

The Image of Dr. B. R Ambedkar in Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* - A Study

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Abstract

The caste system is a complex web of human relations that divides society into four distinct communities paradoxically bound together based on inequalities rooted in religion. 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 necessities of life. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* is successful in constructing the Dalit identity in cosmopolitan terms and elaborating Dalit politics into a global perspective. The influence of Dr. B R Ambedkar's ideas made an activist in Damu, and he was imbued with new courage and self-realization and succeeded in overcoming the tyranny of untouchability.

Keywords: Dalits, identity, Indian society, communities etc

“Caste system is the most brilliantly administered scam in the history. It is so intricate and well-designed that it has continued for ages.”---Narendra Jadhav.

The caste system is a complex web of human relations that divides society into four distinct communities paradoxically bound together based on inequalities rooted in religion. The representations of Indians 'self-identity', their cultures and cultural heritage, and their political subjection and plights are the main concerns of the Indian English prose writers of the periods of religious and political reforms (1857-1920) as well as in the Gandhian phase (1920-1947). According to M.K. Naik, the writers of these periods represent the Indians and their cultural heritage in the colonial context.

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 global context. In the history of world literature, Dalit's autobiography is a new and different experience for the readers. It is different in its presentation i.e. the Dalit

autobiographies give prime importance to objective narration and then to subjective voice-over. Thus, the first thing observed in Dalit autobiographies is the presentation of the social life and the next thing is the narration of firsthand experiences of the authors. The use of regional dialect is one of the distinctive elements of the Dalit autobiographies. The fundamental purpose of the Dalit autobiographies is the emancipation of the Dalits. Dalit autobiographies are revolutionary writings that punch on the face of hypocrites, pretentious unequal society of the non- Dalits. What is there in the Dalit biographies? Arjun Dangle suggests that: "In Dalit autobiographies, we see varying facets of the Dalit Movement; the struggle for survival; the emotional universe of Dalit's life; the man-woman relationship; the experiencing of humiliation and atrocities; at times, abject submission, at other times, rebellion".(Dangle,53)

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

Main events of the Ambedkarite Movement like *Mahad Satyagraha* for Water rights (19-20 March 1927), *Manusmriti Burning* (25 December 1927), *Nashik Kalaram Temple* entry Satyagraha(1930), Poona Pact(1932) *Yeola Conference* (1935) Mahar Parishad for conversion at Naigaon, Mumbai(1936), formation of *Independent Labour Party*(1937), *Mass conversion to Buddhism* in Nagpur(14 October 1956) and *Mahaparinirvan of Babasaheb Ambedkar* in Delhi(6 Dec.1956) found enough space in the story. All the Dalit writers have taken inspiration from Phule and Ambedkar.

An added value of *Outcaste: A Memoir* is that through Damu's memories, it documents the time when the struggle for Dalit emancipation was being waged under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. The value lies in the fact this documentation is not a cold commentary on those 'momentous events' (like burning of the *Manusmriti*, breaking of the water drinking code of the *Mahad* tank, getting entry into the *Kala Ram* temple, and others), but

has the poetic strength of being the eye-witness accounts of the ordinary victims who dared to become participants in the struggle against the victimizers, human as well as institutional.

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 personality under the latter's influence. He recalls, "The movement inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar had fully seeped into me.

Explaining the influence of Ambedkar on Dalit literature, Sharan Kumar Limbale says: "The purpose of Dalit Literature is to transform the conditions of Dalits by challenging the unjust social order. This is a revolutionary cause. The source of this radicalism is considered to be 'the thought and actions of Babasaheb'" (Limbale 2010:14). Babasaheb asserted that writers should take inspiration from the greatness of common people: "Through your literary creations cleanse the staled values of life and culture. Don't have a limited objective. Transform the light of your pen so that the darkness of the villages is removed." (Ambedkar, 8)

Ambedkar tried to change the Hindu mindset while remaining a Hindu, but he failed, so he said, "A big tree of ills can't be demolished with blades; the task requires a mighty ax." (Ambedkar, 71) Ambedkar was a prolific writer and a voracious reader. It is said that Ambedkar has written around one lakh pages to awaken Dalits. To Babasaheb, his books were dearer than even his children: "I can't understand how time goes while writing books. All my energies are concentrated at the time of writing. I do not care for food. Sometimes I stay up all night to read and write. I am never bored then, nor do I feel boredom. I become very discouraged and dissatisfied as soon as the work is finished. I get the same pleasure when my book is published as I would on having four sons." (Ambedkar 1947).

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 the center, as he is the root and the foundation from whom springs the transformation of the whole family. After facing a lot of humiliation from the caste Hindus in his village, Damu went to Mumbai in search of freedom.

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 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: "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).

The influence of Ambedkar made Damu more aware of the lives of Dalits. He began to think about the uplift of Dalits. He always thinks about a layman like him. When Narendra Jadhav completed his Ph.D., Damu asked: "How will this help the common man?" about the reaction of his father the author says "I was stunned. He warned me, if all that you study, all your research, is not going to help the man on the street, it's a big waste" (Jadhav, 247).

The influence of Ambedkar is not little and it is seen in the lives of Dalits and Dalit writers. It is seen in a poem:

Babasaheb Forgive Me!

You detested idolatry

You didn't allow your followers to hero-worship you. I've committed this crime after you were gone.

I couldn't do without writing

The poetry of your achievement. (Amarnath, 134)

The Brahmins have established the theories that the caste system is God-made and not man-made. Dr. Ambedkar, the father of the Dalit Movement rejected the notion that the caste system is God-made. He, along with Mahatma Phule, started a political movement for the freedom and equality of Dalits. The purpose of this movement was to create a new space for Dalits. They were not satisfied with the political and economic equality given by the government as a token of centuries of suffering. They also demand religious and creative equality. They rejected all role models in traditional literature, Eastern and western critical theories and decided to create a literature of their own identity. Keeping this in mind, the clearest definition of Dalit in contemporary usage has been given by Gangadhar Pantwane, a professor of Marathi and founder editor of *Asmitha Darsha*.

He says: "To me, Dalit is not a caste he is a man exploited by the social and economic tradition of this country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books teaching separatism, Fate, and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution." (Amarnath, Gaijan 3)

One more important episode in this autobiographical novel is a conversion of religion. Ambedkar observed that Dalits cannot attain their full

status as human beings while they are crushed under the Hindu religious system. They think Dalits need a new religion that will welcome Dalits to restore their pride. Ambedkar along with so many Dalits struggled to secure their fundamental rights and equal status in the Hindu society. Ambedkar made an announcement that caused a sensation in the newspapers: "Unfortunately, I am born a Hindu untouchable; there was nothing I could do to prevent it. However, it is well within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating made conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu" (Jadhav, 63).

After this announcement some called him Messiah, others felt it was a suicidal step. Headmen of other religions wrote letters and telegrams to convert into their religions. Some leaders like, Gandhi, said 'religion is not like a house or a clock which can be changed at will'.

Questioned about the advantages untouchables would gain by changing their religion, Ambedkar had a firm answer: "What will India gain by independence? Just as independence is necessary for India change of religion is necessary for Dalits. Hinduism made us untouchables, and giving up Hinduism is the only way to bring touch ability to our lives. The underlying motive in both the movements is the desire for freedom." (Jadhav, 164)

Ambedkar said religion is for man but man is not for religion. A religion that does not recognize untouchables as human beings, treats them worse than animals, or refuses to give them water from their wells, is not worthy of being called a religion. Jadhav questions: "What do these people want? Do they want us to meekly follow Hinduism, a religion that does not allow Hindus to enter temples? Why should we favor the religion that preaches untouchability and discrimination? Who has given the Brahmin class the authority to decide our fate?" (Jadhav, 178).

Ambedkar decided to embrace Buddhism. Jadhav writes that Buddhism has no priestly class and certainly nobody is considered untouchable. All men and women are equal, and they are treated as such. Why does Ambedkar prefer Buddhism? Buddhist philosophy sought to shake the foundations of the caste system. Finding an alternative to Hindu society is creating an alternative to the caste system. In the eyes of Buddha, there was no high or low, learned and layman, a good man, and a bad man. This attitude was demonstrated in practice by his disciples. According to Buddha, a true *chandala* (untouchable) is one, "He is a *chandala* who cherishes hatred; who torments and kills living beings; who steals, or commits adultery; who does not pay his debts; who maltreats aged parents, or fails to support them; who gives evil counsel and hides the truth; who does not return hospitality nor render it, who exalts himself and debases others; who ignores the virtues of others and is jealous of their success." (Padma Rao, 72).

Now the question is how many caste Hindus, who can't see man as man must be treated as *scandals*? Buddha in his teachings points out that man shines by action and individuality. It is unscientific to ascribe the superiority of caste to the accident of birth. An untouchable who lives his life and enables others to live by rejuvenation is a true man. Buddha asked as to how a man, who flourishes as a parasite on others, becomes superior to them. "Not by birth does one become an outcast, not by birth does one become a Brahmin; by deeds, one becomes an outcast, by deeds, one becomes a Brahmin." (Lakshmi Narsu, 73). It is a character that determines the caste of a person. And not his or her birth. Birth is an accident.

All the incarnations in the Hindu pantheon were meant to destroy one enemy or the other- Ravana – the Dravidian leader, Dalit, the emperor, Vali, the Vanara King, and such other prominent representatives of the non-Aryans. But on the contrary, the Buddha disapproved of man against man and the destruction in general. This in turn became the central principle for the elimination of caste superiority.

In Jadhav's latest book "*Ambedkar Awakening India's Social Conscience*" (2014), he writes about the greatness and influence of Ambedkar and shows him as one of the makers of modern India: "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great social reformer, a valiant champion of human rights and an emancipator of the downtrodden masses of India, who dedicated all his life to awaken the social conscience of modern India. No wonder there are more statues of Ambedkar in India than any other leader in the history of our nation. It is hardly surprising that every year, on December 6 (his death anniversary), around 2 million Ambedkarites throng to *Chaitya Bhoomi* in Mumbai to pay homage to the hero they worship as their savior. It is also not surprising that Dr. Ambedkar was voted recently (August 2012) as the "greatest Indian after Gandhi" in a nation-wide e-poll with an overwhelming majority" (Jadhav, Cover Page)

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar held the view that Buddhism was the only means for the reconstruction of Indian society in the modern age. It was also applicable for the abolition of the caste system which had become putrefied with untouchability and inequality.

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