



PROTEST IN DR. NARENDRA JADHAV'S OUTCASTE: A MEMOIR (2003)

Dr. Madhukar R. Wankhede

Vidyawardhini College, Dhule (Maharashtra)

ABSTRACT

Protest in life is essential weapon against everything which is inhuman, illogical or harming to self-respect but it must be conscious and justifiable otherwise it becomes negative criticism signifying nothing. It helps to solve the issues through its noble actions. There are many writings who have illustrated protests of the individuals or communities through which their voices are heard. Dalit literature has descriptions and depiction of protests against discriminations and exploitations of dalit communities and it has raised many issues which were absent or unrepresented in literature. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the protest in Dr. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003).

KEYWORDS: Protest, Discrimination, Traditions and Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature portrays a life of downtrodden, socio-economically deprived societies and voiceless people who had no place in literature. It deals with a protest by dalits against inhuman treatments and behaviour of so called upper caste societies. It does not depict a protest to oppose somebody or any society but it wants to say non-dalit societies that dalits are human beings and they also have the rights to live with dignity and respect as others have. The protest in dalit autobiographies, short stories or poems has no feeling of revenge but it is a self-projection of dalits that their life stories must be heard and known to all. According to Narendra Mohan, "The foundation of protest is laid when man becomes conscious of his life rights and for their attainment puts himself into protest with body and soul" (page 92-95). It means protest is associated with a life and rights. It is as "the act of objecting or a gesture of disapproval; a complaint, objection, or display of unwillingness usually to an idea or a course of action." (Merriam Webster online dictionary). The dictionary meaning indicates that the protest is disapproval or objection against the course of action which is intentionally done by somebody to harm or underestimate. This kind of assertion or disapproval or action against injustice or inhuman treatments is depicted in dalit literature and the present paper attempts to explore the protest in Dr. Narendra Jadhav's autobiography.

Protest in Dr. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003):

Dr. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003) is a story of struggling parents who realized importance of education despite poverty and illiteracy and their life became an inspiring story for their children. Jadhav's parents, Damu and Sonu, nurtured the values and attitudes of fighting against every adversity in the life. They also have taught their children that we must fight and assert for our rights to establish our identity and self-respect. Jadhav has narrated the protest against casteism, inhuman treatments, exploitation and traditions those considered dalits

as meaningless entity.

Jadhav has depicted his father's personality who has fought against all circumstances though he had no proper education. His father was against every bad and evil social practice that considered dalits as underdogs. Jadhav in the Author's Note of autobiography describes his father;

Damu was not a leader... but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own identity.

Damu had not formal education... yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence.

Damu was not a guru... but he taught his children to believe in themselves and reclaim human dignity.

Damu was often humbled... yet he maintained, 'Goats are sacrificial offerings, not lions.'

Damu was not an ordinary man, they said...but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system. (Jadhav xii)

The personality traits of Jadhav's father described above indicate that Damu was determined and dedicated person who had clear vision towards looking life and shaping personality.

Damu dares to protest and speak against the government official i.e. Fauzdar in his village who had nothing to do with dalits and their self-respect. Though he was on Yaskar duty, he does not want to compromise with his dignity and Fauzdar abuses him. He refuses to do odd things and declines his orders of carrying out dead body of a woman. When his cousin convinces him that he should not disobey government official, Damu replies with confidence that "What did they care if a Mahar lived or

starved, or even died? All they were concerned about were the high-born. Why should I hide? Am I any less human than they care?" (6). He does not want to hide his caste because he thinks that he is human being and he also has respect as other upper caste people have.

Damu's mind does not allow him to bow down before anybody if he considers superior to him and it indicates his determined mindset of protesting against bad practices. He dares to speak against official and scolds him in his determined words that "I will die but I will not bow down before you. Come on, beat me all you can and kill me. Let the world know that a helpless Mahar was killed doing his duty. See the entire village is witnessing your atrocities" (9). He speaks about the human rights of dalits that they can be protected at the work places or by the officials. He dares to scold him that he cannot tolerate his atrocities though he is upper caste and government official. He asserts that, "We must have self-respect. We must have dignity as human beings. How can I take to begging from door to door? Baluta is our right, they proudly claim! My foot! Have you seen how they throw the food? I don't want rights as a dog. I want my human rights". (Jadhav 19) His words exhibit his strong mindset that he does not want to live like animals but he wants his human rights.

Damu protests against the traditions that have been followed by dalits for generations. Breaking down traditions of works was a crime in the lives of dalits and there was no permission to disobey upper caste people in the villages. Damu's cousin and relatives insist him to do anything which has been assigned to them by traditions but he does not want to follow traditions of doing yeskar duties. He says, "What kind of a tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cats and dogs?... I spit on these inhuman traditions. I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging. What are all of you going to do? Kill me?" (10). It clearly indicates his anger against the traditions that he wants to deny everything whichever is inhuman. He denounces the traditions those have brought heinous and shameful life worse than animals.

He observes the general practices in the villages that dalits do not have permission to enter in to temples because it was a rumour that deities can be defiled by their presence in the temples. Dr. Ambedkar had initiated a movement of temple entry to dalits but many other villagers opposed it. He rejects this mindset of the villagers and strongly asserts that "We will participate in this movement. Why should Mahars be prevented from entering the temple? He questioned and then added, Not that I believe in idol worship, or in God for that matter. However, we are no less humans, and no one can prevent us from going where others are allowed. It is a question of our rights as human beings and we are going to fight for it." (123) He strongly considers that dalits are human beings and they can fight for their rights of living respectful life.

Damu becomes rebellious and aggressive while speaking against injustices and raises a question that how long dalits can tolerate atrocities and exploitations in the name of castes. He

compares the freedom struggle with bringing social justice for dalits in the form of eradication or annihilation of caste system. As the freedom fighters took 150 years to get freedom from British rulers, he thinks optimistically that dalits can get their social justice. He thinks that social slavery can be destroyed as political slavery has been destroyed by freedom fighters. But he justifies extreme protest against oppressors. He says, "Haven't we waited for ages for their change of heart? Those oppressed for so long are bound to be caustic in denouncing their oppressor. If political slavery of 150 years can justify extreme protests against the British government, surely Dalits are justified in lashing out". (149)

Damu's protest is also against the religion and religious practices that has taught binary sense of upper and lower, superior and inferior, powerful and powerless. He questions the practices of the Hinduism that practiced untouchability and discrimination which he experienced in his lifetime. He questions upper caste Brahmins who have decided the fate of dalits through religious books. Jadhav writes that Damu raised logical and rational questions that, "What do these people want? They want us to meekly follow Hinduism, a religion that does not allow Hindus to enter temples? Why should we favour the religion that preaches untouchability and discrimination? Who has given the Brahmins class authority to decide our fate? We are the masters of our destiny and we have to reclaim our rightful place in society." (179) He protests against the century long exploitations and strongly asserts that dalits are also destined to shape their identity and they are also masters of their destiny.

Jadhav's mother, Sonu, also dares to protest against the bad practices of the upper caste people. She also raises questions on prohibition of entry of dalits in to temples. She thinks that dalits are also human beings but they have not right to enter in to temples as other caste people have. She contemplates over the practices that how can be a god polluted by the touches of dalits. She says, "How long do we take things lying down?... We are not allowed to enter their temples. Their gods are polluted, they say. We cannot drink from their wells. We are not allowed to worship Ganpati" (120). She accepts the paths of life or ways of behaving of her husband who dared to protest against anything that harmed their self-respect.

Sonu has been influenced by the personality of Damu who taught her to maintain the dignity whatever the conditions they are facing. He has ignited her mind that she always thought that any kind of injustice or exploitation cannot be tolerated anyhow. Everyone must fight for dignity and identity with respect. She reminds that "Over the years, he taught me to think and question. He encouraged me to debate and argue with him for the sake of arguing, and because it amused him to see me defy him" (176). She gives credit to her rebellious husband who always protested against the evil social practices despite his socio-economic conditions.

Jadhav and his parents have the influences of Dr. Ambedkar's personality. They have learnt from the speeches and writing of Dr. Ambedkar. He taught them and their generations to fight for the right and self-respect. Damu himself had attended public

meeting of Dr. Ambedkar and had inspired to fight for others and denouncing any bad practice of society that considered dalits as meaningless entity and he motivated his children to follow Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy. Jadhav always thinks that everything is the matter of mind if anybody discriminates him. He says, "If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their problem, not mine. I certainly don't need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices....Dignity, after all, rests in mind and heart...and soul. I have to reclaim it not from outside, but from within". (214)

Jadhav and his brothers were inspired by their father's rebellious and aggressive personality who always thought logically and rationally. He inculcated life values of looking at anybody. They inculcated humanistic mindset and philosophy that focused on human rights. They were inspired by their father's endeavours to establish identity with self-respect. They protested against any absurd and negative happenings in their lives. They never gave up and fought against any adversity. Education and study became their motto and they walked on the paths of Dr. Ambedkar and built a sense of protest against submissiveness, exploitation and injustices.

CONCLUSION:

Jadhav's autobiography has the life sketches of parents and brothers. His parents have become a lighthouse for Jadhav and his brothers because they have struggled hard and protested against the sources and responsible factors which kept them socio-economically weaker and subjugated. His autobiography explores the protest against exploitative and discriminative mentality of the so called upper caste society. It also speaks against religion, customs and socio-religious practices that denounced human rights. Jadhav's parents protest against casteist society through their determinations of fighting with logical mindset and he himself and his brothers protested through their determined study and strong longing for education.

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