



VOICE OF HOPE: A STUDY OF THE RESISTANCE AGAINST CASTE-SYSTEM IN NARENDRA JADHAV'S *OUTCASTE: A MEMOIR*

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ABSTRACT

The present book *Outcaste: A Memoir* is an expanded version of Jadhav's best selling Marathi novel *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi* written in 1993. This memoir is a multilayered saga of the social evolution of the Dalits in India. It is a tribute from a son to his father as well as an appraisal of the caste-system. It tells the story of the awakening of the Dalits through three generations. The caste-system represses even stupefies the Dalits so that they grow into the dutiful lambs that need no shepherding in order to stay within the fence, it serves as a kind of cultural repression where people imprison themselves and guard their own prisons. There is no external enemy to combat, we are staying within the enemy territory and the enemy is within us. The present paper is an endeavour to highlight the elements of resistance in the book as well as to emphasize the need for seizing those oppressive mechanisms which we have internalised over the ages in order to combat the caste-system.

Keywords: caste-system, dalits, oppression, resistance etc.

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Outcaste is not merely a personal document of caste-divide in India but a critical appraisal of Dalit awakening led by Dr. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's call for the Dalits to 'Educate, Unite and agitate' comes as the foremost concern of the book. *Outcaste* not only documents the atrocities inflicted on the Dalits but also highlights the possibility of refusing to be defined by the circumstances and fighting within the system. The book is an expression of anger against the age-old marginalization and exploitation of the Dalit community. It is an attack on the social structure of Hindu society which sponsors the notion of birth defined elitism. It is a call made to unite all the subjugated and marginalized people to empower themselves with education so that they can stand against the tyranny of the irrational and illogical caste-system.

The story of *Outcaste* is told from the

perspective of writer's father, mother and the writer himself, with an epilogue from the writer's daughter. The narrative moves in the form of flashbacks and flash-forwards, revealing the caste-ridden status of Jadhav's family and tracing its journey out of the caste system in three stages. The first stage is the one in which Jadhav's father Damodar Ranjhaji Yadav is a low-caste helpless Mahar, in the second stage he moves to city and comes under the influence of Bhimrao Ambedkar, hence realising the need to stand against the inhuman caste-system and the final stage is the one where he succeeds in providing his children a life of respect and dignity with the help of education and emancipation.

Jadhav describes his parents' first experiences of untouchability. His father Damodar tells his wife Sonabai that once he joined his father

to his place of work. Damu got thirsty because of the scorching heat. The master who was from the higher caste offered him water, but when Damu stretched his hand for the tumbler the man screamed at him and abused him for daring to touch the tumbler. Damu could not understand what was wrong in touching the tumbler and how could the water get polluted by his mere touch, while he has seen a dog lapping water from the same pot. Damu says "This was the first time I wondered if it is better to be born a dog than to be born a Mahar" (47). Damu felt humiliated at this incident and was unable to explain to himself the reason for this kind of treatment. He could understand just one thing that the insult was a result of his belonging to an untouchable caste.

The same kind of incident happened to Jadhav's mother Sonabai in her childhood which marked her realisation of the inhuman social system. She narrates to her husband that once in a high-caste wedding she attempted to distribute the sweets to the guests as a gesture of help, but the reaction she got from the landlord's mother was "Eh you bloody Maharin, what do you think you are doing? You have polluted all our auspicious food, you fool...You scoundrels, your caste will never change; give you an inch and you grab a mile" (47).

Later all the sweets were thrown away. Sonu tells that she could not understand who decided the things to be this way. She used to assume that it must be the result of some terrible sin that she committed in her last birth that she was born as an outcaste. At this Damu says "Don't you see? This is a clever trick played by the high-born. This is what they have told us through the ages so that we would take it quietly and not challenge them" (48).

This is how the Dalits are exploited in the name of fate and God. The most important feature of caste-system is that it provides a re-enforcing mechanism to perpetuate social ostracism and further justifies it by taking support of the sanction of the Hindu religion. The people belonging to the low castes have been taught to believe in the philosophy of *The Geeta*, to work selflessly without demanding anything in return. This religiously sanctioned inequality provided the higher castes the authority to dominate the Dalits and wiped out any possibility of protest from their side.

The poverty of the Mahars was brought into light by Damu's description of how they used to long for the meat of the dead-cattle. For them the news of some cattle being dead used to be the most longed for news. People lived in so much poverty that they used to fight for the flesh. It was not only the fight among the people; the animals and vultures also waited for the treat. This description is a severe attack on the caste system which denies equal opportunities to the Dalits which results in such poverty that humans had to fight for their survival like animals and vultures. This plight of the Dalits is the result of the denial of productive employment opportunities to them. They are allowed to perform only the unproductive tasks like guarding dead cattle; working as messengers and labourers etc. it results in their dependency on the higher castes for their bread and butter hence makes them subservient to the higher caste people.

The effect of poverty on the psyche of a Dalit child is brought in the light by the description of the way Damu felt when he reached Mumbai for the first time. When he reached the railway station with his aunt he was very hungry and his mouth watered to see the grocers selling sweets. He recalls "I stared hungrily at them, the smells inviting, making me hungrier than ever. But I dared not open my mouth to ask for anything. That did not stop me, however, from lingering and looking longingly, hoping that my aunt would notice" (86). Owing to his low financial status, he could only look at the sweets but could not buy them. A normal satisfactory life remains just a dream for the Dalits as in their poverty stricken lives there is no scope to enjoy luxuries of life. The house where they were going to stay in Mumbai was so crowded that all the male members had to sleep on the railway platform. He spent his first night in Mumbai sleeping on the railway platform, covering himself with his mother's sari which he was using as blanket. His perception of a city life was shattered at his confrontation with the reality where he could not manage to get a roof over his head.

Damu met a British man in Mumbai who used to treat him well. Being a *Mahar* he was so used to the caste-discrimination that he couldn't believe that he was getting such good treatment. He says: "My lowly place was so deeply etched in my mind

that when I was treated well, I could not believe it. I thought there was something wrong. After much thought, I reasoned that perhaps *Saheb* did not know that I was an untouchable" (92). Receiving good treatment from a British man was a luxury for Damu which he never wanted to lose. It was such an important possession for him that he even decided not to share this secret with his best friend Pandu, as he thought that he may spread the news of his untouchability and the man may not treat him well anymore. The so-called untouchables are deprived of their dignity and self respect to such an extent that they start relating every incident of their lives to their caste status.

Damu offers a comparison between his school in the village and the city school. In the village school he was made to sit away from the other students and had to face the caste based humiliation time and again. When he went to the city school along with the British man he saw that he was treated with respect and was made to sit in a chair. At this juncture he realised that this was a real school and that he never went to any real school before this. The village school where he went never treated him at par with rest of the students. He was always a Mahar boy, not a normal student in the school. Jadhav here unveils the workings of the educational institutions. Instead of serving as media for spreading the message of equality, they indulge in the task of spreading the orthodox beliefs hence contributing to perpetuate the evil trends in society.

The writer mentions an incident where Damu went for hunting with a British family. They killed a tigress and brought the cubs back home. Those cubs seemed like kittens and he used to have a lot of fun with them but he used to wonder "What if they suddenly turned into fully-grown tigers?" (99). Here the cubs can be compared to the Dalits, who are like harmless cubs but are perceived by the higher castes as mere kittens. If they stop taking humiliations all of a sudden, it would be like turning the cubs into fully grown tigers, and in such situation it would not be possible for the non-Dalits to exercise power on them. The way Damu was suspicious of the cubs turning into tigers is the same as high caste people remaining suspicious about the subservience of the Dalits. They are afraid of any

protest from the side of the Dalits that is why they try to maintain their domination time and again so that the Dalits do not raise their voices in protest. Jadhav wants to bring into light the fact that the Dalits need not to be afraid of resisting the atrocities inflicted on them in the name of caste-system. They should instead unite and agitate against this inhuman system, only then they can get their rightful place in the society.

Damu ridicules the caste-conflict among the untouchables also. He tells that the untouchable castes had an internal hierarchy of their own "The musicians who accompanied wedding processions, coming from Chambhar caste, would never play at Mahar weddings. How could they? Were they not of a higher order than the lowly Mahars? The barber community did not mind shaving the buffaloes but they could not bring themselves to give a haircut to a Mahar" (36). As the so-called untouchable castes realised that they will never be able to get a respectful place in the society as long as the caste-based discrimination exists; they began to exercise untouchability among themselves. Considering some castes as more impure or lowly than them satisfied their inner urge to be superior to others. The touchables and untouchables stand as binary opposites. A touchable is all that an untouchable is not. He is high, pure and civilised and untouchable is exactly opposite of what he is. Ascribing a low status to some castes within the castes considered low was an attempt at claiming their dignity which the society failed to provide them, owing to its caste-based hierarchies.

Damu recalls that when he was a child, a man used to say that "no one would be happy in the country as long as the wild cactus, three tufts and the ruddy mugs flourished" (62). The three tufts referred were the Brahmin priestly class and ruddy mugs meant the British. Though the country has been successful in getting rid of cactus and has gained freedom from the British; it has failed to remove the domination of the three tufts. The caste system not only exists but is still flourishing in the country because of the lack of resistance from the side of the exploited. It could not be eradicated by a few protests at a few places. It will come to end only if all the Dalits will refuse it, because if it is left to

sprout anywhere, like tufts; it will soon grow and spread itself. There is a dire need to destroy it from its roots which are deeply rooted in the minds of the Indians and are justifying the delusion of supremacy of the higher castes.

The book describes how the Dalits are made to surrender in face of poverty. Damu and the other workers were getting low wages, so they all decided to protest against it. They demanded better wages and as a protest stopped working till their demands were fulfilled. This continued for long, the owners knew that the poor workers will have to join their work as it was the only source of their living. So instead of fulfilling their demands, they waited for the workers to give-up their demands. The workers had no other option but to start working again on the same low wages. This is how the resistant voices are suppressed. When a person is pushed to a situation where he has to make a choice between earning nothing and earning less than what he deserves, he obviously chooses the second option. But Damu was not the one to give up so easily, so instead of agreeing to work at low wages he preferred leaving the job. He had no source of income and his family reached on the brink of starvation. It was in such situation that he had to come to his village from Mumbai and agree to perform his *Yeskar* duty.

The *Yeskar* duty was a duty assigned to the people belonging to the Mahar caste. The person on the *Yeskar* duty had to inform the villagers about the arrival of the officials in the village, he had to dispose of the dead cattle as well as to guard the dead body if anyone died in the village. Jadhav gives a detailed description of his father's performance in the humiliating *Yeskar* duty. Damu was on his *Yeskar* duty, he was running along with the *Malemdar's* tonga to inform his arrival to the village people. The very first time Damu was addressed by the constable was "Eh Damu Mahar, I have been looking all around for you. Where have you been wandering around, you son of a bitch?" (3). Abusing the Dalits is considered very normal at the places where untouchability is exercised. People perceive the Dalits as the inferior beings who can be treated in any derogatory way. A high caste woman from Damu's village had died and Damu had to guard her

dead body till the officials arrive. He had not eaten anything from morning and the duties were just raining on him one after another. He even tried to take permission from the officials to go home and have food but they did not allow him. A poor untouchable was standing hungry in front of them and was begging their permission to have some food in order to appease his hunger, but they were not bothered. For them he was a mere servant whose duty was to go on doing his tasks without questioning anything.

Damu even tried to take permission to inform his wife that he will not be able to reach home in time but the constable declined his plea. Damu got enraged at this and said in sharp tone "Can you at least let my folks know that I will not be home till this body is cremated?" (4). But the constable being from a higher caste could not tolerate his arrogance and shouted at him "Look at this lout's arrogance! Do you think we were born as messengers for you lowly outcastes?" (4). He indirectly meant here that the outcastes were born as messengers for them. *Malemdar* could not digest the thought that a man from a community which has lived a life of cats and dogs for centuries was now behaving as an equal and claiming his dignity. When his cousin Namya brings food for Damu he bursts out saying "Why should I have to be the one to sit around without a meal since yesterday when everybody else has his belly filled?" (6). When Namya tries to pacify him by telling him that they were big people and that they cannot go hungry. It was for the people like Damu and himself that hunger, deprivation and humiliation is in store and he has to accept the things, the way they are. Namya even asked Damu to eat the *bhakhri* by hiding behind him but Damu refused. He did not like the idea of eating while hiding as he believed there was nothing wrong in exercising one's human rights. He retorted to Namya "Why should I hide? Am I less human than they are?" (6).

The situation in which Damu was caught was also ironical. The dead body which Damu was guarding was of a high-caste woman, who has committed suicide by drowning herself in the well. The job of bringing the body out of the well was given to Damu, who was now caught between the

tradition and the casteism. The same woman who if alive could have been defiled by Damu's touch, now after her death needed to be pulled out of the well by him. He tries to reason out with the *Fauzdar* that he was a *Mahar* and his duty was only to guard the dead, which he performed. As the dead person belongs to the higher caste, he cannot touch the body. At this *Fauzdar* got furious as he knew that no one from the higher castes will come to claim the body. He abuses Damu "You mother-fucking son of a bitch, do you see this whip?...Do as you are told" (7). Such is the plight of the Dalits in our country; a higher caste status provides the officials the incontestable authority to exploit the Dalits. Damu poignantly describes the cruelty of the treatment meted out in the name of caste where people in power dominate and forcefully subjugate the Dalits. They make use of their authority to threaten the Dalits and make them subservient to them.

Damu being a morally upright man could not take this humiliation anymore and declared "I am not going to do it...whoever wants to claim the body, will come and worry about getting the body out. No matter what, I am not going to do it" (8). The *Fauzdar* lost his temper at this insult; he could not take it that a lowly creature like Damu could raise his voices against him. The people in authority feel that the poor villagers are not aware of their rights and can be befooled and exploited easily in the name of authority. The *Fauzdar* mistook Damu to be the same ignorant untouchable but Damu's refusal to do a task not entitled to him surprised him. In his fit of anger the *Fauzdar* insulted Ambedkar saying: "It is all due to that *Mahar* Ambedkar. He thinks that just because he has learned a book or two, he will suddenly become a high caste Brahmin from a *Mahar*. And you listen to his talk and start thinking that by talking back to us; you can get away with it" (8). This incident reveals the attitude of high-caste people towards the Dalits, when a leader of the stature of Bhimrao Ambedkar can be referred in such an insulting manner how can the Dalits be treated any better?

Caste-system negates equality, freedom as well as the basic human rights to low castes which obstruct their way to development. It does not recognize a person as an individual but as a part of

his community. In such a situation no individual can have his individual identity outside his community. In such a scenario a person claiming his human rights as an individual and refusing to perform the menial jobs which his community is forced to do is considered a rebel and any defiance from his side is considered a threat to the dominating community as well as to oppressive societal structures. Damu was a devout follower of Ambedkar; he could not keep his cool on listening to the *Fauzdar* insulting Ambedkar. He suddenly stood up and gripped the half raised whip of the *Fauzdar* and roared "Wait until I crack open the Jaws that spew forth such foul things. Will die but I will not bow down before you. Come on beat me all you can and kill me. Let the world know that a helpless *Mahar* was killed on his duty. See the entire village is witnessing your atrocities" (9).

Damu was able to save himself from further exploitation because he was aware of his rights, but the illiterate Dalits still continue to be deprived of their human rights on account of their lack of awareness. When Damu came back, he was scolded by his cousin Ragho ji for his behaviour, which he thought, was insane. He told Damu that he cannot come to village and behave in any way that he thinks to be appropriate. Sonu, Damu's wife asks for forgiveness for her husband's actions, at this Damu screams at her asking her to stop being sorry for what he did. He says "what kind of tradition is this that treats *Mahars* worse than cats and dogs? I spit on such inhuman traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging *Baluta*. What are all of you going to do? Kill me?" (10). As a protest Damu decided not to perform his *Yeskar* duties and leaves the village in order to go to the city to live a life of dignity and freedom. The author writes "Together, they started walking towards freedom" (11).

It is in a way a call for the Dalits to have faith in liberalization which holds emancipatory potential for the community. It is only when Damu decided to get rid of the discriminatory environment of his village that he was able to get out of the shackles of the caste-system. Had he remained in the village he could never have got any exposure to the Dalit movement and would have always remained an

outcaste. This move made to get out of the confines of caste-system offered him a better chance to realise his potential. The life in the city opened up the opportunities of doing diverse jobs which had no relation to caste-system. While leaving the village where despite all the humiliations they were at least able to earn some stale food to fill up their stomachs, Sonu was worried about how will they be able to make both ends meet in the city? When she asks Damu about it he replies "We will go to Mumbai and I will get a job there. We will have a life of dignity, earning a respectable *bhakhri*" (45). This voyage from a small village Ozar to the city of Mumbai brought back dignity and touchability in his life. Their migration from the village to the city was a move from a life of utter neglect to a life of awareness and dignity. They left their village and with it abandoned all the discriminatory practices associated with their village life. In Mumbai they were able to earn their living and self-respect as well.

It was the result of their courage in choosing to leave their village that they were able to provide their children better educational opportunities and consequently better socio-economic status. Damu and his wife left for the city at night, they have to walk all the way as they could not find a lift, and they knew that no one will offer to take them as they belonged to the Mahar caste. As they were walking, the dogs came charging at them "Barking, a few of them came charging at us, following us for some distance. After a while, when we walked on without knowing them, they went away" (15). This incident has a symbolic significance; the barking dogs can be compared to the blind followers of caste-system. Such people keep raising fingers at the untouchables till the time the Dalits keep paying heed to them, the moment the Dalits start ignoring such fanatics, they stop insulting them.

Sonu tells that her husband was annoyed to know that even after he has settled in the city, his uncles and cousins still wanted him to perform his *Yeskar* duties. He felt that one could not participate in Ambedkar's movement and support such inhuman traditions at the same time. The book explores the trick by which performing the filthy tasks, was made a matter of pride for the Dalits.

When Damu refused to go to the village to perform his *Yeskar* duties his mother said "a true Mahar would die before shirking his responsibility" (18). The dragon of untouchability has gone so deep in Indian psyche that the so called untouchables have stopped questioning their lowly status. They accept it as a law which they have to follow throughout their lives. They believe that they can get rid of their subhuman existence only in next birth on the condition that they accept all the inhuman, discriminatory practices without raising their voice against them. Damu on the other hand was against doing such tasks and refused to get the reward of *baluta* which one used to get after performing the *yeskar* duties. He tells his wife "We must have self-respect. We must have dignity as human beings. How can I take to begging from door to door? *Baluta* is our right, they proudly claim! My foot! Have you seen how they throw the food? I don't want rights as a dog. I want my human rights" (18-19).

The reason why Damu had to declare time and again that he was human, was that he was not being treated as one. He was a self-respecting man, but for recognising his self-respect, he first needed to be recognised as human. It was important for him to be true to his thoughts and beliefs. Ambedkar's teachings are referred to again and again in the book, when Damu sat and recounted his resistance in the village; he remembered Ambedkar's words "Lost rights are never regained by begging, but by relentless struggle. Goats are used for sacrificial offerings, not lions" (20). It was the spirit of resistance inculcated in him by the teachings of Ambedkar that led him to protest against the exploitation. He had refused to be a sacrificial goat and rejected the tyranny of the inhuman caste-system. He was proud that he stood up and reclaimed his dignity. The book not only inspires to stand against the injustice but also to get out of the selfish issues and to think about the better future of the Dalits as a whole.

The book also brings into light how the government resolutions to facilitate the Dalits remain only on paper and are not acted upon in reality. He tells that the municipality had passed a resolution to allow everyone including the untouchables full access to the water tank but the

untouchables could not dare to exercise their rights for the fear of the high-caste people. When Damu came to know that Ambedkar had planned an agitation against it, where he and his volunteers were going to drink water from the same tank, at first he could not understand how drinking water from the community tank would help his community. But when Babasaheb proclaimed that they were asserting their rights as human beings that they were defiling the arrogance of those people who boasted that their religion treated even animals with respect.

The writer here wants to emphasise that by accepting the discriminatory practices the Dalits indirectly contribute to their perpetuation. It is only when they will unite and assert their disapproval to the caste-based social practices that they can get rid of them. Such symbolic acts of resistance are necessary to make the higher-castes realise the Dalits' claim for dignity and to shake the foundations of this hollow social system. But unlike what the agitators intended, the caste Hindus took this agitation as an attempt at disrespecting and defiling God. Their reaction to the agitation was ridiculous, they said "religion was being threatened and the God was being polluted" (23). When the agitators returned to Bombay, they came to know that the Brahmin priests purified the water tank by pouring into it 108 pots of curd, milk, cow-dung and cow-urine amidst loud religious chants. At this Damu says "Didn't these educated people realise that the notion of purification with animal urine was more ridiculous and despicable than the idea of defilement by human touch?" (24). A water tank which gets polluted with a mere touch of an untouchable gets purified when washed with cow dung and urine. This description showcases the unreasonable grounds of untouchability and the foolishness of all those who believe in such ridiculous social systems.

There are some feministic elements in the memoir, as it includes the point of view of the writer's mother Sonabai also. Sonu recalls how before her marriage she was inspected by Damu's relatives. She was asked to walk up and down to check if she was not handicapped in anyway. She says "I felt like cattle in the bazaar being inspected

for defects" (71). And further after marriage she was advised by her own mother to follow her husband blindly. "Your husband is your God from today. He knows what is right and what is wrong. At all costs, you must obey him" (79). Sonu is representative of all Dalit women who are twice colonised. She was caught between the caste prejudices and patriarchy. Her mother, mother-in-law and all the elderly ladies she confronts advise her to follow her husband blindly.

Sonu tells that as she was much fairer than her husband she enjoyed a privileged position at home, so at times she was happy about the fact that her husband was dark. She thought "If he were handsome, I would have lost my privileged position in everyone's eyes" (103). Her position can be compared to the position that the non-Dalits enjoy in the society. They do not want the Dalits to be treated at par with them as that way they fear losing their unique status in the society. Sonu was fair as long as Damu was dark. In the same way the caste-Hindus are high as long as the Dalits are ascribed a low caste-status. They do not want these hierarchies to change, for this they try to complement their low caste status with financial dependency. They push the Dalits to the depths of ignorance and illiteracy so that the Dalits always remain at the last pedestal in the hierarchy and they can sustain their dominance.

The resistance from the side of Sonu is seen in the incident where she was taking part in a religious procession. Some miscreants mingled with the crowd and started misbehaving with the girls. Sonu when noticed this, snatched a baton from one of the volunteers and started hitting the miscreants. All her neighbours were amazed at her behaviour; one old woman even came to her to express her shock over her "unfeminine behaviour". But Sonu told her "How long do we take things lying down? We are not allowed to enter their temples. Their Gods are polluted, they say. We can't drink from their wells. We are not allowed to worship Ganpati because we honour Babasaheb alongside. And now, we are not to have a procession to immerse our idol. We won't let them bully us in Mumbai. This is a big city, not a village" (120).

The issue of conversion is discussed in detail in the book. Damu believed that a new religion could

restore the pride of the untouchables. For him giving up Hinduism was the only way to bring touchability into his life. The resistance to conversion from Sonu's side was very interesting. She tells him that changing the religion was not like changing the clothes "its religion that you want to change not clothes" (174). When Damu shouts at her forcing her to follow him she rebels saying "it's always you, you and you...Damodar Runjhaji Jadhav. What about me? I am the insignificant Sonu, always nodding my head to whatever you say and walking behind you like your shadow?" (174). Damu was shocked at this; the thought of his wife rebelling against him was beyond his imagination. He could not believe that his meek wife could behave in such a manner. As a husband Damu represents the patriarchal society that still believes in the secondary status of women. Even though Damu himself is subjugated by the caste system he makes it a point that his wife follows him in whatever he does. Sonu's protest against conversion is not merely an argument between a husband and a wife; it is her attempt to claim her individuality. She rejects the continuous domination of her husband and refuses to be an agent of the patriarchal ideology. She fights the caste-system and the male domination at the same time.

The conflict on the issue of conversion continued. On one side was Damu's determination to provide his children a respectful place in the society which was possible only if they gave up Hinduism. He said "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 the masters of our destiny and have to reclaim our rightful place in society" (179). On the other side was Sonu's faith which was not allowing her to betray the Gods she worshipped all her life. She told Damu that he was out to kill her faith while his reason was that they were giving up the religion where they were unwanted. Finally they all went to Nagpur and converted into Buddhism. Sonu however kept the idols of her Gods hidden and continued worshipping them secretly. But in her heart she knew that conversion was their step towards claiming their dignity and a relief from the burden that the Dalits

have been carrying in their hearts for centuries.

The caste system continues to influence the minds of the Indians as it is sown and nourished in the minds of people for centuries. The result of this influence is that the untouchables when they are offered an alternative religion, they find it difficult to accept it. Buddhism has its base in reason, it can get them out of the unreasonable caste-system but what prevents them from accepting it is the firm hold that the Hindu spiritual mysticism has on their psyche, which is nothing but a medium to make the Dalits victims of the caste-system. But ultimately they had to convert because they could not go on remaining trapped in the chains of a religion which treats them worst than animals. It was a move at entering a democratic space which included everyone alike. It was a form of rejection of Hinduism with its inhuman practices and an endeavour to create a dignified Dalit identity. It was a collective effort to create a new culture based on social equality transcending the caste-boundaries.

The arrogance of the caste Hindus is brought into light at the time when the Dalits agitation was going to take place. The agitators were going to enter the Kala Ram temple, the entry into which was denied to them by the high-caste people. The touchables declared that, "even Lord Ram could not himself make them open the temple to untouchables" (129). However there were some people who admired the will power of the protestors and mocked at the fanatics saying "Even the stone walls of the temple would melt in face of our determination to worship the Lord, but not the hearts of the orthodox!" (130). This gesture emphasises the wickedness of the caste system and the need to stand against such a system where entering the abode of God is considered an act of defilement and pollution. The people who should take a stand and contribute towards making a society which treats them equally; they try to secure their high-caste status by denying the Dalits the entry into religious places. They fail to understand the fact that they can lock the gates of the temples for the Dalits but God could not be confined in a temple.

The incident which took place on the day when the untouchables tried to enter the Kala Ram temple reflects the futility and hollowness of the

system which discriminates among humans. The priests on that day started asking the castes of the people before letting them enter the temple. The untouchables at that time concealed their caste by lying to the priests and got the entry to the temple. The priests could not make out who belonged to which caste. When priests doubted any of them they said ' "You suspect us to be untouchables? And you want us to prove our caste?" (132). This incident reveals how unscientific and illogical are the foundations on which the caste-system stands. The priests who claim to be the highest of all castes failed to recognize the untouchables. Caste after all is a man made construct. It is only when people reveal their caste that they start getting a biased treatment. As long as the caste is concealed, the untouchability does not exist.

In the third stage the story is told from Jadhav's perspective. His father succeeds in providing him a better financial status but fails to free him from the shackles of caste. The author tells that the caste system was so ingrained in the minds of people that no matter how much progress an untouchable makes, he would be at the same pedestal in the caste-hierarchy. When Jadhav was going abroad for his Ph.D. people praised him a lot, not for being intelligent but for being intelligent in spite of being a Dalit. Jadhav tells "the high-born praised me for making it *despite* coming from a lowly caste" (206). When Jadhav outperformed all others in Sanskrit; his teacher's reaction was that he had begun to lose faith in the education system. At this Jadhav wonders "Why? Why can't they let me be? Why can't they accept me for what I am? For the millionth time I asked myself why they couldn't judge me on where I stood? Why *did* they always have to judge me on the basis of my origins?" (207).

Jadhav tells that the caste of an outcaste is never cast-off. It always remains an unalterable part of his identity. "It is an unfortunate truth of our society that whatever heights a man might scale, his caste is never cast off; it remains a cause for scorn or contempt. Only the *type* of humiliation changes" (207-208). The example of it comes when Jadhav is praised for being civilised. A man praises him saying "we the high-born seem to have become civilised. But look at Jadhav, though he is a Dalit, he is so

civilized!" (208). The man's shock at finding Jadhav civilized speaks for the caste-ridden mentality of people and their negative attitude towards the Dalits. Such people believe that all the virtues can be found only in the people who belong to higher castes and for them, an untouchable being virtuous is something unheard of.

Once a man from a higher caste suggested Jadhav to meet a holy man. The way he praised the holy man was ridiculous. He said "Swamiji is so wise, so broad-minded that he will speak candidly and discuss philosophical issues *even* with a 'low caste' person like you" (208). Jadhav wants to highlight the fact that there are a lot of people who think themselves to be liberals but they actually remain confined to their caste-prejudices. They are not able to free themselves from their slavery to caste-prejudices. This incident gives the message that Dalits do not require any pity or sympathy but their right to live a life of dignity like all other humans live.

When Jadhav reached at the top of the ladder of the social success, he got a chance to visit the shrine of Vithoba, when he reached there, the first question that came into his mind was will he ever be able to free himself from the bondage of his caste? The moment he reached there he got the answer, the temple authorities who never allowed him to enter the temple when he was a common untouchable, now did not fail to recognize his social and financial status. He was escorted with honour to enter the temple. The temple, the entry into which was reserved for the cast-Hindus, and which used to get polluted with the mere shadow of an outcaste, was welcoming him. His improved economic and social status provided him the right to enter the arena of dignity and touchability.

Though one's caste rank plays an important role in determining his prestige in the society but one cannot deny the fact that it is but only one component not the only component. A person's wealth be it in the form of knowledge or money, plays a pivotal role in defining his status and resultantly in determining the treatment he or she will receive in the society. Therefore the message is very clear. Erase the lines of poverty from the face of the existence of a human being and give him a

dignified way of life if you want to break the shackles of caste hierarchy. Economic hierarchy can help an individual to counter caste hierarchy because people never fail to recognise the economic status of a person, no matter to which caste he or she belongs.

The priests who used to get defiled by his touch were now striving to get his attention and wanted to perform rituals for him. He handed over a hundred rupee note to the priest and thought "Was this the only way I could buy my way into the temple? Buy some touchability?" (212). He was now a Dalit who has become a Brahmin due to his changed economic status. Now he had an identity other than and better than being a Mahar. Jadhav not only ridicules the touchables but pities them. He says that he no longer feels bad about the constant reminders of his so-called low caste. He says "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 victims of their own obsolete prejudices" (214). This highlights the change that has come in the mindset of the Dalits due to educational and economic empowerment. They no longer see themselves as the weaklings who can be suppressed by the powerful groups, but instead they find faults in the perspective of higher castes towards them. They pity the higher castes for their prejudices and are proud of their own unbiased attitudes.

He tells that though the city dwellers had started accepting the Dalits, in the villages, they have to face the same the same age-old humiliation. He says "the village the tea-shop owner used to shout sarcastically, 'Get the silver cups out...Sahebs from Mumbai are here!'" (224). And the old broken cups would be brought for them. The Dalits are never allowed to get past their caste; they are reminded again and again that no matter where they reach their caste will not change and it will remain an inseparable part of their identity and a constant source of hurdles for them. The identity being a matter of shame is brought out by Jadhav when he compares the life story of a Dalit to the story of ugly ducklings and swans. He says "I wonder how many swans waste their lives thinking of themselves as ugly ducklings, trapped and punished

by the inequities of our caste-system? And how many more ugly ducklings pretend to be swans and get away with it?" (227).

Jadhav suggests that the beautiful swan inherent in every human being should be emerged. There is something good in every human being and those practices should be encouraged which bring out the inherent humanity of people not the ones which make people feel superior or inferior to others. There are people who continue to feel themselves inferior and impure than others just because they belong to a low considered caste. While there are some people among the higher castes who do not have any humanity left in them, they exploit the Dalits in the name of caste, still their actions are not questioned and they continue to be treated as superior because of their high-caste status.

The spirit to keep fighting and trying is highlighted in an incident that took place with Jadhav's brother Dina. Dina was on his way to become a boxer, one day he was punched hard and defeated by his opponent, at this Damu comforted him saying "Just as God doesn't get old if you miss one fair, a wrestler doesn't chicken out with the first defeat like this...your wounds are your trophies! If a true boxer loses one event, he doesn't retire from the sport. You are beaten today. Doesn't matter. You should take it as a challenge and go on" (234).

This counselling of his comes as a lesson to all those people who accept the exploitation, just because they think they are too weak to stand up against their opponents. The book itself is an appeal to all the Dalits to stop blaming the circumstances for their pitiable plight and become aware of their rights through education so that they could stand against the injustices and fight the caste-system. If their first attempt at claiming their dignity is not successful, they should not stop their agitation but should keep trying until they succeed.

Jadhav's marriage was also a form of protest against the caste-system. The girl he chose was from a so-called high caste, though the choice was deliberate, as he wanted to choose a soul mate not a caste. The girl's parents were unwilling to marry their daughter to a Mahar as they feared that it would harm their family reputation. In a country

like India, which is fractured along caste-lines, a marriage is never a simple establishment of relationship between two independent individuals. It involves the individuals, their families and communities as well. In such scenario, an inter-caste marriage is a forbidden thing. The caste group that is relatively higher in the social hierarchy sees any such marriage as a social stigma.

Jadhav's marriage took place in the month which was considered most inauspicious by the Hindus. Keeping aside all the superstitions they got married on an inauspicious day. Jadhav ridicules people's belief that those who get married in the month of *Paush*, their marriage does not survive for long as one of the companion dies. Jadhav tells that he got married on an inauspicious day and remained happy for over twenty-two years. Jadhav's marriage is an example of the changing attitudes of the young generations. His wife did not see his caste as an obstacle in their marriage and they both refused to follow the orthodox religious superstitions. All this was the result of their exposure to the world of knowledge, it was only through education that they were able to come out of the deadlock of caste prejudices and take a rational decision.

The book ends with a note of self-realization that dignity rests in the hearts of people not in the social prejudices. It depicts the shift in perspectives. While Damu found himself always caught in the shackles of caste, his son Narendra is not sure about his future and thinks whether he will be able to get past his caste. Jadhav's daughter Apoorva is confident and proud of her existence. She succeeds in transcending caste boundaries and becomes a universal citizen where no one reminds her of her Dalit status. She does not see any point in marrying into one's own caste. When she hears about the incidents of caste-based discrimination, she gets surprised. Her present identity does not smell of caste. She 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 have lit for me and nothing can stop me" (263).

Outaste is not merely a narrative of revolt but of a deep-introspection which not only condemns

the system but offers an appraisal of individual's own responsibility in shaping his destiny, and the faith in one's individual efforts in striving to come out of his shackled existence. All kinds of odds can be tacked by the ones who choose to act. This is the message Jadhav gives through his memoir. He makes it a point to tell that if the higher caste people are hypocrites; the Dalits are superstitious. It is not that the hypocrites are befooling them, but they are allowing themselves to be befooled. The book has succeeded in highlighting the fact that an ordinary man like Damodar can bring out extraordinary changes in his life with the help of education and awareness. Unlike most of the Dalit personal narratives which revisit the horrible experiences of untouchability, *Outcaste* suggests the way-outs to escape the tyranny of caste-system and gives a call to all the Dalits to refuse to be led by circumstances and to be the masters of their own destinies.

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Anjali Sharma has completed her graduation from Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, post graduation and M.Phil from Panjab University, Chandigarh. She is pursuing her PhD from Panjab University. She submitted M.Phil dissertation in 2013. Her specialisation throughout has been in Dalit Literature particularly the Dalit Literature in translation. She has been teaching as Assistant Professor at Rajiv Gandhi Government Engineering College, Kangra for more than one year. The following is a paper she has written on Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*.
