



Vol. 11, No. 2
CLRI May 2024

Page 84-107

Quest for the Establishment of Dalit Identity in Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste*, A Memoir Through the Lens of Ambedkar

Tarik Anowar

Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Sciences, Malla Reddy College of Engineering & Technology, Hyderabad, Telangana.

Abstract

One of the byzantine hallmarks of India is its caste-ridden social structure. Dalits are known as Shudras and therefore designated as untouchables. This marginalised subaltern community has long been suffering from identity crisis. They have been searching for their identity for a long time, either by embracing other faiths or by revolting against the caste hierarchy. The prominent social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Sabitribai Phule, Ambedkar and other notable luminaries fought for the rights and identity of the Dalits. Being a Dalit, Ambedkar made himself educated and became the architect of the Indian constitution. He ran several movements to dismantle the vogue of untouchability shaped in the name of caste identity. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste, a Memoire*, is a dramatic piece of writing which underscores the struggles of Damu and his offerings for the quest of identity. Damu took part in every Dalit movement activity organized by Ambedkar. He has been deeply inspired by the slogan 'educate, unite and agitate' hoisted by Ambedkar. He provided well education to his children who inculcated their position in their chosen careers and succeeded in finding their identity and space in the Indian society. Dalit people have their voice for claiming their identity through their literature which ascertains that subaltern can also speak.

Keywords: Identity, Dalits, Mahar, Subaltern, Caste system, Untouchability, Ambedkar.

Narendra Jadhav is a writer in English, Marathi and Hindi and an Indian economist, educationist, professor. He is a well-known expert on Babasaheb Ambedkar. He was born on 28th May 1953 to a *Mahar* untouchable family in Mumbai. His family converted to Buddhism, in 1956, against the rigid practice of casteism. For his work entitled *Dr. Ambedkar: Economic Thoughts and Philosophy*, Narendra Jadhav received the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad Award (1992). *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003), by Narendra Jadhav, was first published in Marathi in 1993 under the title *Amcha Baap An Amchi* (Our Father and We). The book published in French in 2002 under the title *Intouchable*, and it has since been translated into several European languages. The book depicts Dalit social history in India before and after independence, as well as his memories and experiences with his family. The memoir *Outcaste, A Memoir* (2003) chronicles their family's and community's struggles. It is a memoir that tells the story of three generations over the course of eighty years. It's a remarkable piece of literature that makes us recognise the inhumanity and injustice of a societal structure that dehumanizes a section of people.

Outcaste, A Memoir (2003) is unlike any other Dalit autobiography because it tells the story of Jadhav's family's triumph through adversity. It goes beyond the atrocities of untouchability to include the pains and struggle for dignity and identity, which we must not overlook. It takes a lot more effort to achieve one's objectives. However, attaining them against all obstacles adds to the story's interest. Being from a poor Dalit family in 1950s and 1960s India made life difficult enough, let alone succeeding in a caste-biased society. The narrative of Dr. Narendra Jadhav's family is one such example of caste atrocity. Dr. Jadhav's forefathers were compelled to wear clay pots around their necks to prevent their spit from fouling the ground the Brahmins walked on, as well as attach brooms to their rumps to wash off their footprints as they

moved. This is an example of how reality differs from fiction. Damu, together with his loving wife, Sonu, is the true hero of *Outcaste*. Their personal stories of battle against caste tyranny, poverty, and tragedy paint a bleak picture of the Dalit experience laced with reality.

In Indian history, caste system has been existed more than 3500 years (Mandavkar 43). Since then, India has been lambasted for its abhorrent social segregation system. It operates on the 'purity and impurity' principle: 'purity' is 'rich' and 'white' while 'impurity' is 'poor' and 'black'. The concept and ideal of caste and varna arose from the Brahminical mind, which divided the population into castes and sub-castes. Later on, it had an impact on their way of life, as members of society regarded 'wealthy' or having 'purity' continued to gain riches, while the majority of the people was broken down from the selected few and remained 'poor'. They were branded *Shudra* and untouchable in the process (Sharma 32). The Brahmins created the four *Varna*—*Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*—to keep them at the top of the social hierarchy, and the *Shudras* were created to serve all three *varnas*. The untouchables, who were in fact very courageous and ready to fight for justice and human rights, were isolated, and tribal communities were thrown into forest areas, further isolating them. The Indian constitution prohibits caste discrimination, but in practice, the situation of untouchables has not altered. Many studies in the sociological and anthropological domains have proven that India's caste system is completely fictitious and mythical.

There is strong belief in the mind of orthodox Hindus that the Hindu society was somehow molded into the framework of the caste system and that it is an organization consciously created by the shastras. Not only does this belief exist, but it is being justified on the ground that it cannot

*but be good, because it is ordained by the
shastras and the shastras cannot be wrong.
(Jadhav, Ambedkar 16)*

It is evident that caste is split into different segments based on caste, sub-castes, occupations, religious beliefs, and local residences, as well as the aspirations of upper caste people, their interest, and relationships. S. N. Busi observes, "Ambedkar has defended caste as an arterial chopping off the population into fixed and definite units, each prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy" (1-2). G. N. Devy says in the introduction to *The Outcaste*: "... the origin of the notion of caste is so obscure and its manifestation in social life is so complicated that it is almost impossible to think of it as a 'system' which rules that can be articulated and resonate out..." (Limbale xiv)

Dalit stories, like other Dalit genres, are about self-discovery and finding one's identity. Gangadhar Pantawane, a distinguished writer, philosopher, and Ambedkarite activist thoughts, "Dalit story comprehends history, understands present reality subtly and has greater power to ignite" (New Identity, 1986). To comprehend Dalit literature, we should be aware of and acquainted with the Dalit movement. The Dalit movement and Dalit literature developed concurrently; rather, Dalit literature is the consequence of the Dalit movements. "Dalit literature is life-affirming literature. All the strands of this literature are tied to life. It is the clear assumption of the Dalit writer that: 'My literature is my life, and I write for humanity'" (Limbale 105). Dalit literature is believed to have formed with the writings of Mahatma Phule. However, Ambedkar is the driving force behind the Dalit movement and Dalit literature.

In general, Indian short stories in 'Marathi,' and Dalit stories in particular, have spread their wings to embrace the charms of traditional touch, depict contemporary cruel reality, create

a space for the loud voice of rejection, and also exemplify the sorrows of Dalit-hood. The shift in social life, the status of Dalits in the existing society, social ethical ideals, and social tradition are all important to the Dalit short story authors in Maharashtra. All of the Dalit short story writers aspire to bring about change in the lives of Dalits so that they can live lives of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice.

It's because Dalit literature is a revolting literature, a protest against rejection, oppression, anguish, and agony at the hands of superior castes. It also calls for a revolutionary shift, whereas other literature is intended to entertain and instruct. There is nothing imaginative or fantastical in Dalit writing; it is factual, and it is supposed to show the world how pitifully the untouchables have suffered for ages.

When discussing Dalit politics and rights, the foremost question that arises is the identity of the Dalit. In this context, it must be considered that 'Dalit' is not a caste into which one is born and does not appear in the Hindu caste system, but rather a constructed identity (Bharati 4339-4340). Different subaltern communities that have been discriminated against for centuries identify as Dalits and form a new identity by coming together with the viewpoint that is dignity of Dalit (Omvedt 1995) thereby obliterating the subhuman condition imposed on them by the Hindu social order by virtue of their birth.

Prior to Ambedkar's reform movement, the issue of caste was considered an internal matter of Hinduism, and its resolution was restricted to the spectrum of social movements. Acknowledging that caste oppression and Hinduism were inextricably linked, and believing that any kind of social reform was impossible within the framework of Hinduism, Ambedkar aimed to construct a new social identity and accepted Buddhism to do the same (Zelliot 11-13). Buddhism was one of the earliest critics and alternative options to

orthodox Brahmanism, in which social institutions were formed on the notion of the spiritual inferiority and socio-political position of the lower caste and women (Contursi 441-457). This alternative conceptualisation of religious identity provided the Dalits with the means to escape their degraded cultural representation while linking them with the legacy of Buddhism and enabling them to imagine and create new cultural identity, challenging the regressive mode of social systems and seeking to build a new social system based on the ideals of equality (Wankhede 53).

[Outcaste, A Memoir is more than a personal account of caste division in India; it's also a critical assessment of Ambedkar's Dalit awakening. The book's main issue is Ambedkar's appeal for the Dalits to 'Educate, Unite, and Agitate'. The novel is an outpouring of rage against the Dalit community's long history of discrimination and exploitation. It is an attack against Hindu society's social structure, which promotes the idea of birth-defined elitism. It is a rallying cry for all oppressed and marginalised people to use education to empower themselves and stand up to the oppression of the senseless and illogical caste system.

Damu utters "This was the first time I wondered if it is better to be born a dog than to be born a Mahar" (Jadav, *Outcaste* 47). Damu was humiliated by the occurrence and was unable to explain why he had been treated in this manner. Only one thing was clear to him: the insult was a result of his being a member of an untouchable caste. A similar incidence occurred in Jadhav's mother Sonabai's childhood, causing her to become aware of the inhumane societal system. She tells her husband about how she tried to deliver sweets to the guests at a high-caste wedding as a gesture of goodwill, but the landlord's mother said, "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” (ibid., 47). At this Damu says “Don’t you see? This is a clever trick plated 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” (ibid., 48). People from the lower castes are educated to believe in the ideology of *Shastras* and to work selflessly without expecting anything in return. This religiously sanctioned inequality gave the upper castes the power to rule over the Dalits, effectively eliminating any prospect of dissent on their part.]

Damu’s portrayal of how the Mahars used to yearn for the meat of the dead-cattle brought the Mahars’ poverty to light. This depiction is a scathing indictment of the caste system, which denied Dalits equal opportunity, resulting in poverty so terrible that humans had to battle for survival like animals and vultures. It makes them subordinate to the higher castes since they are reliant on the higher castes for their bread and butter. For the Dalits, a normal, satisfying existence remains a pipe dream because they are unable to enjoy the amenities of life due to their poverty.

In Mumbai, Damu met a British man who treated him nicely. He was so used to caste discrimination as a Mahar that he couldn't believe he was being treated so well. He declares: “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” (ibid., 92). For Damu, getting exceptional treatment from a British white man was a luxury he didn’t want to lose.

The touchables and the untouchables are diametrically opposed. An untouchable is everything that a touchable isn’t. He is the polar opposite of what he is: he is high, pure, and civilised, and he is untouchable. Assigning a low status to some castes among the castes considered low was an attempt

to reclaim dignity that society had failed to grant them due to caste-based hierarchies.

The discourse of identity has been the major concern in Indian Dalit literary movements. Dalit literature emerged to quest for new identity from the negative untouchable identity imposed on Shudras by the Brahmins, the power holder. This negative identity generates a sense of identity crisis in the Dalits. An individual is not born as a Dalit but rather becomes Dalit by the social order structured by caste and religion. Such identity crisis is remarkably addressed by Kancha Illaiah in his book *Why I Am Not Hindu* (1996). In this context Ambedkar wryly asserted that "I was born a Hindu, I had no choice. But I will not die a Hindu because I do have a choice." (qtd. in Hegde 2016).

The discussion of identity crisis has become an important aspect in the Indian subaltern study. A person is in identity crisis when he/she is uncertain and confused about his/her status and place in the society. According to Erikson, "identity crisis ... was one of the most important conflicts that people face in development ... An identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself" (qtd. in Tiwari 6). Erikson's concept helps us to understand that the Dalits have been suffering from identity crisis because of the negative identity imposed on them from outside by the Brahmins, the constructor of caste order. This is the prime reason for which the Dalits fail to form their own identity independently in the society. The concept of identity crisis propelled the Dalit writers to question and investigate their original heritage in the post independent India. In the context of problem of identity Mercer says, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (4).

Dalit as a subaltern literature started its movement for claiming and reclaiming identity on individual as well as community levels. The autobiographies and other Dalit genres relocate and rewrite the history of their forefather which has been unseen and unknown. In the opinion of Erikson,

We cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and the contemporary crisis in historical development because the two helps to define each other...we are born in a community which gives us an identity as we give the community its identity (33).

A human being without identity is meaningless; identity makes a person a social being. Connolly, in his book, *Identity/Difference* says, "An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized." (qtd. Khan 19).

The construction of identity can be positive or negative. The ruling class and its ideology decide whether the construction of identity of an individual or a community will be positive or negative. The consequences become catastrophic if an individual or community is branded with a negative imposed identity. For example, in Bengal, the *Namashudras* were earlier designated with negative nomenclature i.e., *Chandal* (corpse handler) and the *Uchhalaya* tribe of Maharashtra and the *Lodha* tribe of Bengal have been identified as the criminals, a negative identity. Sambriddhi Kharel remarks, "Dalit' is self-imposed negative term that provides others an opportunity to look down upon low castes regardless of their economic status. This term reinforced the negative stereotypes and negative self-images of low caste people" (102). Caste hierarchy assures the supremacy of the Brahmins and their authority over other castes. This structural social framework generates the ideas of 'separation and exclusion', 'superiority

and inferiority' complex. Vipin Kumar (2003) notes, "separation, conflict and encounter alone are the subjects of theoretical considerations if identity becomes a matter of mere exclusion" (56). The caste system is very much political and power oriented where the Brahmins as a ruling caste decide what would be the social status of a particular community. The Dalits have been debarred as outcastes by imposing on them the negative identity by the Brahmins and they relegated them (Dalits) on the periphery of the society. In his book *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, S. M. Michael discusses Dalits as "The word "Dalit" is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section of the Indian population right down the ages". (108)

The social location of the Dalits exists outside the village without human identity and dignity. They have been treated as 'other' since time immemorial. They have been trying to search for their identity in society as long as the time of Gautama Buddha. The humanistic approach of equality and brotherhood of Buddha inspired many untouchables. The lower caste people deviated towards different faiths to search for identity and space in the society with the passages of time. A humongous number of Dalits embraced Islam and Christianity to uplift them from the inhuman condition. The religious and social reformers of different backgrounds strived hard on behalf of Dalits for reclaiming their human identity and prestige in the society. Jyotiba Phule was one of the remarkable social reformers who proclaimed equality among human being irrespective of their caste and creed. As a Mahar Shudra, Phule first raised his voice against the cruelty of caste system. He firmly stood against this untouchability and the hierarchical caste system in Hindu society. Phule has been inspired by Thomas Pain's book *The Rights of Man*. He set up a number of schools for the untouchables with the help of his

wife Savitribai Phule. It is Jyotiba Phule who first introduced the word 'Dalit' to represent the subaltern untouchables.

At the beginning of the 21st century, B. R. Ambedkar emerged as a prophet to these untouchables to bring a revolutionary change. He took birth in a Dalit family and faced all kinds of discrimination, atrocities, and identity crisis for his unclean social status. Disregarding all the hard situations, he earned his education from this country as well as outside of the country and finally, he became the architect of the constitution of India. He endeavoured to uproot the untouchability from society and to build a society which is equal, free, and just to all. He demolished all the barriers and made it possible for Dalits to access into all public places even into the temples. In 1927, he also burnt *Manusmriti* the Hindu religious scripture which propagated about the caste system and placed the Dalits into a dehumanized position. In the mid of 20th century Dalit movement came up with the Dalit Panther initiated by Marathi writer Namdeo Dhasal. Like Black Panther in America, Maharashtra's Dalits started Dalit Panther Movement in the year 1972 to articulate the rights of Dalits. Inspired by Ambedkar's ideology, Dalit panther emerged to disclose the Dalit suffering and oppression into the limelight. The renaissance of Dalit literature initially appeared in the state of Maharashtra in the 1960s. Then gradually the trend of Dalit writings developed in different Indian vernacular languages throughout the country. The common theme of Dalit literature is 'who am I and what my identity?'. The main objective of Dalit literature is to destroy social hierarchy and to disseminate the message of Equality, liberty, justice, freedom, and brotherhood.

Dalit writer Gail Omvedt dictates that Dalit satyagraha was the initiation of "untouchable liberation movement." (Omvedt 49). According to Ambedkar, Dalits would come over from their downtrodden position if they accessed in political power. In 1929 in a conference of Swabhimaan Samrakshak Parishad

which took place at Chittagong district in Nashik, Ambedkar addressed the public and spoke:

A strong movement alone will create proper understanding about the discrimination between the Untouchables and other communities. There is no time to debate about the emancipation of Untouchability. The time has come for the awakening about the self-respect...The Untouchables should awaken their self-respect and launch a sustained movement for their human rights. (Jadhav, Ambedkar 117)

The actual remedy of caste issues would be not to have any faith in *Shastras*, and then he further said, “Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled humanism. You will succeed in saving humanism if you kill Brahminism” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 223-224). According to him, Dalits will get away from their lowliness if they avoid abiding the codes and conducts prescribed by upper caste. Ambedkar fought throughout his life for the equality, justice and freedom which were direly needed to lead a human life. The custom of untouchability and discrimination that high caste Hindus practise is inhuman and unlawful from a humanistic perspective. Though Gandhi, the political ethicist, called Dalits the *Harijon* or sons of God and tried to eradicate untouchability but he himself was patronage of caste system. When Ambedkar planned to form a separate electorate, Gandhi's hunger strike obstructed him from accomplishing his goal, and at last Ambedkar was obliged to sign on the Poona Pact in 1932.

Narendra Jadhav in the book *Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India*, discusses how his parents stood against the social injustice meted out by the upper caste. Jadhav's parents became the subject of suppression and discrimination because of their Dalit identity. When the Dalits of Maharashtra found

the caste oppression reached beyond tolerance, they started a revolt against it. They were struggling against this discrimination to achieve their self-dignity and self-respect. The political and literary protest of the Dalits aimed to challenge the Brahmins for their human identity and equality.

The upper-class people denied the Dalit's right of getting education in order to hold their supreme status and not to question their authority in society. Ambedkar realized that education is the only tool for Dalits to raise consciousness among them and to challenge the caste politics. Ambedkar said that, "by considering ourselves to be incapable and impure for so many generations, we have lost our inner strength and self-esteem, which are the two pillars of upliftment" (Jadhav, Ambedkar 46). And he again emphasized that "today we are lying in open, uprooted, burning under the hot sun ... I strongly advise you that you should give special attention to the best quality of education" (Jadhav, Ambedkar 80). Dalits can achieve their identity and occupy space in societal framework with two major weapons; one is education, and the second is political power. These two powerful forces might reinforce the Dalit to come out from their lamentable state. A parallel idea can be noticed between the concept of Ambedkar and Michel Foucault in the context of power and knowledge. In order to alter the social discourse framed by Brahmins, Dalits need to access power. A revolutionary spirit will sprout in the Dalits when they attain knowledge and raise a consciousness in them. As Foucault says in his essay 'Prison Essay' in his book entitled *Power and Knowledge*, "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is not possible for knowledge to be engendered power" (52). Ambedkar believed that knowledge and power are inseparable. Dalits need to attain knowledge and power to bring a revolutionary change.

In his memoir, Jadhav narrates his father was immensely inspired by the thoughts and principles of Ambedkar. His

father Damu provided his offsprings well education and encouraged them to achieve their goals in their life. His memoir narrates in detail how Jadhav, his parents, and children worked hard to escape from casteism and to gain a dignified life. Damu and his family had to undergo religious oppression, poverty and illiteracy in Maharashtra. The power holding caste put these Dalits into many harsh circumstances to suppress their voice. In the memoir, Jadhav discusses that his father was forced to beg (Yeskar) from house to house and to follow the tradition which was acutely detested to him. Damu was not like other Dalits who were easily bowed down to the tradition. He started revolting when he found the Yeskar duty hampering his personality and self-respect. There was an incident where the authority compelled Damu to guard a dead body found floating in a well till morning in empty stomach. Damu did the same without any argument. In the next day morning, the Fauzdar arrived and ordered Damu to get into the well and draw the body out. Damu was adamant not to do so and in a voice of revolt he said, "I 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 doing his duty. See, the entire village is witnessing your atrocities" (Jadhav, 9). A spark of resistance and revolutionary voice comes out in the statement of Damu. In this context Michel Foucault describes:

You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want... So, I think that resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic (Foucault 167).

Henceforth, it is clear that the Jadhav's Memoir describes the dirty game of power and hegemony and how the Dalits'

protest conquers the illegal torture of the upper caste power holder. In the Memoir, it is observed that Damu begin to protest to attain his identity and due right as a human. His silent voice emerges as anger and it raises confidence in other Dalits as well.

Ambedkar was completely against such exploitations and atrocities. He encouraged the Dalits to raise their voice against all sorts of caste violations. Damu as an idea of de-Brahminization attempted to deconstruct the antediluvian social tradition that was engraved in the mind of Dalits as false consciousness. He was adamant not to visit house to house and beg for *Baluta*. In a rebellious tone he said, "what kind of tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cat and dogs? I spit on these inhuman traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for *Baluta*. What will you do? Kill me?" (Jadhav, *Outcaste* 10). Damu wanted to lead a life with dignity and identity and for that he refused to follow his ancestral tradition of Yeskar duty. To escape the inhuman treatment in village, he planned to leave his village that very night with his wife Sonu to the city of Mumbai which Narendra Jadhav mentioned as "together they started walking towards freedom" (ibid., 11). In the context of Yeskar, Damu's wife Sonu said, "it was not the question of few months; it was a question of his identity- our identity" (ibid., 19). Damu is the symbol of his community and it reveals how Dalits in Maharashtra have been treated by the upper class. The teachings of Ambedkar agitated Damu to gather his courage to disobey the order of Patil and Fauzdar. If Dalits get the necessary education, they will be able to realize their marginal social status; one the other hand, if they have political power, then they can call for protest against it and alter the social framework. After waging a war against the Fauzdar, Damu realized, "was that really who challenged the Fauzdar?... my actions were true to the teaching of Babasaheb" (ibid., 20). Damu later realized whether has he

done any mistake challenging him (Fauzdar), then an immediate answer comes from within, “no I had not done anything wrong. Perhaps I should not have waited so long to do the right thing” (ibid., 20). Thus, the inspiration of Ambedkar’s teachings and principles left a significant impact on Damu.

Apart from self-motivation, he tried to influence others by proclaiming “we will achieve self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect, and gain our self-knowledge” (ibid., 22). Although Damu was uneducated, he indoctrinated a goal in his children to be educated and to move ahead in their life to cherish their dreams. Damu and his family paid strenuous effort to dismantle the chain of slavery and for reclaiming their human identity. Similar to Ambedkar, Damu too believed that caste is nothing but an artificial tool for chopping off the human values of a section of people and nothing else. He believed that he is the master of his own fate. He stood against the established social customs to form his own identity as a human. Damu tells his wife, “We will go to Mumbai and I will get job. We will have a life of dignity, earning a respectable Bhakri” (ibid., 45). As a self-conscious individual he contemplates how the people of his community have been treated badly for long and denied their identity as human being. Damu says, “did you see how they treated us in the village? We are not called by our names but simply as untouchables, the outcastes, and the lowly people who do not matter at all” (ibid., 45). Dalit people are designated as untouchables and outcasts and they are forced to do the menial jobs. Damu rejected all their oppressions loaded by upper caste and strode to gain his identity through his own efforts. Damu was a faithful hard worker in the railway department and later in the post of electric motor mechanic centre in Mumbai. He worked hard with ardent respect to accomplish Ambedkar’s advice to attain a dignified life. He says:

As a devout follower of Babasaheb, Sonu and I strive to educate our family. Babasaheb has inculcated in us the belief that education is the solution to all our ill ... I vowed that giving my children the highest possible education would be the mission of my life (ibid., 231).

Damu was the father of six children, namely Janu, Sudha, Dina, Leele, Trusha and the youngest one is Jadhav. Damu inculcated a positive spirit in their children and helped them to raise their position in their own goal. The author Narendra Jadhav himself did PhD in economics and finally became a financial advisor and on the other side, Janu also became an IAS officer. Jadhav, like his father believes that a man is the master of his own will. He is never worried about caste discrimination and says, "if others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low. It is their problem, not mine. I certainly do not need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices" (ibid., 214). Their faithful and consistent endeavour finally propelled them to conquer their identity. Jadhav and Janu have also been motivated by his father and Ambedkar. Though Damu took his last breath on January 14, 1989, his immoral spirit is still visible in his children and in other Dalits who are fighting against discrimination and humiliation in this caste-ridden society. Damu abided Ambedkar's advice that "give your sons a good education" (ibid., 210).

Narendra Jadhav achieved success in his career and finally succeeded to bring back his identity. Similar to the author, the Dalit people can also achieve their identity when they will be aware about their position and abolish their sense of untouchability. Jadhav also mentioned that the teachings of Ambedkar will help Dalits to recognize and reform their identity. The last part of the memoir is written from Apoorva's perspective, the granddaughter of Damu. For the first time she

was addressed as a Dalit when she was 12 years old in 6th grade standard. She felt overjoyed when her class teacher informed her that her father had been a bright Dalit scholar. Besides the happiness, this information also flabbergasted her that even after gaining achievement the Dalit identity did not eliminate from his name. Then she said, "I was proud of my father, but completely bewildered as to why he had to have that little achievement to him. Why could not she just call him a scholar? Why add the Dalit tag?" (ibid., 261). Even today, Dalit people are first addressed as a Dalit after that by their achievement. In the contemporary era, the situation of the Dalits has immensely changed. They are now enjoying all sorts of rights as a citizen of the country. Damu's granddaughter is now free from all kinds of horrible experiences that her grandfather faced as an untouchable. Apoorva says, "my grandfather worked hard to make my life just like that of any other girl in the world. I have the torch they lit for me and nothing can stop me" (ibid., 263). The ancestors combatted arduously with caste issues to pave the path of progress for the coming generation. Damu's granddaughter has also bagged all her academic achievements and accomplished her dreams. Apoorva says, "now I think, I know who I am. I am Apoorva, not tied down by race, religion, or caste" (ibid., 263). The constitution of India declared untouchability as a punishable offence and also formed different articles to assure Social Justice and Empowerment, protection and safeguards for the Dalits. There are a number of articles in the constitution that deal with special reservations and betterment for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. Dalits finally made it possible to gain their human identity and a respectable life as a citizen of India. They are no longer treated as outcaste. They have constructed their own literary and cultural identity, which ensures that subalterns can also speak. The voices of self-identity and self-dignity of Damu and Sonu reverberate in the author's words, "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 a low caste” (ibid., 178).

In the Indian subcontinent, caste is thought to be the foundation of people's identities. It is traditionally based on a hierarchical concept and a corresponding series of rights and obligations. As a result, caste constituted a continuum ranging from the mythical superior-most Brahmins to the inferior-most untouchables, whose precise identity would be impossible to ascertain. such Castes' haziness is a consequence of both their sheer numbers and their dynamism. Contrary to popular belief, caste is not a static group; it has been continually evolving through divisions and mergers, giving rise to new castes that claim a higher ritual position than existing castes in their specific locales based on their material strength. Similarly, residential location determines people's various means of living, which has influenced the social status of many castes. As a result, caste creates a fluid lifeworld for people on the Indian subcontinent.

The constitution of India declared untouchability as a punishable offence and also formed different articles to assure Social Justice and Empowerment, protection and safeguards for the Dalits. There are a number of articles in the constitution that deal with special reservations and betterment for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. Dalits finally made it possible to gain their human identity and a respectable life as a citizen of India. They are no longer treated as outcaste. They have constructed their own literary and cultural identity, which ensures that subalterns can also speak. The voices of self-identity and self-dignity of Damu and Sonu reverberate in the author's words, “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 a low caste” (ibid., 178).

References

1. Bharati, S. R. “Dalit: A Term Asserting Unity”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(42) (2002): 4339-4340, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412748>, (consulted on 19/03/2023).

2. Busi, Subhamani Naganna. *Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar—crusaders against caste and untouchability*. Hyderabad: saroja publication. 1997. Print.
3. Contursi, J. A. “Militant Hindus and Buddhist Dalits: Hegemony and Resistance in an Indian Slum”, *American Ethnologist*, 16(3) (1989): 441-457, consulted from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645267>, (consulted on 19/03/2023).
4. Erikson, E. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: W.W Nortonand Co. 1968. Print.
5. Foucault, Michel. *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other writing 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., Brighton: Harvester Press. 1980. Print.
6. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I, An introduction: trans.* Robert Hurley, New York: Random House. 1978. Print.
7. Hegde, S. “A Nation Builder’s Pride of Place”. *The Hindu*. 2016, (consulted Web. 16 Apr. 2023).
8. Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Calcutta: Samya. 1996: P. 33.
9. Jadhav, Narendra. *Ambedkar: Awakening India’s Social Conscience*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd. 2014.
10. Jadhav, Narendra. *Outcaste, A Memoir*. New Delhi: Penguin. 2003. Print.
11. Jadhav, Narendra. *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Journey out of the Caste System in Modern India*. New York: Scribner Book Company. 2005. Print.
12. Khan, Ali Ahmed. *Identity Crisis in Dalit Literature: An Appraisal*. Jaipur: YKing Books. (2013): 19.

13. Kharel, S. *The Dialectics of Identity and Resistance of Dalits in Nepal*. Dissertation. University of Pittsburgh. (2010): 102.
14. Kumar, V. "Identity and Totality: A Synthetic Definition" in Baral and Kar (ed.,) *Identities Local and Global*. New Delhi: Pencraft International. (2003): 56.
15. Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*. Trans. Santhosh Bhoomkar. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2003. Print.
16. Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Translated by Alok Mukherjee. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan. 2010. Print.
17. Mandavkar, Pavan. "Indian Dalit Literature Quest for Identity to Social Equalit", *Indian Dalit Literature Quest for Identity to Social Equalit*, Vol. 3 (2): (Apr 2015) ISSN : 2395-6518.
18. Mercer, K. *Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics*, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart. (1995): 4.
19. Michael, S.M. *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Second edition India; Sage publication. (2007): 108.
20. Omvedt, G. *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar Beyond*. Second Edition. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan. 2011. Print.
21. Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions: The Anti Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*, Orient Longman: New Delhi. 1995. Print.
22. Pantawane, G. *Evolving a New Identity: The Development of Dalit Culture*. In: B. Joshi, ed., *Untouchable!: Voices of*

- The Dalit Liberation Movement, 1sted. London: Zed Books, 1986. Print.
23. Saha, Oeishi. "The Dalit Identity", *Akademike*, January 30, 2015. (consulted on 19/06/2023) from <https://www.lawctopus.com/akademike/dalit-identity/>
24. Sharma, Ram Nath. *Indian social problems*. Bombay: media promoters and publishers. 1994. Print.
25. Tiwari, Kanak Lata. "Identity Crisis- Indian English fiction of post 1980's." *International Journal of English and Literature*. Vol. 4.1 (2013): 6-10. Web. 26 June. 2019. <<http://academicjournals.org>>.
26. Wankhede, H. S. "The Political and the Social in the Dalit Movement Today", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(6) (2008): 50-57, (consulted on 19/03/2014) from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40277102>
27. Zelliott, E. *From Untouchable to Dalit, Essays on Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers: Delhi. (1996: 11-13).



Tarik Anwar

Tarik is an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of English Studies, Akal University, Punjab, India. His research interests include Indian Dalit Literature, Indian tribal studies, and other post-colonial studies.

[Get Your Book Reviewed](#)

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here](#).

[Authors & Books](#)

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.