

Outcaste: A Memoir (Viking)

Background

In 1993, "*Amcha Baap Aan Amhi*" written by Dr. Narendra Jadhav was first published in Marathi and became an instant bestseller. In 2002, based on the Marathi book, an expanded version was published in French as "*Intouchable*" by Fayard. Fayard is also currently publishing the book in several other European languages including Spanish. The French book was widely acclaimed in France and as a recognition the Ministry of Culture, French Government invited Dr. Jadhav as part of the "Belles Etrangères" devoted in the same year to India, aimed at discovery of foreign literatures in France. Other literary figures invited from India as part of the "Belles Etrangères" included Mahashweta Devi, Upamanyu Chatterjee, U.R. Ananthamurthy, Esther David, Alka Saraogi, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Shashi Tharoor, Mukul Kesavan, Mukundan and Krishna Baldev Vaid. Public events in the form of round tables and public readings were organized with bookshops, libraries, cultural associations, secondary schools and universities in several cities in France for around ten days during November 2002.

Outcaste: A Memoir

The present book in English entitled "*Outcaste : A Memoir*" has been slightly modified from the French version and is being published by Viking (Penguin India) in the Indian sub-continent. The book is due for release in late July 2003.

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 offsprings 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 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".

About the Author

Narendra Jadhav was born in 1953 in Mumbai. He is a well-known economist, career banker, public speaker and social worker. Dr Jadhav has several scholastic honours and professional distinctions to his credit. He is presently the Head of the economic research of the Reserve Bank of India. He has also served as an international civil servant during his various assignments abroad, including a four-year term as the Adviser to the Executive Director (India) at the IMF.

Dr Jadhav read Economics at the Mumbai University and Indiana University, USA, from where he earned his doctorate. At the Indiana University, he won the Best International Student Award and the Award for Outstanding Contribution to Economic Theory. His books, *Monetary Economics for India* (1994) and *Challenge to Indian Banking: Competition, Globalization and Financial Markets* (1996), have been popular readings on the subject. He was awarded the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad (Literary Academy) Award for his book *Dr Ambedkar: Economic Thoughts & Philosophy* (1992).