

'Only the form of casteism has changed'

NT Bureau
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There have been few problems that have been of enduring nature in the country which has seen vast social change since independence. Casteism is one such. For those who think that caste has become irrelevant as a result of a social churning in more than half a century of independence, Narendra Jadav, a Mumbai-born economist who heads the Economic Research division of the Reserve Bank of India, has something on the contrary to say.

'Only the form of casteism has changed. It is now subtle (in practice) and (has become) more sophisticated (in discriminating). The earlier blatant discrimination was at least easier to tackle. This one is more lethal', Jadav, who was here yesterday to read from his autobiography 'Outcaste: A Memoir', said.

To further stress his point, he tells the small gathering at the Landmark where a panel discussion had been organised over the book, to go back home and 'open the matrimonial page in any newspaper'.

'Caste system is very much there', he said, adding that he had personally sought to tackle social pinpricks arising out of his caste identity by ignoring the attitude of others. 'In Maharashtra, my name tells the caste. And people look at me wondering what I am doing there. I carry on with the attitude that I have no problem with my name. If you have a problem, that is not my concern'. Condensation and patronising had been put up with, he said, with the same attitude.

'It is my considered view that India with 3.5 per cent growth rate after independence and 5.5 per cent growth rate now, is performing far below its potential, because of caste'.

At the same time, Jadav says, he is 'psychologically and ethically against' fixing the responsibility of one's misfortune upon others. 'If you have a burning desire, you can come up in life. That is the positive message I am trying to give (through the book)', he said.

Jadav also released four books, 'Touchable Tales: Publishing and Reading Dalit Literature', 'Post-Modernism and Religious Fundamentalism: A Scientific Rebuttal to Hindu Science', 'Ambedkar: Autobiographical Notes' and 'Brahmans and Cricket: Lagaan's Millennial Purana and Other Myths', all brought out by Navayana.

P Sivagami, writer, Kanimozhi, poet, and N Ram, Editor-in-Chief, The Hindu, were the panelists who spoke. The event also announced the launch of Navayana, a niche publishing house to deal with caste and Dalit-related issues. Navayana along with Penguin India which published 'Outcaste: A Memoir' organised the event. S Anand, journalist, and Ravikumar, writer, who are behind Navayana, were present.

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