Kavale from being falsely implicated in the murder case.

Limbale adopts a strategy of subversion in his depiction of events that is not describing the events directly but by leaving them to our imagination. As we do not see the dalit basti being torched but through utterances by Rambhau Kavale's mother when she says, "Looks like the Maharwada has been set on fire" (*Hindu* 53). Similarly, we learn of Savita Kamble's mental health after the murder of her husband through defence lawyer's questioning of her testimony on grounds of her mental instability. Subsequently, Limbale rejects the sentimental narration for a matter-of-fact reportage which not only reveals the catastrophic effect of murder on Savita Kamble's mental health but also exposes the ineffective judicial mechanism that allows influential to walk free as Manikchand replies with aplomb early on in the novel that the culprits "will be acquitted by paying money" (*Hindu* 13). Instead of portraying the plight

and predicament of the homeless dalits, Limbale focuses on the rehabilitation of dalits and the political slugfest that it entails:

Rohidas had used his influence in the government to get this housing scheme approved. Journalists and dalit activists came by frequently to monitor the progress of the work. The whole village's attention was focused on this construction. (*Hindu* 32)

On the other hand, "the adjoining basti of the Mangs looked wretched with its crumbling huts. Lahu Mang and his wife, Draupadi, eyed the construction work going on in the neighborhood with great hope" (*Hindu* 33), also points towards the lack of solidarity and unity within the different dalit subcastes. Limbale focuses on how caste Hindus were affected by the detainment of the accused, for instance, "Achalpur was in turmoil. Its young men were behind bars" (*Hindu* 33) and "Shankar Pujari became mentally disturbed. His belief that it was not a crime to kill a dalit who went against religion was shattered. The villagers, too, were apprehensive" (*Hindu* 34). But most importantly, "For the first time, people for committing reckless atrocities against dalits were behind bars" (*Hindu* 34). But even then, the caste Hindus fail to mend their ways as they prevent Sadanand Kamble, a dalit sarpanch, from hoisting the national flag as he may pollute it. Limbale projects how at the time of election horse-trading is used to have the dalit candidate placed into the minister's chair and Manikchand advises Sadanand Kamble, brother of Taty Kamble and makes him complicit in his perverted opportunism:

If necessary, you will have to support the killer of Taty Kamble. Taty is dead now; his bones have turned to dust. . . . Taty rebelled against the village and we don't have to tell you how he ended up. You learn from his fate. The village will welcome you with open arms. (*Hindu* 106)

Subsequently, the same caste Hindus who are disdainful of the dalits and do not allow them to enter the temples welcome the dalit minister Sadanand Kamble with the ceremonial arti, pointing towards their inherent hypocrisy. The novel also depicts how dalit women are ill-treated and inhumanly treated by the caste Hindus as Vishnu Pujari who fails in his attempt at raping Draupadi tries to get even with her when she is accused of being a witch and is paraded naked by the caste Hindus:

Draupadi, the character in *Mahabharat*, was not stripped naked. But Draupadi in independent India was, because she was a dalit. (*Hindu* 146)

And the caste Hindus shouted, "let us take her around the village naked. Otherwise, they won't feel the terror" (*Hindu* 146), only underlines their deep seated casteist prejudices. She is later saved by dalit youths who rescue her from the villagers. Apart from the caste ridden society that the novel exposes through this incident and Sonali's portrayal, it also serves to underscore the gender oppression that cuts across caste lines and upper caste women are as often not extended the caste privilege. Uma Chakravarti in *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003) observes that upper caste women have to endure the gender oppression for availing the high caste status and are also expected to espouse the cause of caste system through the sustenance of its rigid rules. In *Hindu* too, we find every act of transgression by women being thwarted and treated with contempt be it in the name of family honor or be it righteous behavior, for instance, Sonali's education is put to an

abrupt end on account of her dancing and getting clicked with a dalit boy Rohit Kamble and is later married to Prabhakar Kavale who murders Taty Kamble and after the murder, life for her, "seemed like serving a jail sentence. . . . She would have visions of the blood-splattered Prabhakar, and of vengeful Rohit standing at the door, carrying an axe" (*Hindu* 83). And when she starts pining for Rohit, she pays a nocturnal visit to him when she insists that, "Prabhakar is a murderer. I can't live with him" (*Hindu* 85), the response that she gets only demonstrates the patriarchal mindset when Rambhau Kavale, her father-in-law tells her grandfather-in-law, "She came to this house alive. Only her corpse will be allowed to leave this house" (*Hindu* 89). Though Sonali consciousness allows her to transcend the caste barriers as while hearing Taty Kamble quoting Ambedkar's words in a dalit congregation and by witnessing the staging of Ambedkari jalsas where "the sound of Taty Kamble's speech felt like an erupting volcano. For the first time in her life, Sonali had heard such a blunt critique of the Hindu religion. Its other face was made visible to her today" (*Hindu* 51). Similarly, Surekha Mane, another upper caste woman who is attracted towards Mangesh Kamble, a Mumbai returned dalit youth, is told by Narendra Patil, an upper caste man, "Have you no shame? . . . You have become a loose woman because your husband is in jail?" (*Hindu* 140). But these equations of caste and gender do undergo a change when Narendra Patil is beaten up by Mangesh Kamble and Sukekha Mane files a case of sexual assault against him. However, as mentioned earlier dalit women like Draupadi are still oppressed by the combined forces of caste, class and gender. But generally we find that the gender oppression cuts across caste lines. Limbale in the foreword 'Straight from the Heart' proclaims:

Dalits have been the targets of injustice and atrocities for thousands of years, but that does not provoke any serious discussion. The Hindus of this country are adopting an aggressive stance now. I feel sickened by caste riots, social tensions and lack of security. Increasing criminality, unemployment and corruption torment me. This torment, this anguish is at the heart of my writing. (*Hindu*: xi)

Therefore, the novel serves as a recapitulation of the atrocities directed at dalits more so during the last decade and a half. Apart from the murder, rape and burning down of dalit houses the novel also captures the daily brawls they are confronted with by the caste Hindus. It also foregrounds the author's deep-seated conviction that till caste system and its prejudices persist in Indian system, thinking of an egalitarian society based on equality, liberty and fraternity amounts to deluding ourselves. One such incident, which also finds mention in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) and captured in the novel as well is the tearing off the pages on Ambedkar from the textbook at the behest of caste Hindus.

The novel which opens with the murder of Taty Kamble ends with another murder, this time of Prabhakar Kavale, the main murderer by Kabir Kamble, who accepts to do his traditional job of dancing in processions and as per custom was entitled to get bidagi a reward for dancing. Before him Mahars owing largely to the awakening of dalit consciousness had given up doing menial jobs and other specified traditional roles that they were asked to perform. Therefore, Kabir succeeds in tricking the savarnas by accepting to dance disguised as a woman in the victory procession of the acquitted upper caste murderers.

Towards the end of the novel, Milind Kamble is once again picked up by Manikchand and Gopichand in their car for another night of illicit acts. He witnesses dalit activists burning the judgment copies on Taty Kamble's murder case just as he had witnessed Taty Kamble's murder during his first car ride. Milind Kamble then indulges in self-reproach when he thinks of the current state of the movement which seemed to him "like that of a woman with 60 percent burns. When the movement needs surgery, it is being treated with a bandage and ointment" (*Hindu* 154) and he fears that his "masculinity was dissipating and I was undergoing a metamorphosis. My sex was changing" (*Hindu* 155), and he confesses that "This process of being neutered did not start today. It goes back a long way. I became impotent the day I separated from the movement" (*Hindu* 155). Also, he recounts his wife Lakshmi's admonishment, "You have sold yourself and now you want to sell Babasaheb as well" (*Hindu* 155). Thus, the novel begins and ends with the internal conflict of a compromised dalit which underscores Limbale's aim of projecting that the enemy lies within. The use of first person and omniscient narrators, newspaper reportage and a large ensemble of characters enables Limbale to portray a complex story of dalit struggles in Maharashtra during the 1990s and early millennia as documenting these events would have proved to be difficult otherwise in a conventional plot.

Limbale's purpose is to access the successes and failures of the dalit movement and to treat those facets which ails it. Milind Kamble is then, an honest attempt at the portrayal of a dalit activist who has betrayed the movement for the luxuries or comforts thrown at him by the caste Hindus in the form of liquor, meal and sex. Therefore, it becomes imperative for Limbale to expose him and alike for the smooth functioning of the movement. Through his monologues and first person narrative Limbale lays bare the nexus of corrupt politicians and businessmen and how they operate. Milind Kamble is not moved even after witnessing the murder of fellow dalit activist and rape of a dalit woman. In other words, he shrinks back from the contamination of the world in which he had to act.

Regarding the translation, it can be said every cross cultural communication entails loss of meaning. But having said that, it is through translation that a text becomes accessible to a wider audience. Limbale uses everyday conversational Marathi in *Hindu*, and the narrative is inundated with dialogues. Whereas, the urban characters such as Gopichand, Manikchand and Milind use English liberally and unconsciously. The translator Arun Prabha Mukherjee maintains that she has "retained a large number of Marathi words that would easily be understood by Indian readers and for which there are no English equivalents. There were some concepts that were impossible to translate in English, such as *gharjamai* or *sandhya namaskar*" (*Hindu*: xxviii)

Kancha Iliah analyses the post-Independence situation in *Why I am not a Hindu* (1996) as:

In post-colonial India, in the name of Congress democratic rule, the Hindus came to power both at Delhi and at the provincial headquarters. Parliamentary democracy in essence became brahminical democracy. [...] The same brahminical forces transformed to suit an emerging global capitalism. (51-52)

Consequently, Limbale has appropriately used the full names of the characters as a dalit writer has to expose the division in a community along caste lines. In Achalpur too, the dalits

comprising of Mahars and Mangs are segregated from the village proper where caste Hindus live. In the narrative the term 'village' and 'villagers' are problematized as the term villager is not synonymous with a dalit, which interrogates the romanticized version of the village life penned down by mainstream writers like Sumitranandan Pant or Premchand. The relations between Achalpur and Maharwada (later renamed as Bhimnagar where Mahars are rehabilitated and the very denomination also signifies political identity informed by Ambedkarite ideology) are stained due to caste factors. When the Bhimashakti was formed in its response the villagers too formed an organization Shivashakti which insists that the importance of their organization will be realized "only when communal tensions are on the rise" (*Hindu* 94) and later we learn that they march into Bhimnagar waving tridents to warn dalit youths against conversion. The revolutionary transformation in dalit consciousness as they critique Hinduism and give up their traditional assigned roles is prefigured by the performance of the Ambedkari jalsas which was started in the 1930s, is an art form, aimed at educating the dalits about their condition. Similarly, in the narrative the jalsas show a reworking of the popular folk tales and exposes the underlying casteist notions. Jyotirao Phule's observation in *Gulamgiri* or *Slavery* (1873) is insightful in this regard he stated that education in India has been used as a tool by the upper castes to sustain their dominance and making the lower castes subservient by denying them access to education in order to keep them ignorant of the exploitative nature of their position within the hegemonic caste society. Phule considered caste as a form of slavery and coined the term *ati-shudra* for untouchables. He created an alternate view of the past; a past which challenges the Brahmin view of the past and to dismantle their hegemony and suggests that it is the duty of every shudra who has availed the benefit of education to work for the upliftment of his caste and project a true picture of the status of shudra's life before the government and only after their emancipation that India can progress because they are 'life and sinews' of the country. This view was later reiterated by Ambedkar as he too emphasized the importance of education. Limbale in the novel, seems to carry the weight of this ideological art form where Taty Kamble passes on Ambedkar's revolutionary legacy to the dalit youth to carry on the struggle even after his death.

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