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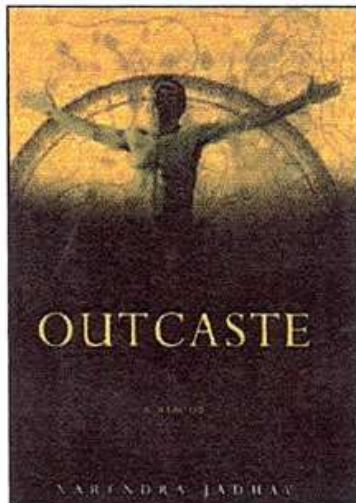
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Outcaste: A Memoir

Narendra Jadhav
Penguin India
2003
Sociology
Pages: 296
Price: Rs 395
Hardcover
ISBN: 0670049727

Outcaste: A Memoir is a multilayered personalized saga of the social metamorphosis of Dalits in India. At one level, it is a loving tribute from a son to his father. At another, it gives an intelligent appraisal of the caste system in India and traces the story of the awakening of Dalits traversing three generations. At still another level, it is reflective of the aspirations

of millions of Dalits in India.

Written in the first person, at times from the perspective of Narendra Jadhav's parents, Damu and Sonu, and at other times from his own, the book traces the remarkable journey of Damu from a small village at Ozar in Maharashtra to the city of Mumbai to escape persecution. In the city, although illiterate and despite the disadvantages of his Mahar caste, Damu earns respect in the various jobs he undertakes. Even more heartening, his children and their offspring go on to fulfil all his aspirations, rising to high positions in their chosen careers, and overcoming, finally, the barrier that had so bedevilled his own life. Damu's refusal to cave in to any type of injustice and his iron determination form the heart of the book.

But *Outcaste* is much more than a personal recounting of the downside of the caste divide in India. It also examines Dalit issues in the context of the Dalits' awakening spearheaded by the champion of human rights, Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Independence movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhiji's relation with Ambedkar, the mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism in 1956, and caste in its

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contemporary reality. A crucial landmark is Damu's own transformation under the spell of Ambedkar. The radical change in Damu and his family, their sloughing off of servility, and their self-esteem are seamlessly woven into the narrative.

The book ends with a note of self-realization: that in modern India dignity rests in the minds and hearts of people, and that obsolete prejudices do not really matter. Enlivening the text are personal anecdotes, some funny, some sad and some heart-warming. And running like a refrain throughout is the clarion call of Ambedkar, 'Educate, Unite and Agitate'. Poignant and simple, Outcaste makes for fascinating reading.

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