



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



## EDUCATION LIBERATES THE DOWNTRODDEN FROM THE SHACKLES OF CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A STUDY ON NARENDRA JADHAV'S 'OUTCASTE: A MEMOIR'

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### ABSTRACT



Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* is successful in constructing the dalit identity in the cosmopolitan terms and elaborating dalit politics into global perspective. He does not consider dalits to be located to one place, or even to one state or country but a community as citizen of the world. It is the story of Damu Runjaji Jadhav, the uneducated, engine-mechanic in Mumbai Railways and his family. As a dalit text, the memoir is beyond all shade of doubt, the representation of the assertive and vibrant dalit characters, the writing of dalit history and the formation of dalit identity in the global context. Damu is inspired by the philosophy espoused by Babasaheb Ambedkar and he also participated in Ambedkarite Movement. The slogan of 'Educate, Organise and Agitate' given by Babasaheb Ambedkar to his millions of untouchable brothers reverberates in the story. The influence of Dr. Ambedkar's ideas made an activist out of Damu. He came to realize that it was not sufficient to remain content with being able to live one's life and provide for the family. The aim of this paper is to emphasize that education helps the downtrodden to refine quality of life and liberate themselves from the exploitation of caste. The book ends with the realization that further change is required. The world has to stop treating dalits as different. It is up to the present generation to carry the torch lit by the tears and blood of their ancestors.

**Keywords:** Education, Liberation, Downtrodden, Discrimination, Memoir.



Dr. Narendra Jadhav is a leading educationist, economist and policy maker, well known social scientist and bestselling author rising up from dire poverty and shackles of an oppressive caste system. Dr. Jadhav wrote about trials and tribulations of untouchable family, his own family in his autobiographical novel *Outcaste: A memoir*.

Coming in line of development and growth of Indian English prose from Raja Rammohan Roy to Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and others, Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003) is a landmark as a dalit literary text in English that goes a long way in formulating the dalit identity in cosmopolitan sense and in global context. The text also seems to mark a new phase of dalit writings – moving beyond from the struggle phase to the phase of success, glory and achievements. Dalit Autobiography is the most popular form of dalit writing with a dalit consciousness. Dalit poetry, Drama, Short Story, Novel and Autobiography all portray the grim picture of Indian society where millions of dalits strive to acquire their human rights along with the basic necessities of life.

Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* is successful in constructing the dalit identity in the cosmopolitan terms and elaborating dalit politics into global perspective. He does not consider dalits to be located to one place, or even to one state or country but a community as citizen of the world. Jadhav's memoir seems to sing of success and glory of dalit consciousness in the context of globalization. It is chiefly due to the fact that it was published in the era/context of globalization and the internationalization of the caste question initiated in the 1990s.

To summarize the whole story of the *Outcaste* Singh says:

If one were asked to sum up the whole meaning of Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* in two power points, these would be: (i) the inhumanity of the Hindu caste system and (ii) the indomitable spirit of its victims (represented by Damu, the author's father) against this inhumanity. (Singh, 24)

Besides these two focal things, there are some other strands in this book which make it a powerful presence in the area of dalit literature. Here we have the eye-witness accounts of the movement of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar which he launched and sustainingly led for the socio-cultural and politico-economic emancipation of the dalits who suffered untouchability and the related deprivations at the hands of the high caste Hindus.

Narendra Jadhav gives a kind of positive energy to the readers. He encourages the dalits to come up well in life with strong determination and hard work. He emphasizes that caste should not be barrier to the development of outcastes. He says "he is 'psychologically and ethically against' fixing the responsibility of one's misfortune upon others. 'If you have a burning desire you can come up in life.' That is the positive message I am trying to give through the book" (News Today 14-11-2003).

A reading through the history of dalit literature suggests that during the decade of the 1970s, its evolution mainly centered around the injustices inflicted on the dalits, and the deprivations suffered by them through the centuries. The constant refrain was to talk about the oppression at the hands



of the upper caste Hindus. Daya Pawar's autobiographical narrative *Balutha*, Laxman Mane's *Upara*, or even Dr. Kishor Shantabai Kale's *Kolhatyacha por* (An Illegitimate Offspring) reflected this trend. Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi: The Outcaste* and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, continued with this trend. Though there are good number of biographies from dalits, Jadhav's is unique. Most of the dalit biographies express their agony and criticize the treatment meted out to them by the Hindu society. They questioned the injustice but Jadhav's *Outcaste* is a success story:

And it should be stressed that this typicality of dalit literature has strong roots in the facts of history of the socio-cultural-economic mental set-up that is called casteism. Narendra Jadhav's *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi (Outcaste: A Memoir)* made a departure from the tedium of grievances. (R P Singh, 23)

It is the story of Damu Runjaji Jadhav, the uneducated, engine-mechanic in Mumbai Railways and his sons, Jayawant (IAS), Sudhakar (Employee at Gulf Air, Aeroplane Company), Dinesh (Administrative Officer, at Mumbai Municipal Corporation) and Narendra (Economist & Social Thinker); his daughter-in-law, Vasundhara (Professor, at Siddharth College, Mumbai) and his granddaughter Apoorva (Student, Walter Jonson's High School, Washington). Each one narrates their own story keeping Damu in center, as he is the root and the foundation from whom springs the transformation of the whole family.

The centrality of the untouchables in the story and the global context within which this story was read is, however, the distinctive aspect of the text. But as a dalit text, the memoir is beyond all shade of doubt, the representation of the assertive and vibrant dalit characters, the writing of dalit history and the formation of dalit identity in the global context. In the 'Author's Note', Narendra Jadhav describes Damu, the central character as the one who was not a leader but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny. He had no formal education yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence. He was not a guru but he taught his children to believe in themselves and retain human dignity. He was often humbled... yet he maintained, "Goats are special offering, not lions'. He was an ordinary man, but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system" (Jadhav, xi-xii).

Damu was inspired when he heard about Phule and he decided to educate his wife and he believes that if wife is educated she can give her children better education. He says, 'If she learns to read and write, she can make sure that our children become no less than a barrister'... (Jadhav, 160)

Though the entire story of the autobiography is woven around the life story of Damu Jadhav and his determination to provide good education to his children, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, messiah of millions of dalits in India occupies a central role as an undying source of inspiration behind Damu's aspirations. Damu is inspired by the philosophy espoused by Babasaheb Ambedkar and he also participated in Ambedkarite Movement. The slogan



of 'Educate, Organize and Agitate' given by Babasaheb Ambedkar to his millions of untouchable brothers reverberates in the story.

The influence of Dr. Ambedkar's ideas made an activist out of Damu. He came to realize that it was not sufficient to remain content with being able to live one's life and provide for the family. It is wisely said that a man's intimate association with a noble hearted person will enlarge and enable his own personality under the latter's influence. In Mumbai, Damu came into contact with the dalit movement activists like Tau Master and Upshum Guruji. Poor and in search of work as he was after leaving his native village Ozar, he got the dual satisfaction of earning some money while doing wholeheartedly some odd jobs related with the dalit cause. He recalls, "The movement inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar had fully seeped into me. I was now imbued with new courage and self-realization. It had given me the power to question, reason and act" (Jadhav, 25).

In Bombay, Damodar worked by turns as a porter, newspaper vendor, mason, carpenter, and the fourth grade worker in the Port Trust. His children are the living examples of his philosophy. His eldest son J.D. Jadhav became an IAS officer, another son Dinesh became Deputy Municipal Commissioner and the youngest son Narendra Jadhav became a world famous economist and an author. About this, Jadhav says, "The difference was my father's vision and his dream." Smriti Koppikar commented that: "It was a dream born out of B.R.Ambedkar's one line directive to Dalits 'educate, unite and fight back.' In a sense, Ambedkar is the real hero of the book" (Smriti).

Narendra Jadhav was abundantly inspired by his committed, disciplined and hardworking father. Damu was thoroughly inspired by Dr. Babasaheb and he infused the spirit into his children. The influence of Ambedkar on Damu's children was tremendous. There was an incident which makes all dalits realize the intrinsic and inherent power of education that transforms them into enlightened ones. Once Jadhav, as a VIP, visited lord Vithoba's temple, a temple reserved for caste Hindus. Outcastes were never allowed to have even their shadow fall upon the temple but now, Jadhav visited the temple to perform a ritual in the capacity of a VIP. He felt excited and wept with mixed feelings of suffering and achievement. He recalls the past unusual incident: "I thought 'I who am supposedly at the lowest rung of the caste system, am now almost at the top of the ladder of social success. At least, I thought with smug satisfaction, 'I have arrived'... The very temple that had shunned and turned away countless untouchable devotees, pining to catch one glimpse of *Vithoba*, was today all geared to honour me, an untouchable" (Jadhav, 211).

Damu, inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's message, infuses the spirit of rationality and courage into the people of his community. And he has made them understand their value as human beings and that they have their own dignity. He is determined to work hard to impart good education to his children. It was Damu's good fortune that all his efforts in bringing up his children to a level of excellence did not go in vain. The children fulfill his aspirations and rise to high positions in their chosen careers, where they work for the upliftment of their society. Jayavant, his elder son becomes an IAS, and works



enormously for the downtrodden wherever he gets an opportunity; Dinesh, another son, raised to the position of an administrative officer at the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, has taken the task to contribute for the development of dalit community. And, above all, Narendra, the youngest son of the family, has achieved something more than Damu's expectations by contributing not only to the development of dalit community but to the whole Indian society as well. He has given his best as an Economist to implement the policies for the development of Indian economy; as an educationist, he brought a drastic change in the field of education being the vice chancellor of University of Pune; and he is still contributing his best for the betterment of society as a social thinker. Inculcating the revolutionary ideas derived from their ancestors, each generation of the family moves ahead in the battle of freedom and search for an identity.

In spite of the persistent efforts made by the leaders like Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar, discrimination on the basis of caste could not be checked completely. To eradicate caste every one must come under one religion that is the religion of humanity to conclude this it is apt to remind one of the poems of Namdeo Dhasal in which he says:

Don't call him black, white and nag them by saying you are a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya, a Shudra...Consider the sky as grandfather and earth as grandmother and live in their lap contentedly in harmony and happiness work animatedly to pallid the moon and the sun. All should eat one crushed sesame, compose Hymns on human beings. Man should sing songs of Man.

(Beena, Neeta, 65)

*Outcaste* is the story of the assertion of a dalit who left his Mumbai slum and became a respectable middle class citizen. Jadhav courageously declares to the world that he is Mahar from Ozar and comes from Wadla slum of Mumbai. He asserts that he comes from the Mahar caste, his forefathers were made to wear clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their foot prints as they walk. "So what? Have I not reclaimed my dignity through my achievement? Why should the caste into which I was born count now?" And he declares, "If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their problem not mine." He questions the crippled nature of the Hindu mentality that cannot recognize the achievement of dalits.

This beautiful book is rounded off with a three paged epilogue written by Narendra Jadhav's daughter, Apoorva born and brought up in Indiana, America, with her consciousness of a highly cultivated and cultured American society. Apoorva is richly worthy of her name since it means modern. The word 'dalit', strictly speaking, is not applicable to her at all. The epithet 'dalit' to her sounds like big mockery in the face of one that uses it for her. She is a fresh soul, thoroughly liberated from her native ancestral low-culture. She belongs to a new world literally and metaphorically the milieu of which is absolutely of a different mind. The natural metamorphosis from her native 'dalit'

community- of which she knows nothing – even the word 'dalit' sounds to her as strange as any word



from Greek or Latin of which she is totally ignorant.

She says:

I came to know that I was Dalit when I was twelve years old or so. I did not know what it meant and was confused. There was this teacher in sixth grade that recognized the last name, I guess, and asked, 'Are you the daughter of Dr. Narendra Jadhav, The Dalit scholar? (Jadhav, 261).

This epilogue adds a new dimension to the book since Apoorva narrates her autobiographical occurrences like an adept writer. It might appear that the epilogue doesn't seem to have many direct bearing in the main theme of the text, a critical reader perceives that it is an integral part of the whole text since Apoorva, the author of the epilogue is none other than the most sophisticated daughter of Narendra, representing herself as a member of third generation of Jadhavs. Although, Apoorva speaks with the voice of a member that constitutes the third generation of Jadhav's family, it is quite amazing to see that Apoorva, being the latest member of the geneology of Jadhav's has had the least resemblance with the previous generations in any respect what so ever except that she is one of the Jadhav's. The world that Apoorva describes as is intimately known to her is entirely an alien one, the difference is not of any degree, it is entirely of a new kind. Can anyone use 'dalit' as an epithet to Apoorva unless he or she thoroughly traditional to do so? Apoorva, as she reveals herself in her epilogue, is, beyond all shade of doubt, a fragrant flower of modern culture and civilization. She is very sensitively and thoroughly conscious of her own status as a fruit of high culture. "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 to demeaning tasks even after India's independence. I have the torch they have lit up for me and nothing can stop me."(263)

She transcends all the traditional, orthodox and racial boundaries and she has very naturally acquired a new idiom of expression and experience that she has built a niche for herself. A critical reader understands that caste system has done an inestimable damage to the whole dalit community. It is quite evident from the life of Apoorva who was born and brought up with no shackles of caste or community. Apoorva's life is an eloquent testimony to the fact that an individual, free from man-made shackles of caste, custom and tradition, will flourish and blossom up thoroughly.

It is very appropriate to quote the famous lines of Thomas Gray from his immortal poem 'An Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard':

'Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air'.

*Outcaste: A Memoir* is a very powerful criticism on the age old caste system in Hinduism. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, with his unusual vision declares that the one and only solution to the multiple problems associated with dalit communities is, the total abolition of castism in Hindu society.

Narendra Jadhav is a Buddhist and his wife is a Hindu. His daughter, Apoorva does not know the differences of these religions, in the epilogue she



speaks as a liberated soul.

Untouchability can be seen only in India, so the classmates of Apoorva say that she is an Indian. She said 'No one reminds me that I am a Dalit. Jadhav as he was taught by his father, teaches his daughter about the sacrifice and struggle of great dalit leaders. Apoorva says:

My dad told me to seek the blessings of all our ancestors who have worked to get me where I am today. I realized for the first time that I have been able to reach farther than my boundaries because I am standing on their shoulders.(Jadhav,208)

The Indian villages are reproduced as centers of untouchability and caste atrocities. In an interview, Jadhav 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". Ambedkar believed that moving out of the confines of caste- ridden villages to the anonymity provided by the cities would offer dalits a better chance of realizing their potential. (The Times of India, Jan 16, 2004).

Hindu religion remained a refuge for ancient customs, and traditions the caste system, untouchability, the law of karma and hereditary rights, etc. Those who had acquired modern education realized that it was impossible to bring about social change unless Hindu religion itself was reformed. Dalits must educate and civilize themselves. Because of their ignorance and innocence many dalits are aimless and seen as drunkards. They should change their life style. About the behavior of Damu as a husband, Sonu said: "He

never drank, never abused me, best of all, he never raised his hand to me" (258).

Dalit families should be educated. Damu is an inspiration to all dalits. He says:

If Babasaheb was doing so much to improve the lot of all dalits, the less I could do was uplift at least one family- my own. I vowed to give my children the best possible education and raise them with the spirit of public service. Yes that would be mission. (Jadhav,146)

He wants to grow up his children to have dignified life. He wants them to be respected. He argued with his wife that if his children remain Hindus they would always be treated as inferior. They would never have a respectable place in the society. He doesn't want his children to suffer like him.

Damu's journey in *the Outcaste: A Memoir* is also the discovery of the inherent quality of a human being who can achieve any post he desires irrespective of his caste. It is an exploration of the truth that it is not the birth that defines an individual as untouchable, a useless being who cannot attain anything other than toiling in the dirt.

While disclosing the greedy politics of the hierarchical religious and caste system to put dalit as dalit for ages, the novel enlightens dalit community to think high and to move forward in life as a human being of self-respect. Former Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's observation of the novel substantiates this view: Like the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, or indeed the life of our beloved former President, the late Dr. K. R. Narayanan, the life story of Dr. Jadhav is also a story of change, of great



courage, of progress, of hope . . . Narendra's autobiography must shape our social and political vision. It must shape our educational policy. (Dr. Manmohan Sing)

The book ends with the realization that further change is required. The world has to stop treating dalits as different. It is up to the present generation to carry the torch lit by the tears and blood of their ancestors. In this *Memoir*, the author examines the issues, which are so deep and penetrating in a manner, which is poignant. From one angle, it is an attack on the social structure of Hindu society. If this novel is studied from another angle, it is a call made to unite all the oppressed and humiliated people to empower themselves by devoting themselves to education and finally to stand as one nation of brotherhood to fight against tyranny, subjugation, slavery, oppression. But those who perpetuate and advocate the notion that caste defines the destiny of an individual; it is not only irrational and illogical but also ridiculous. It must needs to be thoroughly overhauled from bottom to top. In other words Hinduism as it has been in existence for thousands of years must pass through a kind of socio spiritual metamorphosis so that a new society where all men enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities must emerge out of the social debris of the erstwhile Hindu society with its abominably cursed caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar very briefly and effectively presents his vision of the healthy society when he says that the prevailing caste system must thoroughly be abolished. This is, indeed, a sagacious suggestion made by him. It has already been suggested that ways and means of solving this age-old problem of

untouchability are there but they must be earnestly implemented by the government to do away with this uncivilized system at the earliest. Let us be optimistic and let all of us bring our concerted efforts towards the realization of this dream—a casteless society.

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