

# **The Politics of Illegitimacy and Resistance in Sharan kumar**

## **Limbale’s The White Paper (Akkarmashi)**

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### **Abstract**

Sharankumar Limbale’s *The White Paper (Akkarmashi, 1984)* stands as one of the most influential autobiographical narratives in Dalit literature and a foundational text in the articulation of Dalit subjectivity. The text foregrounds the existential crisis of the Akkarmashi—the “half-caste” born of caste-transgressive sexual exploitation—and exposes the structural violence embedded in caste society. Through a narrative that oscillates between personal anguish and collective testimony, Limbale documents the psychological fragmentation, social humiliation, and political invisibility imposed upon Dalits by Brahmanical patriarchy. This article examines *The White Paper* through the lenses of Dalit aesthetics, Ambedkarite thought, and subaltern studies, arguing that Limbale transforms personal trauma into a political document that indicts caste society. The narrative reveals how caste, sexuality, and illegitimacy intersect to produce a life of perpetual exclusion, while simultaneously asserting the agency of the oppressed through the act of self-representation. Ultimately, the text functions as a counter-archive that reclaims dignity through testimony, making it a seminal contribution to the canon of Dalit resistance literature.

**Keywords:** Dalit literature, Sharankumar Limbale, The White Paper (Akkarmashi), Dalit autobiography.

## 1. Introduction

Sharankumar Limbale's *The White Paper* is not merely an autobiography; it is a socio-political indictment of caste society and a radical intervention in Indian literary discourse. The title *Akkarmashi*, meaning "illegitimate," encapsulates the protagonist's fractured identity as the son of a dominant-caste landlord and a Dalit woman. This identity is not simply a personal burden but a structural condition produced by caste hierarchy, which weaponizes sexuality, lineage, and purity to sustain its power.

Dalit autobiographies differ fundamentally from mainstream autobiographical traditions. They do not celebrate individual triumph but expose collective suffering. Limbale's narrative voice becomes a conduit for the suppressed histories of Dalit communities, aligning with his later theoretical work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004), where he argues that Dalit writing must emerge from lived experience, social truth, and political urgency. *The White Paper* thus stands at the intersection of personal memory and collective history, functioning as both literature and testimony.

### **The Concept of the Akkarmashi: Illegitimacy as Social Death**

**The central theme of *The White Paper* is the condition of the Akkarmashi, a figure doubly marginalized:**

- Illegitimate in caste terms, because he is born outside sanctioned endogamy.
- Illegitimate in familial terms, because he is denied paternal recognition and inheritance.

This dual illegitimacy produces what sociologists describe as "social death"—a condition in which the subject is biologically alive but socially erased. Limbale's narrative repeatedly illustrates this erasure: he is denied entry into his father's house, excluded from the

privileges of caste lineage, and simultaneously alienated within his mother's Mahar community, which views him as a reminder of caste violation.

This liminality destabilizes the caste system's obsession with purity. The dominant-caste man's sexual exploitation of Dalit women is normalized, but the child born from such exploitation is condemned. Limbale exposes this hypocrisy, revealing how caste society protects the oppressor while punishing the victim. The Akkarmashi becomes a living embodiment of caste violence—an identity produced by the system yet rejected by it.

#### Caste, Sexuality, and Power

Limbale's narrative foregrounds the intersection of caste and sexuality, exposing how caste operates through the control and exploitation of Dalit women's bodies. The landlord's sexual access to Dalit women is not an aberration but a structural feature of caste society.

#### **Dalit women become:**

- Labourers in the fields
- Sexual objects in the landlord's house
- Mothers of children who will never be acknowledged

This dynamic aligns with Dalit feminist critiques, particularly Sharmila Rege's argument that caste patriarchy is sustained through the sexual subordination of Dalit women. Limbale's mother becomes a symbol of this exploitation—her relationships with upper-caste men are not romantic choices but survival strategies in a system that denies Dalits economic autonomy.

The text also reveals how caste patriarchy fractures Dalit families. The landlord's refusal to recognize his children creates a lineage of illegitimacy, shame, and deprivation. Limbale's identity is shaped by this violence, and his narrative exposes the emotional and material consequences of caste-based sexual exploitation.

### **Autobiography as Collective Testimony**

Although *The White Paper* is autobiographical, Limbale repeatedly emphasizes that his suffering is not unique. The autobiography becomes a collective document, a “white paper” in the political sense—an official report exposing systemic injustice.

#### **Key features of this testimonial mode include:**

- Direct, unembellished language that rejects Sanskritized literary norms and elite aesthetics.
- Depictions of hunger, humiliation, and violence as everyday realities rather than exceptional events.
- A refusal to romanticize rural life, countering mainstream Marathi literature that often idealizes village communities.

This testimonial mode aligns with Ambedkar’s insistence that the oppressed must narrate their own histories. Limbale’s narrative challenges upper-caste representations of Dalit life, asserting the authority of lived experience over literary convention.

### **Dalit Aesthetics and the Ethics of Representation**

Limbale’s later theoretical work provides a framework for understanding the aesthetic principles underlying *The White Paper*. Dalit literature, he argues, must be:

- Authentic, rooted in lived experience rather than imagination.
- Revolutionary, aimed at social transformation rather than aesthetic pleasure.
- Collective, representing the suffering and aspirations of the community.

#### **In *The White Paper*, these principles manifest through:**

- Minimalist style, mirroring the starkness of Dalit life.
- Fragmented narrative, reflecting the fractured identity of the Akkarmashi.
- Political anger, directed at caste oppression and social hypocrisy.

The text rejects the aesthetic of “beauty” in favour of an aesthetic of truth. Limbale insists that literature must confront the ugliness of social reality, not conceal it. This marks a radical departure from mainstream Indian literature, which often avoids confronting caste violence directly.

### **Identity, Education, and the Search for Dignity**

**Education becomes Limbale’s only path toward self-definition and dignity. Yet even in school, caste follows him:**

- Teachers humiliate him.
- Classmates mock his illegitimacy.
- Institutions reproduce caste hierarchies.

Despite these obstacles, education becomes a tool of resistance, echoing Ambedkar’s call to “educate, agitate, organize.” Limbale’s eventual entry into the literary world symbolizes the reclamation of voice denied to Dalits for centuries. Through writing, he asserts agency, challenges caste ideology, and redefines the identity imposed upon him.

### **The Political Significance of The White Paper**

**The political power of The White Paper lies in its refusal to offer reconciliation. There is:**

- No redemption arc
- No paternal acceptance
- No escape from caste

**Instead, Limbale exposes the permanence of caste violence and the structural nature of Dalit oppression. The autobiography becomes:**

- A counter-history to Brahmanical narratives
- A critique of caste patriarchy
- A manifesto for Dalit assertion

Its publication marked a turning point in Marathi and Indian literature, inspiring a wave of Dalit autobiographies that foregrounded lived experience as political truth. The text continues to influence contemporary Dalit discourse, shaping debates on identity, representation, and resistance.

## 2. Conclusion

Sharankumar Limbale's *The White Paper* is a foundational text in Dalit literature because it transforms personal trauma into political testimony. By exposing the violence of caste, the exploitation of Dalit women, and the existential crisis of the Akkarmashi, Limbale challenges the moral legitimacy of the caste system itself. The text stands as a powerful reminder that literature can function as resistance, and that the voices of the oppressed—once silenced—can become instruments of social transformation. *The White Paper* remains a crucial document in understanding the politics of caste, identity, and resistance in modern India.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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