

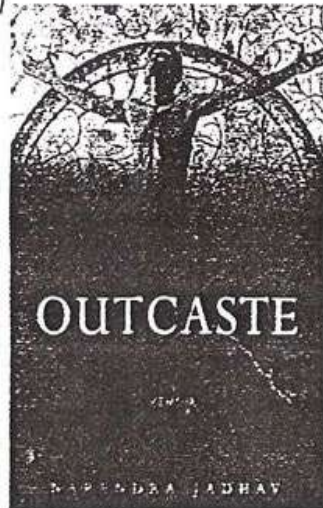
ARTICULATION

A journey towards freedom

Outcaste is a success story of a Dalit family. It is a story of Damu and his wife, and their children. It is a story of low caste Mahars who migrated from their native village Ozar to Mumbai in the early 20th century. Narendra Jadhav, the youngest son of Damu and Sonu, stands as a testimony to the success of the Dalit family.

Jadhav, who has held prestigious positions like the Head of Reserve Bank of India's economic research division, and the Adviser to the Executive Director (India) at the IMF, narrates the story from the point of view of his father, mother and his own.

Outcaste is the story of the assertion of a Dalit. Jadhav, who left his Mumbai slum and became a respectable middle class citizen, courageously declares to the world that he is a Mahar from Ozar and comes from Wadala slum of Mumbai. He asserts, "Yes, I do come from the Mahar caste. Yes, my forefa-



A first person account of the struggles of a Dalit to become a respectable citizen in society

OUTCASTE: A MEMOIR

Narendra Jadhav,
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thers were required to wear clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.

Yes, as village servants, my forefathers were mercilessly forced to run...human pilots, foaming at the mouth under the

scorching Sun, to herald the carriages of government officials.

So what? Have I not reclaimed my dignity through my achievements? Why should the caste into which I was born count now?"

And he declares, "If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their

problem, not mine."

Damu's family struggled hard to survive through the Great Depression in the 1930s. The Colonial modernisation initiatives - the Railways, the Port Trust, the textile mills and so on provided Damu and his wife some work to earn a living in Mumbai city, and the movement of Dalits led by Babasaheb Ambedkar gave Damu the indomitable spirit to fight against all odds.

The journey of Damu's family from the slums of Mumbai to the heart of the city is indeed a journey 'Towards Freedom'. But one should not forget that a celebration of the success stories often suppresses many of the stories of the Dalits in villages and slums. The Dalits still face discrimination in Ozar village.

I visited Dharavi, a slum in Mumbai in May 2003. My Dalit friends, from two most backward districts of the country - Mahboobnagar of Andhra

Pradesh and Raichur of Karnataka, have been living there for the last 60 years or more. They told me that the cruelty of caste discrimination, drought and starvation deaths forced more and more Dalits to migrate to Mumbai.

But the situation in Mumbai is more terrible. A lot of employees, a majority of them migrant Dalits and from other marginalised sections, are thrown out of their jobs due to the closure of the Industries and the privatisation of the public sector. These jobless Dalits and the increasing number of the newly migrated Dalits do not know where to go.

I mention Dharavi not to underplay the significance of the rise of the Dalit middle class in Mumbai. But I want to remind all that the success story of the Jadhavs has an underside to it. The Dalits of slums and villages remain where they are. Are there some Dalits who will tell us the stories of the Dalit community of the villages and the slums and their struggles for dignity and equality?

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