

‘Outcaste: a Memoir’: A Study of Narrative and Reminisces of ‘Narendra Jadhav’

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Abstract: *India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. It has rich heritage with customs and traditions. But on the contrary it has also the rigid caste system, with the history of suppression and the origin of Dalit writings. The word Dalit signifies a radical movement that challenged the existing stereotypes lying in Hindu society. This paper examines the scope of Dalit Literature. Most of the Dalit literary creations have their roots in the Ambedkarite thoughts. The paper studies the conditions of social factors existing in India that surround the Dalits and the discrimination shown by the upper castes on them. Dalit autobiographies have been written by the marginalized people who are at the lowest rung of the Indian society. Many research papers have been written on the plight of the Dalits, their conditions of poverty, hunger, atrocities and physical violence and on the protests and revolutions held by the Dalits to seek equality in the society. Outcaste: A Memoir by Narendra Jadhav is one of the well known translated Dalit autobiography. The autobiography is a great work of social commitment with an aim of promoting the ideas of social equality and justice and of bringing an end to the suffering, discrimination and the exploitation of the Dalits.*

Keywords: *Dalit writings, atrocities, inequality and injustice towards Dalits, physical violence, poverty and exploitation of Dalits, Outcaste: A Memoir, the autobiography of Narendra Jadhav*

1. INTRODUCTION

Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste: A Memoir*, initially published in 1993 in Marathi, was entitled *Amcha Baap An Amhi* (Our Father and We). The book was translated into French under the title ‘*Intouchable*’ in 2002 by Fayard, Paris and has been translated into several other European languages. The book portrays Dalit social history during pre and post independence in India, his memories and experiences with his family members. ‘*Outcaste: A Memoir*’ is a struggling journey of their family and the whole community as well. It is a book of memoir that puts together the story of three generations spread over eighty years.

Narendra Jadhav was awarded the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad Award for his book *Dr. Ambedkar: Economic thoughts and Philosophy* (1992). He has been a successful writer and a well known economist and also won the best international student award for his outstanding contribution for economic theory.

Narendra Jadhav was born in a Mahar family. He was the son of Damu, an illiterate but self respecting untouchable who fought with a steadfast ambition to help people have a break from the hegemony of caste. The work is lucid and clear. Damu Mahar is the protagonist at the centre. The English format is written in the format of a Memoir and hence the title *Outcaste: A Memoir*. Jadhav follows diary style with dates and writes from the perspectives of Damu Mahar(Father), his wife Sonubai(Mother) and Narendra Jadhav. The autobiography is written in first person singular. The first part portrays the plight of Mahars in the oppressive and marginalized society. The entire work is divided into four parts entitled, ‘*Up Against Bondage*’, ‘*Towards Freedom*’, ‘*The struggle*’ and ‘*Making of the Second Generation*’. The youngest member of the fourth generation of Jadhav’s family, Apoorva, the seventeen year old daughter of Jadhav wrote the Epilogue.

Narendra Jadhav’s forefathers had been humiliated and exploited in the marginalized society which lit the flame and burning desire to reach great heights to fight against this exploitation and to stand in a class based society guiding the future generations. A reader ought to know the interesting aspect from

Jadhav's point of view to know the importance of forefathers in social history and simultaneously of that which emerges as a thought provoking argument.

Dada(Jadhav) spent his childhood in Ozar in Nasik and later in Mumbai for the rest of his period. The dialect used at Nasik has been chosen when writing the Marathi autobiography. The words of Aamacha Baap has Marathi components used in the colloquial language, that used in the rural sector, words used in English language, corrupted English and Marathi words, words from Hindi language and also from other languages. A reader also finds usage of butler English in his Memoir.

Outcaste portrays the reality and authentic experience from a Dalit perspective to a contemporary Dalit Movement and Dalit Literature. Fredic Jameson's famous formulation about 'third world literature': *'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society.'* (Broughton 27).

Narendra Jadhav's father, Damu was much influenced by Ambedkarism and Dalit movements. One can see his social commitment, struggle and Dalit consciousness in many an event throughout the work. In his own words, Jadhav says, *"Dada exemplified the new found pride and awareness that Babasaheb Ambedkar had inculcated among Dalits. He learnt to be fearless and raised us to be brave too."* (Jadhav 56). Damu was not a born leader. But he chose to fight against the prevailing caste system and create his own destiny. He was an intelligent man, with no formal education. He worked hard to live with dignity and self-respect.

Jadhav describes Damu as, *"Damu was not a leader.. but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny."* Or, *"Damu had no formal education... yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence."*, or *"Damu was not a guru... but he taught his children to believe in themselves and retain human dignity."*, or *"Damu was often humbled. Yet he maintained, goats are special offerings, not lions"* or *"Damu was an ordinary man, they said... but he did an extraordinary thing; he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system"*.

Damu is a common man in a village who works as a Yeskar, the one who is assigned village duties like that of guarding dead bodies. He has seen many atrocities, social boycott and excluded life due to the hegemony in hierarchical society. Damu criticizes Hindu tradition, *"What kind of tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cats and dogs? I spit on these inhuman traditions, I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for Baluta, what are all of you going to do? Kill me?"* (Jadhav 10). The words spoken by Damu do not only show his painful criticism but is a pertinent criticism leveled by Dalit community against Hinduism. Nirad C Chaudhury in his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) criticizes Hindusim: *"Hindu spirituality is a pursuit, not of beatitude, but of power"* (Naik 269). Dalit movements rose with the injecting of socio-economic misery that has been in existence in the class structures of the country into the body politic. Dalits have been struggling to form an identity for themselves. They form a marginalized section of the population and it is this assertion of their identity and their consequent attempts to achieve social status with other citizens that forms the focus of enquiry in this paper.

We find this Ambedkar's intellectual argument and social criticism in Damu's life. Damu reminds us of Ambedkar's words *"The untouchables have to do away with the humiliating and enslaving traditions of village duties like carrying away dead cattle. It is utterly disgraceful to sell your human rights for a few crumbs of bread. We will attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self respect and gain self-knowledge."* (Jadhav22). One can find that Ambedkar's teachings have a profound effect on Damu and Sonu and they realize that they have begun to develop a sense of self *"Truly we sensed a change in the way we carried ourselves. We proudly proclaimed ourselves Dalits with our chin up, and we looked everyone in the eye. We began to lose our former servility, associated with being born in low caste."*

Damu's individual life presents the entire community's voice. His words are words of revolution for social justice. It is this that marks Dalit's strength to attack hegemony's injustice. Damu is challenging and bold and his voice created intolerable conditions in the village to the upper caste people and within the community. His views against the bondage lead to freedom. For him, his wife Sonu and the principles of Ambedkar are everything in this world. It is not only Damu and Sonu walking towards freedom but the whole community.

Damu was married in late 1926 and travelled with his wife Sonu from a small village at Ozar in Maharashtra to the city of Mumbai in order to escape persecution. He never seemed to leave the concepts of Ambedkarism and Dalit movements and took an active participation in these movements. Ideals of Ambedkar were an insight for him to carry his family and social responsibilities. He criticizes Hinduism and also the treatment meted out to women. He says, “*The Hindu religion and the caste system are inseparable. Caste system forms the basis of Hinduism. This religion justifies the Karma Theory and so accords the slave status of women. It aggravates the conditions of women by reinforcing, rationalising and practices, and makes women feel that they are inferior creature and sinners.*” (Paswan 17).

These ideologies of Ambedkar made Damu create in him a hope to see his children fulfill their aspirations and rise to high positions at all levels and finally overcome the barriers that have so bedeviled their own lives. The summary of Dalit movements and politics that Damu has seen is the dominance of upper caste on the lives of Dalits. As Gail Omvedt observes, ‘*the logic of dalit politics comprises its antagonism towards Hinduism as Brahmanic hegemony and that this hegemony had to be overthrown*’. So he seems to be greatly cautious in bringing up his children and he is reminded to be the one in Ambedkar’s words, “*There will be no difference between parents and animals if they do not desire to see their children in a better position than their own.*” (Jadhav 22). Thus Damu’s careful attachment towards his children appears in Narendra Jadhav’s life.

Damu’s main idea of struggle is to bring liberty, equality and human dignity. His life is directed towards Ambedkarism to uphold a humanist social vision, a broader perspective to address the concerns of the lower strata of society. Dr. Ambedkar inspired people through his writings and speeches. He inspired people to take an active role in movements for social change. Aravind Malagatti, one of the autobiographers says, “*I show society’s weakness and mine*” (Malagatti xvi). Dalits strongly opine that truth and reality are a great wealth for their life’s struggle.

Religion according to Marx is opium that makes human mind poisonous. Dr. Ambedkar critically remarks that Hindu religion divided Dalits in all the aspects and emerged as the root cause for their downtrodden position. Dalit men and women have been inhumanly treated by Hinduism. Ambedkar criticizes Hindus “*Even the stone walls of the temple would melt in the face of worship to God, but not the hearts of the orthodox Hindu.*” (Jadhav130). The fact is that India is a secular country but it stands as a non-secular and doubly colonized country in case of minorities. Damu says “*Atrocities, exploitations and inhuman treatment of upper castes provokes Dalits to question their identity.*” (Jadhav 19).

One of the Dalit poets Namdeo Dhasal presents his powerful criticism on caste in “Now Now” poem.

The sun of self-respect has burst into Flame,

Let it burn up caste (Dangle 1992).

For Dalits nothing is more important than self-respect. For them, self-respect and education are crowns for their upliftment. As Ambedkar said “*We can forgo the material benefits of the world but we cannot forgo the fruitful benefits of education*” (Ambedkar 345). Struggle for education is a struggle for self-respect, gender equation and economic equality.

Narendra Jadhav’s childhood, student life and his career are built with his parents’ humble, sincere and struggling life. One finds the intellectual ideas of his parents in every phase of his life. Jadhav reminds us one of the words of Kabir, a fifteenth century poet and saint.

I stood knocking at the doorsteps of human as I died...

Who are you...? I was asked.

My entire existence on earth could not tell me who I was...

And that is what I have come to ask you....’

Who am I? (Jadhav 207).

The bottom line always stood out: “*I was a mere mahar, a Dalit, a Harijan, and a scheduled caste belonging to the lowest stratum of society. No matter what I did, where I went, or what success I achieved. I would always be looked upon as a mahar, an untouchable.... albeit one who had achieved success. It was as if being a mahar was as apology for a human being! Yes, I do come from the Mahar*

caste. Yes, my father was an illiterate lowly employee doing menial jobs to earn a square meal for the family. Yes my forefathers were untouchables. Yes, my forefathers required wearing clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.” (Jadhav 207).

Jadhav reveals the painful history of his forefathers being oppressed and exploited in the hands of the upper castes. But he strongly affirms that he has been able to uplift his self dignity in spite of all that has happened to his forefathers. Thus *Outcaste: A Memoir* remains an *unforgettable memory that makes him re-identify himself as a Dalit with his wretched history. “I underplayed the injustice part because, by then, the stories of oppression had been told and retold, they had become shrill, a blame game going on with upper-caste people held responsible for acts committed by their forefathers,” says Jadhav. “So, my story was about how I made it in this world despite the oppression.”*

Outcaste: A Memoir teaches us everything from patience, humbleness to hardwork. The reality to construct the future of every Dalit man and woman with Dalit consciousness is to be accepted and understood. There are many disadvantaged people like Jadhav who questioned their identity. Foucault says *“I do not feel that it is necessary to know exactly who I am. The main interest in life and work is to become some one else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what would you say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worth while in so far as we do not know what will be the end.”* (Macey xiv).

Jadhav recollects an incident how he was humiliated by his upper caste teacher after reaching a high position, a reminiscence of past but that past that ought to be struggled with the past to reconstruct the successful future like Jadhav’s life. He says:

The most ironic was my high-caste school teacher’s remark made while bidding me farewell. This teacher used to publicly refer to me as the ‘government’ son-in-law because my tuition had been waived. Once when I had outperformed all others in Sanskrit – supposedly the divine language, and an exclusive preserve of the high castes for centuries – this same teacher had said that he was beginning to lose faith in the education system! (Jadhav 206-7).

Jadhav’s mother Sonu was a traditional woman mixed with a tinge of spirituality. She is not aware of patriarchy, gender inequalities and dominant attitude of the upper class. She practices her regular duties and performs puja to Mairai, Vishaba and Khandoba, their family deities. She is a selfless woman, free from prejudice and leads a spiritual life. Jadhav is never influenced with Sonu’s spiritual life but is closely attached to his father comparatively.

Narendra Jadhav wondered why he was not judged on the basis of his intellectuality rather than being judged on the grounds of his origin. Dalits have been looked down by the upper caste even when they have been the classmates and colleagues. . He says that Brahmins’ psychology towards Dalits never changes from the religious grounds but is linked up with birth, caste and religion. One of the Dalit activists Harish Bansode’s says *“I am proud that I am a Mahar! Mahars have ruled this country. Mahars are brave. Mahars are scholars. Mahars have rich heritage and culture.”* (Paswan 47).

Jadhav speaks of an incident when he went inside the temple but everything strikes him in the eyes:

I was the unwanted, unworthy untouchable.

I was transported to another era. Fear gripped me...

I could be thrown out of the temple....

Whipped for violating time-honoured social customs” (Jadhav 212).

Jadhav’s reminiscence was wounded and consciousness rose for Dalits that evoked Dalit’s prohibition in the temple premises. He shows his utter rejection: *“I fished out a wad of crisp hundred rupee notes from my pocket and begun handing them out to the priests, pressing them into their outstretched, imploring, touchable palms. They swooped upon me like eager hawks.”* (Jadhav 212). He further says *“Was this the only way I could buy my way into the temple? Buy some touchability?”* (Jadhav 212).

The temple priests would arrange a separate entry for politicians and other reputed people which would not be done in case of common people. Here, what matters is not the sincerity, purity or human

nature but social status, money and power. Jadhav raises a question if Vedas has taught us to treat Dalits inhumanly. Dalits are needed for basic needs and in manual labour like construction of temples but in turn are treated inhumanly by the priests of these temples with the pride of their caste.

Narendra Jadhav attains his human dignity through his achievements. He is not ashamed of his caste status in the past. What he asks is a space as a human being and a citizen that makes identity of him irrelevant on the basis of caste. *“He believes that destiny is in their hands, and they are to be blamed if they don’t come up; and they have to struggle and they have to fight, this awareness is unprecedented.”* (Anand 34). His ideology is to direct the young Dalits to construct their future with Dalit consciousness and struggle. Apoorva, the daughter of Narendra Jadhav locates herself in USA. She opines that caste is a thing of the past and a burden of her forefathers. Both Jadhav and Apoorva claim their identities as citizens of Mahar community. They do not deny their Mahar/Dalit identity but trace themselves in the space to claim the status of a universal citizen. It is that we could only be Indians in the global context with no tag of race, caste or religion. The words like Untouchable, Dalit have no place in the sphere but become irrelevant and redundant. It is to be noted that Jadhav wrote *Outcaste* when he was in Washington DC for four years. Jadhav is one of the Dalit intellectuals. He asserts his identity in these words: *“If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their problem, not mine. I certainly don’t need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices.”* (Outcaste: 214)

In an interview, Jadhav talks of Indian villages that are reproduced as centres of untouchability and caste atrocities and says: *“Please recall that when Gandhiji was telling people to “go to the villages”, Ambedkar was advising his followers to do just the opposite – “go to the cities”. One can understand the value of life probing into the meaning into every Dalit woman’s and man’s autobiographies. Dr. Ambedkar’s intellectual and challenging life gives awareness of education as a means of transformation from gutter to greater heights.*

Narendra Jadhav’s autobiography speaks of human rights. In a country like India, where the constitution has given all the human beings the right to speak, protest and live life of one’s own, Dalits are restrained from speaking and protesting and the minorities when it comes to human rights.

“Autobiography is of interest only to the extent that it might prompt an important chapter in post-structuralist theory” (Broughton 15).

Ambedkar’s says:

*Lost rights are never regained by begging,
but relentless struggle. Goats are used for
sacrificed offerings, not lions”* (Jadhav 20).

According to Ambedkar, we achieve our education and equal rights through struggle rather than begging as there is no meaning in begging for rights but a meaning in struggle for human rights. *“Only the proletariat can grasp the real nature of social relations when in social revolutions it emerges as the collective subject- object of history and in doing so fulfills the dialectical process described by Marx”* (Ayers 140).

Jadhav got married to an upper caste girl (Brahmin girl) Vasundhara though her mother rejected their proposal. Vasundhara says, *“Education has nothing to do with it. He may be good but he belongs to a low caste. If you marry him, our family’s reputation and position in society will be reduced to nothing.”* (Jadhav 243). This shows the general dominant nature of the upper caste. They are stubborn in their choice of food and marriage and would not share food with others. On the contrary Damu and Jadhav strongly believe that all human beings are equal in all respects and seek to establish an egalitarian society. Narendra Jadhav asks Damu. *“Dada, in getting married, should one choose a soulmate or a caste? Damu says “Just remember that whichever girl you choose, don’t bother about what caste she is from.”* (Jadhav 242). Damu’s consciousness has taught him to build a society which unites the different people irrespective of caste, gender and religion.

Damu never supported Gandhism due to his personal experience. He remained an Ambedkarist. Gandhi was a visible anti-Dalit. Damu participates in the black flag demonstration in a protest against Gandhism in 1931. Dalits were renounced and made to disagree with the religious practices in their life. He recollects his memory and says, *“That was the first time I saw him. With his simple homespun*

apparel, kind face and of gesture, Gandhiji looked like a loving father figure. One look at him, even from a distance, and I found my anger dissolving.” (Jadhav 147). Jadhav says that Dalits never believed in Gandhism for their upliftment after Phule and Ambedkar came into picture. Jadhav severely criticizes the orthodox nature in Hinduism. Damu says, “What do these people want? They want us to meekly follow Hinduism, a religion that does not allow Hindus to enter temples? Why should we favour the religion that preaches untouchability and discrimination? Who has given the Brahmin class the authority to decide our fate? We are masters of our destiny and have to reclaim our rightful place in society. We shall renounce Hinduism. Hail Babasaheb, the great one, who is our visionary, our saviour!” (Jadhav 179). Jadhav is of the opinion that Gandhi is simply another form of status quo-ism, the ancient orthodox Hinduism. He says that Hinduism believes in the law of Karma, so does Gandhism. Hinduism enjoins cow-worship, so does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in incarnation of God and so does Gandhism. Gandhism promotes in the concept that people need to accept their misfortunes as their best of good fortunes which none can accept. “The shudra who only serves (the higher caste) as a matter of religious duty and who will never own any property, who indeed has not even the ambitions to own anything, is deserving of thousands obeisance. The very Gods will shower down flowers on him.” (Ambedkar 68). Jadhav says that Gandhi’s spirituality and Ahimsa have not done justice to Dalits. His concept of Moksha and birth are rhetorical and his psychology is closer to Hinduism rather than to egalitarianism and secularism. The concepts of purity and impurity are not in food and things, but in their minds that always was to save their existence and to dominate Dalits.

Ambedkar’s principles and ideologies made Damu converted him to Buddhism but his wife opposed him fiercely. “Today, you are saying you don’t like Hinduism so you want to change... it is religion that you want to change... not clothes! Damu says:

“Eh, Soney, what’s wrong with you? Why, you look as if someone close to you has died....’

Yes, you are out to kill my faith”.

“No what we are doing is rekindling our faith in ourselves as humans. We are giving up the religion where we are unwanted” (Jadhav180).

If not initially, Sonu later realizes Damu’s words and greatness of Buddhism. Sonu herself had a bitter experience of being an untouchable in the village. On an occasion of a wedding feast at the landlord’s house, she was snubbed for polluting the sweets but unfortunately the sweets were made by Sonu. There are many such incidents in Sonu’s life that force her to reject Hinduism. “Hindusim will never be destroyed ... but ... what is surviving is only the ugliness of Hinduism” (Naik 267). Jadhav encountered the sufferings and atrocities from the society through his education and social status. One can see the protesting nature in Narendra Jadhav damu and sonu and also in Apoorva, Narendra Jadhav’s daughter. Apoorva says “Now, I think I know who I am. I am just Apoorva, not tied down by race, religion or caste. My ancestors carried the burden of being a Dalit and bowing down to demeaning tasks even after India’s independence. I have the torch they lit for me and nothing can stop me.” (Jadhav 263). Jadhav understands and takes pride in the idea of his daughter in carrying the Dalit identity, Dalit’s social history and respect for ancestors and respect for self-respect, dignity and identity. He says “It is unfortunate truth of our society that whatever heights a man might scale, his caste is never cast off; it remains an inseparable part of his identity. His caste always remains a cause for scorn or contempt. Only the type of humiliation changes.” (Jadhav207-08). Humiliation faced by Dalit women and men is a visible social atrocity.

Outcaste: A Memoir presents a challenge to Hinduism by an individual and community as a whole. His narration brings about a social consciousness for the future generation and their upliftment and their welfare. “Reading autobiography promises a cherished resource and stimulating occupation.” (Broughton 50). The narration given by the autobiographer would be autobiographer’s personal and social life around which the entire story revolves. A reader whether Dalit or not can understand the Dalit Autobiographies with a humanistic approach and attitude of change and openness to accept the inhuman practices of caste system and can learn that they ought not to follow the repressive social order in the changing times.

2. CONCLUSION

Contribution of Dr. Ambedkar: “Noble is your aim and sublime and glorious is your mission. Blessed are those who are awakened to their duty to those among whom they are born. Glory to those,

who devote their time, talents and themselves to the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who would reap their struggle for the liberation of the enslaved in spite of heavy odds, car pine humiliation, storms and dangers till the downtrodden secure their Human Rights.” (Ambedkar n.d.).

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