

## Metro Plus Chennai

Features: Magazine | Literary Review | Life | Metro Plus | Open Page | Education | Book Review | Business | SciTech | Entertainment | Young World | Quest | Folio |

Metro Plus Bangalore Chennai Coimbatore Delhi Hyderabad Kochi Madurai Thiruvananthapuram Visakhapatnam



### An emerging voice

Narendra Jadhav's book 'Outcaste: A Memoir', a story about dreams coming true, was the topic of discussion at Landmark



EVERY SIXTH human being is an Indian and every sixth Indian is a Dalit says author, eminent economist and banker Narendra Jadhav in his book 'Outcaste: A Memoir'. Unfortunately, vast numbers don't necessarily mean vast influence, or even representation. Yet, Dalit voices are finally emerging, as though from a deep silent well. They're not always audible, and they're not always listened to - but they're steadily gaining strength, aided by education and the occasional liberal publisher. However, open minded publishers are apparently few and far between, leaving Dalit writers with stories to tell and no one to tell them through.

So when Ravikumar, a Pondicherry-based activist-theoretician of the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu and S. Anand, a Chennai journalist who's been exploring caste issues, combined forces to launch 'Navayana', a publishing venture that intends to concentrate on caste issues, they decided to make a splash. Narendra Jadhav was invited to discuss his book along with N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu*, writer P. Sivakami and poet Kanimozhi.

Jadhav's book 'Outcaste: A Memoir' is an expanded version of his Marathi novel 'Amcha Baap Aan Amhi'. The story, written in the first person, explores the world Jadhav lived and struggled in through the eyes of his family.

'Outcaste...' follows Damu's journey from a small village, Ozar in

Published on Mondays, Tuesdays,  
Wednesdays & Thursdays

Archives

- Datewise

Classified

- Lead
- Life Style
- Fashion
- Music
- Personality
- Eating Out
- Madras Miscellany
- Issues
- Arts & Crafts
- Information Technology
- Shopping
- Heritage
- Miscellany

News

News Update

Front Page

National

Regional:

- Southern States

- Other States

International

Opinion

Business

Sport

Miscellaneous

Index

Maharashtra to Mumbai to escape the persecution he faces as a Dalit. Thanks to his grit, hard work and courage, his children and grandchildren fulfil his aspirations, armed with little besides education and determination. It's a story about dreams coming true - the kind that audiences all over the world find irresistible.

However, its print run in European languages far exceeds the numbers it has sold in India. Jadhav's book sold 20,000 copies in French in less than a year. (In India, an English work of fiction or non-fiction sells an average of 700 to 1,000 copies). A Spanish version will be appearing in November and last year Jadhav was invited to participate in a literary festival 'Les Belles Etrangeres' to talk about his book and experiences as a Dalit in India.

Navayana's contention, that publishers ignoring Dalit literature is both unjust and unintelligent since a large number of people are interested in the subject, was proved true by the turnout for the discussion. Taking Landmark by surprise, the crowds spilled out of the book reading area into the aisles and between bookshelves to listen to the animated discussion.

Kanimozhi began by examining the pain the book evokes. "He doesn't impose the pain on you. It's like poetry - you read the silences. The pain creeps in slowly, after you finish. It haunts you for days." Autobiographical Dalit literature of pain and oppression has been making an impact lately because it's so powerful, and so real. As Jadhav says in 'Touchable Tales' published by Navayana, "The facts that I have are stranger than fiction. Therefore, the facts that I have are far more exciting than fiction."

Kanimozhi also touched on the fact that the story of discrimination in India is far from over. "Even though the voice of people suppressed for centuries is being heard loud and clear, there are still people who, like computers, can reel off castes and sub castes. In the cities we like to believe that we all merge. But that's not true." She concluded by asking Jadhav how he and Damu, could just walk away from their oppressors without wanting to hit back.



Sivakami discussed the idea of Jadhav asking Dalits to join the

mainstream. "What is the mainstream? Do we have to accept saffronised education and master it better than our masters? Does the mainstream advocate equality, or dignity of labour and manual labour?"

As Jadhav nodded thoughtfully and took down notes, Sivakami ended with "A positive note sends positive waves... The beat of the victor's drum is so loud he can't hear the lowest of the low. Maybe once the dust settles, he will."

N. Ram discussed the practical problems of putting together a book like 'Outcaste.' He talked about the difficulties of getting an English book out of what would have been difficult material, "transcribing and restructuring work in a completely different manner" and translating different sources into literature. "You are struck by the plurality of voices," he said, adding that the story, set "in a formidable backdrop of great events" deserves to be celebrated for its continuity of spirit.

Jadhav, who concluded the evening, said, "The book is in two levels - it's the story of a family on the one hand; it's also about the social metamorphosis that has taken place over the past 80 years. And the fact is that Ambedkar is the agent of that change. He made my father and his generation ask a simple question, which had never been asked before. "It may be okay for you to be our masters, but how is it in our interest to be your slaves?" Jadhav went on to talk of how they "realised education is the only panacea. The Only hope for the future."

"For those of you who think the caste system is no more, just open the matrimonial column in any newspaper or magazine. It's only moved into a more sophisticated form - and that is lethal," he says before he answers Kanimozhi's question. "Why don't I react? When others look down on you for centuries, you develop a complex and look down on yourself. This complex was removed by Dr. Ambedkar. We are Dalits. If people discriminate against us, they have a problem. Not us. Why do I ignore them? I think that's a sign of liberation."

SHONALI MUTHALALY

Printer friendly page

Send this article to Friends by E-Mail

Metro Plus Bangalore Chennai Coimbatore Delhi Hyderabad  
Kochi Madurai Thiruvananthapuram Visakhapatnam

Features: Magazine | Literary Review | Life | Metro Plus | Open Page |  
Education | Book Review | Business | SciTech | Entertainment | Young  
World | Quest | Folio |

---

The Hindu Group: [Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contacts](#) | [Subscription](#)  
Group Sites: [The Hindu](#) | [Business Line](#) | [The Sportstar](#) | [Frontline](#) | [The Hindu eBooks](#) | [Home](#) |

Comments to : [thehindu@vsnl.com](mailto:thehindu@vsnl.com) Copyright © 2003, The Hindu  
Republication or redistribution of the contents of this screen are expressly prohibited without the written consent of The Hindu

---

