



## Translation and Global Reception of Sharankumar Limbale's Works: A Study of Dalit Literature Beyond Borders

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### ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the translation of Sharankumar Limbale's works, particularly "Akkarmashi" (The Outcaste), and their reception in global literary circles. Limbale's writings, rooted in the specific socio-cultural and political realities of caste-based oppression in India, have found new audiences across the globe through translation. This paper explores how Limbale's works have been interpreted and received by non-Indian readers, examining the cross-cultural challenges of translating caste-based narratives and the broader impact on global discourses of marginality, identity, and human rights. The study delves into the nuanced process of translating not only the language but also the cultural and historical contexts essential to understanding Dalit struggles. Furthermore, it highlights how global readers often draw parallels between the experiences of Dalits and other marginalized communities around the world, thus positioning Limbale's works within a universal framework of social justice. However, the paper also discusses the limitations of translation, including the potential loss of cultural nuance and specificity. Ultimately, this research underscores the power of translation to amplify marginalized voices and to promote a deeper understanding of caste oppression as a global issue, while also acknowledging the

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complexities involved in making culturally specific texts accessible to diverse, non-Indian audiences.

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### **1. Introduction:**

Sharankumar Limbale is a significant figure in Dalit literature, renowned for his powerful autobiographical works that expose the brutal realities of caste-based oppression in India. Born in 1956 in Maharashtra, Limbale experienced firsthand the dehumanizing effects of the caste system as a member of the Dalit, or “untouchable,” Mahar caste. His upbringing in poverty and social exclusion fueled his desire to challenge the entrenched social hierarchies that marginalized him and others like him. Limbale’s works are grounded in the Dalit literary movement, which emerged in the 1960s and 70s as a form of protest literature that aimed to voice the experiences, aspirations, and struggles of the Dalit community.

Limbale’s seminal work, “Akkarmashi” (translated as *The Outcaste*), is both a literary and social milestone. The text, which chronicles his life as a Dalit, unveils a world where humiliation, poverty, and the struggle for dignity are everyday realities. Through “Akkarmashi”, Limbale not only exposes the suffering and injustices that Dalits endure but also asserts their right to a life of dignity, equality, and humanity. His writing extends beyond mere narration; it is a call for social reform, aimed at dismantling the deeply ingrained caste system.

Limbale’s work holds a vital place in Dalit literature because it conveys the voices and stories of a community historically denied the right to speak. His contributions have broadened the understanding of caste dynamics and have become essential to discussions on identity, social justice, and human rights within and beyond India. By sharing these stories in visceral, unfiltered language, Limbale challenges readers to confront caste-based discrimination. “Akkarmashi” (*The Outcaste*) is one of the most impactful autobiographies in Dalit literature and serves as a raw and unfiltered account of life under India’s caste-based social system. Written by Sharankumar Limbale in Marathi in 1984, the work reflects the severe poverty, humiliation, and ostracism experienced by Limbale as a Dalit. The title, “Akkarmashi”, roughly translates to “half-caste” or “impure,” underscoring the caste-based discrimination that marks Dalit existence from birth. Limbale’s narrative highlights not only the visible poverty and exclusion of Dalits but also the less visible internal conflicts and sense of shame that caste oppression imposes on individuals.

The book is a powerful testament to the brutality of the caste system, particularly for the Dalit Mahar community, which has historically been forced to perform menial labor and endure systemic

discrimination. Limbale details the violence, exploitation, and indignities faced by Dalits, including their exclusion from education, employment, and social participation. Through his personal struggles and his family's suffering, he paints a picture of a community stripped of rights and dignity and left to endure a life of subjugation. "Akkarmashi" goes beyond a personal story; it is a sociopolitical critique that challenges the foundations of caste discrimination. It exposes how caste hierarchies perpetuate poverty and deny individuals the basic rights and opportunities needed to escape oppression. Through his narrative, Limbale draws attention to the pervasive impact of caste-based oppression on identity and self-worth, capturing the physical and psychological scars that the system inflicts on Dalits. His work has become a cornerstone in Dalit literature, resonating with readers who recognize the injustices described and sparking conversations on human dignity, rights, and the need for social reform in India.

Through the translation of "Akkarmashi", Sharankumar Limbale's portrayal of caste oppression transcends cultural boundaries, allowing global audiences to engage with Dalit struggles; however, this process also underscores the linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in making such culturally specific narratives accessible to non-Indian readers. Translating Sharankumar Limbale's works, particularly "Akkarmashi" (The Outcaste), is a complex and challenging process that extends far beyond a simple linguistic exercise. His writings are deeply rooted in the Marathi language and the socio-cultural fabric of the Mahar community, carrying specific idioms, expressions, and references that embody the lived realities of Dalit life in India. Translators must grapple with multiple layers of complexity, from language barriers and cultural context to regional dialects, all of which are critical to preserving the authenticity and emotional depth of Limbale's experiences.

## 2. Language Barriers

One of the primary challenges in translating Limbale's works lies in the language itself. Marathi, like other Indian languages, is rich in cultural and regional idioms that do not always have direct equivalents in English or other global languages. These expressions, deeply embedded in Marathi's cultural context, convey the emotional and social nuances of Dalit life. For example, Limbale uses terms and phrases that reflect the derogatory language historically used to refer to Dalits or describe the caste-based oppression they endure. Translators often struggle to capture this emotional weight in translation, as finding equivalent words that carry the same resonance can be difficult. Consequently, the translation risks either "softening" the harshness of the language or introducing unfamiliar terms that may alienate non-Indian readers.

The caste system in India, with its historical, religious, and social implications, is a critical aspect of Limbale's narrative, yet it remains a uniquely Indian concept that lacks a straightforward parallel in many other cultures. Translating "Akkarmashi" thus requires not only linguistic but also cultural translation—an ability to convey the caste system's deep-seated impact on individual lives to audiences who may not have a background in Indian social structures. Translators must often provide additional context to help readers understand the caste hierarchy and the nature of Dalit oppression. However, adding explanatory notes or glossaries can disrupt the narrative flow, glossaries can disrupt the narrative flow, while omitting this context can lead to misinterpretations or a superficial reading of the text. This balance is a delicate one, as too much explanation risks over-simplifying or exoticizing Dalit experiences, while too little can render the text opaque to non-Indian readers.

In "Akkarmashi", Limbale's use of dialect is another crucial component that captures the local flavor of his community and the diversity within Marathi-speaking regions. His narrative voice shifts between standard Marathi and local dialects, reflecting both his personal identity and the oral traditions of his Mahar community. This regional dialect is central to the text's authenticity, as it conveys the tone, rhythm, and attitudes of his community. However, these dialects often include colloquialisms and regional slang that can be difficult to translate. For example, words or phrases unique to the Mahar dialect might not have a precise equivalent in English, leaving translators to make difficult choices between retaining these words in their original form or using approximate translations that may dilute the local specificity.

The caste system is believed to have originated over 2,000 years ago as a means of organizing society by profession and ritual purity, but over time, it transformed into rigid social hierarchy that stratifies people into distinct groups, with Dalits at the very bottom. Caste identity is ascribed at birth, and for centuries, Dalits were forced into menial, stigmatized labor and excluded from education, land ownership, and participation in mainstream society. They were often subjected to extreme forms of discrimination and violence and were regarded as "untouchable"—a term that encapsulates the physical and social distance enforced between Dalits and other castes. This historical context underpins much of Limbale's suffering and his exploration of identity, dignity, and justice in "Akkarmashi".

For non-Indian readers, understanding this context is crucial because it enables a fuller appreciation of the social and emotional weight of Limbale's narrative. His experiences of humiliation, poverty, and exclusion are not isolated incidents but part of a systemic legacy that has affected generations of Dalits. Without understanding the historical roots and rigid structure of the caste system, readers might interpret Limbale's suffering as individual misfortune rather than a shared, institutionalized experience among

Dalits. Moreover, understanding caste provides readers with insight into the resilience and activism that characterize Dalit literature and social movements. Dalit writers like Limbale are not merely documenting personal hardships; they are challenging centuries-old structures of oppression and advocating for a new social order based on equality and human rights. Translating this narrative without adequate context could diminish the urgency and depth of Limbale's call for justice, rendering the systemic nature of caste oppression invisible to readers unfamiliar with it.

The translation of Sharankumar Limbale's "Akkarmashi" (The Outcaste) has significantly contributed to global discourses of social justice and human rights by highlighting the deeply entrenched systems of discrimination faced by Dalits in India. As the text reaches new, international audiences, it brings awareness to caste oppression as not only a regional or cultural issue but as a matter of universal human rights. This widening of perspective allows readers to see caste-based discrimination as a systemic injustice, akin to other forms of institutionalized oppression around the world, such as racial segregation, apartheid, and economic exclusion.

In the global context, "Akkarmashi" has resonated with readers who draw parallels between the caste system and other systems of inequality. By presenting Dalit experiences within a framework of marginalization and social exclusion, the text encourages readers to recognize the global, intersecting nature of discrimination—whether based on race, ethnicity, class, or religion. This awareness can inspire solidarity across movements for marginalized groups worldwide, building common ground for efforts toward equality, human rights, and social reform. In particular, "Akkarmashi" serves as a reminder that the denial of dignity and opportunity is a human rights violation, regardless of where it occurs or the form it takes.

Further, "Akkarmashi" has brought new perspectives to discussions within social justice literature by emphasizing the importance of cultural and historical specificity in understanding oppression. In the field of human rights, where certain narratives can sometimes be universalized or stripped of local context, Limbale's work underscores the value of culturally specific narratives. His experiences illustrate that any meaningful human rights discourse must address both individual and collective histories and recognize the complex social structures that contribute to marginalization. This contribution has enriched global conversations on rights and justice by showing how the unique experiences of Dalits can inform a broader understanding of how institutionalized discrimination operates. By amplifying Limbale's voice through translation, "Akkarmashi" has become part of a wider movement to decolonize human rights discourse, positioning Dalit struggles within a universal context without erasing the particularities of their experiences. This challenges readers to view human rights as

inclusive of diverse narratives and to consider how global frameworks can adapt to address unique, localized forms of oppression. Through “Akkarmashi”, Limbale's personal story of resilience and his call for dignity are increasingly recognized not only as a fight for Dalit rights in India but as a contribution to the ongoing global movement for justice, equity, and respect for all marginalized communities.

At the core of “Akkarmashi” is the theme of oppression, which manifests in various forms—social, economic, and psychological. Limbale's portrayal of the systemic discrimination faced by Dalits underscores how societal structures can dehumanize individuals and strip them of their rights. This theme resonates universally, as it reflects the experiences of marginalized communities around the world.

Limbale illustrates how oppression is often institutionalized, embedded in laws, traditions, and social norms that perpetuate inequality. His vivid depictions of the humiliation and violence faced by Dalits serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of entrenched discrimination. This exploration of oppression invites readers to examine similar structures in their own societies, whether they manifest as racism, sexism, or classism. By portraying the multifaceted nature of oppression, Limbale connects the specificities of caste-based discrimination to broader discussions of power dynamics and social justice.

Another prominent theme in “Akkarmashi” is the quest for human dignity. Limbale’s narrative emphasizes the intrinsic worth of every individual, regardless of their social standing or caste affiliation. His experiences reveal the devastating impact of caste oppression on self-esteem, identity, and personal worth, as Dalits are often treated as less than human. Throughout the text, Limbale asserts his humanity and challenges the societal narratives that devalue Dalits

This theme of human dignity resonates globally, particularly in movements advocating for the rights of marginalized groups. It highlights the fundamental belief that dignity is a universal right that should be afforded to all individuals. Limbale’s work compels readers to confront the ways in which society can uphold or violate this right and encourages a collective responsibility to ensure dignity for all. By affirming the importance of dignity, “Akkarmashi” contributes to global discourses on human rights, emphasizing that the fight for dignity is integral to social justice.

The quest for identity is a deeply personal and universal theme in Limbale’s narrative. As a Dalit, Limbale grapples with the societal labels and prejudices that shape his identity struggling to reconcile his sense of self with the oppressive forces that seek to define him. His journey reflects a broader search for identity that many individuals and communities experience in the face of discrimination. Limbale’s exploration of identity is particularly poignant as he navigates the

complexities of belonging and self-acceptance within a caste-based society that consistently undermines his worth. His assertion of his identity as a Dalit becomes an act of resistance against the dehumanizing narratives imposed upon him. This theme resonates with readers globally, as the search for identity is a common human experience, particularly for those who find themselves marginalized or oppressed. It raises questions about how identity is constructed and understood in relation to social structures, culture, and community.

### 3. Limitations

The translation of Sharankumar Limbale's "Akkarmashi" presents several limitations that can impact the reader's understanding of the text, particularly concerning cultural nuance. One significant challenge is the potential loss of idiomatic expressions and regional dialects that are integral to conveying the emotional and cultural weight of the narrative. Limbale's use of local phrases, metaphors, and idioms rooted in Marathi culture captures the essence of Dalit experiences in a way that often lacks direct equivalents in other languages. These expressions not only reflect the socio-cultural realities of Dalit life but also carry connotations that may be lost in translation, leading to a diluted representation of the original message.

Furthermore, the translation process may risk oversimplifying complex social issues related to caste oppression. In efforts to make the text accessible to a global audience, translators might resort to generalized language that fails to capture the specificity of Limbale's experiences and the intricacies of caste dynamics. Such simplifications can render the narrative more palatable for international readers but may inadvertently strip away the urgency and gravity of the issues presented.

Additionally, there is a danger of exoticizing Dalit struggles, framing them as "other" or "foreign" rather than recognizing their legitimacy as part of a global discourse on social justice. This perspective can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce a narrative of victimhood that does not account for the resilience and agency of Dalit communities. The resulting portrayal risks overshadowing the nuanced realities of caste oppression, leading to misunderstandings that undermine the significance of Limbale's work within both Indian and global contexts.

The translation of Sharankumar Limbale's "Akkarmashi" (The Outcaste) carries significant implications for global discourses on human rights and social justice movements. By making Limbale's narrative accessible to an international audience, the translation amplifies the voices of marginalized communities, particularly those grappling with systemic oppression. The work serves as a crucial text that illustrates the realities of caste-based discrimination, allowing readers worldwide to recognize that



such struggles are not confined to India but are part of a broader, shared fight against inequality and injustice.

Moreover, literature has the unique power to serve as a bridge between cultures, fostering understanding and empathy among diverse communities. Translating works like “Akkarmashi” not only allows readers to engage with the specific experiences of Dalits but also invites them to reflect on their own societal contexts and the structures that perpetuate inequality. Through the emotional depth and authenticity of Limbale’s narrative, readers can develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities of identity, dignity, and human rights.

In essence, the translation of “Akkarmashi” is not merely a linguistic endeavor; it is a vital means of promoting awareness, empathy, and activism in global discourses on social justice. By highlighting the intersectionality of oppression, Limbale’s work challenges readers to confront systemic injustices and advocate for a more equitable world, reinforcing the idea that literature can be a powerful catalyst for social change.

#### 4. Conclusion

The exploration of Sharankumar Limbale’s “Akkarmashi” underscores the critical value of translating Dalit literature for both cultural preservation and global awareness of caste oppression. The translation of Limbale’s work facilitates access to the lived realities of Dalits, inviting international readers to engage with their struggles and aspirations. This process reveals the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination, allowing readers to draw parallels between caste-based oppression in India and other marginalized experiences worldwide. Such global interpretations enhance the discourse on social justice, emphasizing the universal relevance of Limbale’s narrative.

However, the study also highlights significant limitations involved in the translation process. The potential loss of cultural nuance—manifested in idiomatic expressions, regional dialects, and context-specific references—can dilute the emotional and cultural depth of the original text. Additionally, the risks of oversimplification and exoticization may lead to misunderstandings that undermine the complexities of Dalit struggles. These limitations necessitate a careful approach to translation, emphasizing the need for translators to honor the specificity of the original work while making it accessible to broader audiences.

Ultimately, the role of translation in promoting cross-cultural solidarity and awareness cannot be overstated. By translating works like “Akkarmashi”, translators serve as conduits between cultures, fostering understanding and empathy among diverse communities. This cross-cultural engagement not





only amplifies marginalized voices but also challenges readers to confront systemic injustices in their own societies. Literature has the power to transcend borders and inspire collective action, making translation a vital tool in the global struggle for human rights and social justice. Through thoughtful translation, Limbale's narrative can resonate across cultural divides, encouraging a shared commitment to dignity, equality, and justice for all marginalized communities.

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