

**A Study of Hindu Hegemony, Spiritualism and Dalits in  
Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*  
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### **Abstract**

Conservative religions and the spurious religious books trap Dalits in the Varna system. The religious exclusion and marginal space lead Dalits to explore alternative identities. The untouchables in India were always in search of new religions at various historical junctures as there was no scope for growth and emancipation in Hindu society. Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India, Islam in the medieval period and Christianity in the modern era attracted Dalits. Dr BR Ambedkar's liberation movement turned Dalits to Buddhism for their emancipation. This paper is an attempt to present the struggle of Dalits who have been protesting against the Varna system for their natural rights.

**Key words:** Caste, Hegemony, Atrocities, Rights, Identity, Secular, Humanity

### **Introduction**

Narendra Jadhav, a renowned Marathi writer projects Dalit life and struggle in his works. In *Outcaste: A Memoir*, he puts forth the challenges before the Dalit liberation movement and highlights the need to change the present conditions to empower Dalits in India. His protagonists thus fight the Varna system and embrace Buddhism to instil the basic human values freedom, fraternity, equality and social justice which were uprooted by the fundamentalists for centuries.

### **Suppression of Dalits and their Conversion**

It is a universal truth that the Varna system still exists in India and it is difficult to change the mindset of the traditionalists and fanatics as it has been sown and perpetuated in the barren minds of the people. As a result of this, the followers of Manu have succeeded in keeping their hold over the minds of people through Gods and scriptures to maintain hegemony and their place and position in society. Though, all the people are equal before law in India as per the Indian Constitution, the caste system has been deeply rooted in people and therefore, they do not want the social change and oppose any such change in practical. Suppression of Dalits and the denial of their natural rights in the Varna system turn Dalits to explore the alternative religious identities, so that they can live freely as human beings and not as lesser human beings.

By laws of the Indian Constitution, any person can profess and practice any religion he or she selects of likes to follow in India. The right to life and the space to growth which was denied to them in Hindu religion, they exercise in Buddhism. But the questions which remain unanswered are- why the conversion was required in past? Why is it required today and why it will be required in future? Why do people convert to other religions? Do people blindly convert to other religions? What is Parent Religion? Does one know the history of his or her parent Religion? Why does a Hindu Dalit call Hinduism as his or her parent religion? And the last, do the historically oppressed understand how they have been quarantined in the Varna system? Moreover, why does he or she want to remain in the Varna system? If any studious person goes through the religious history of the nation, he shall find the people converting themselves to other religions. In Muslim Regime, the people feared the rule and embraced Muslim Religion while some other wanted an escape from the tortures of the

exclusion enforced upon them. In British rule, thousands of the people coming from the suppressed castes embraced Christianity for their emancipation. Did these conversions really bring change in their life? Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people have been embracing Buddhism, the religion that attracted those most. Did the conversion in Muslim, Christian, and the Buddhism make any difference to the lives of the people who were slaves in the Varna system? The answer is, when the people are deprived of their natural rights, they protest against the orthodoxy and fanaticism and turn to the alternative religions. Are there really ideal conditions for growth and rational ideas?

In Muslim and Christian religions, there is the idea of salvation i.e. *moksha* which is attained through the mediator who is no other than the *Preshit* or God. Muslim and Christian religions project the idea of heavenly world and salvation from the pains of rebirth. In Hindu religion, salvation can be sought through one's *karma* in the caste, he or she is born into. How does one should obtain this salvation in Hinduism? The answer to this question is, 'accepts the lost in the caste system and carry the work allotted by the Varna system, is a way to salvation. Buddhism does not claim any salvation through the mediator or *preshit* and does not create the imaginative heavenly world with the idea of salvation of deliverance. Buddhism has its base in reason which is merely the other name for science. Still the spiritual mysticism in Hinduism keeps its firm grip or hold over the mental psyche of the people and they are not ready to lose the firm faith or belief that they had in its spirituality. In "The Buddha and His Dhamma", Dr. Ambedkar explores Hindu spiritualism and Mysticism as:

1. Belief in the infallibility of the Vedas;
2. Belief in Moksha or Salvation of the soul, i.e., its ceasing to be born again;
3. Belief in the efficacy of rites, ceremonies and sacrifices as means of obtaining moksha;
4. Belief in Chaturvarna as the ideal for social organization;
5. Belief in Iswara as the creator of and in Brahmana as the principle underlying the universe.
6. Belief in Atmana, or the soul.
7. Belief in Karma, i.e., the determination of man's position in present life by deeds done by him in his past life." (103)

Belief in all the above eight is Hindu Spiritualism and Mysticism which is above science. Therefore, it is the trained mindset of the fundamentalists opposes science in the name of God and the Holy Scriptures. In other way, they have been trying to project the same as science which one can term 'pseudo-science'.

### **Conversion to Buddhism in Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir, a Way to Protest and Claim Natural Rights*:**

In *Outcaste: A Memoir*, Damu, the protagonist is very much influenced by the ideology of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and hence he converts himself and his wife to Buddhism and registers his protest against the Varna system. But while he adopts this change, he does nowhere think if his wife is ready for this conversion. His wife, Sonu is not ready for this conversion but he does so without taking her consent. She resists the move and questions the change of the religion. D. Murli Manohar in his paper, "Who is 'Brahman', not Brahmana/Brahmin? A Personal Narrative of Mala Dasari" states, "She argues that how can she give up her Gods and worship new Gods.'. He further questions: Is change of religion like change of clothes we wear? It means in D. Manohar Murali's words: Damu blindly converts himself and makes his wife to convert. Thus, Murali's mysticism is in line with Gandhi's mysticism. According

to D. Murli, Sonu's conversion to Buddhism is blind act as she, he thinks, is forced to do so. However, the fact is something different that D. Murli is ignorant about or trying to overlook it. In fact, Damu is inspired by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's liberation movement which demands for freedom, fraternity, equality and social justice in society. He is aware of his suppression and oppression and hence decides to embrace Buddhism to find space for growth and emancipation. On the other hand, Sonu is unaware of her exploitation as a Dalit and again a woman. It is this ignorance which turns her to resist her husband and his decision to embrace Buddhism." Her words, "I would never stop worshipping my Hindu Gods" prove the fact that she has been enslaved in Hindu society and therefore not ready to accept Buddhist principles wholly. (Jadhav, 192) Here Sonu's resistance to conversion is just an argument between the husband and wife; it is an attempt to prove her individuality that she too is a human being and hence she cannot be forced to accept the conversion. She asserts her individuality and denies acting puppet or agent to it. Therefore, a researcher must examine her argument with her husband from the feminist point of view as well and not from the spectacle of an upper caste historian taking undue advantage of the ignorance of women like Sonu. Here the argument is a strong attempt on her side to assert the point she is raising that she too is a human being and is equal to husband and therefore, cannot be forced. So, D. Murli's statement; Damu's and his wife's conversion to Buddhism is blindly done act proves to be wrong.

Damu's wife's act of continuing worship Hindu Gods at the same time embracing Buddhism seems to be her complete ignorance. Therefore, it is true that the Dalits still follow D. Murli's parent religion which is full of mysticism. Such class of Dalits still exists in India and it is a great challenge before all the Ambedkarite movements, as they have to tackle with the trained psyche of the Hindu Dalits, shaped by Hindu Spiritualism, which is nothing but the medium to make Dalits slaves in the Varna system. Thus, Damu's protest against it is a way to free oneself from Manu's laws which deny natural rights to Dalits.

### **What is a Parent Religion? A Counter Argument to D. Murli's Staunch on Buddhism as Outside Religion:**

In the article, "Who is 'Brahman', not Brahmana /Brahmin?" D Murli writes: "By reading all these (things on conversion) and listening to speeches on Dalits converting into Buddhism following by Ambedkar's logic, I was put in a conflict. However, those conflicts and storms vanished with my strong spirituality in Hinduism." (5) Thus, he concludes that the "conversion is not a solution to Dalits." He stresses, "In fact, it makes them outsiders whether to go to Christianity or Buddhism or Islam or Sikhism. Why should the Dalits move from their parent religion to outside religion? (8) Here, D Murli's knowledge about Buddhism is vague. Buddhism does deny the myth or idea of God, nor does it make any claim of Moksha or salvation through the mediator, it follows the Reason i.e. the scientific truth. Secondly, his question: "Is change of Religion like the change of clothes we wear?" makes it clear that the Clothes and religion are two entirely different things. D Murli seems to be ignoring the very fact that the clothes, he is talking about even were denied to the untouchables and they had to live in utter poverty and the world of ignorance. Untouchability even followed to the shop when they were going to buy the new clothes.

Maybe, the stalwart like D Murli is intentionally overlooking the facts and propagating the Varna system and its mysticism which denies natural rights to Dalits in this country. Thirdly, his conclusion, 'Conversion is not a solution for the dalits' is a message for the Dalits, if he might have stated Conversion is not a solution for him, then it was quite alright but he is not talking about an individual here but giving the message to Dalits. D Murli Manohar regards Hindu religion, as the "Parent religion" and he puts Buddhism in the list of "outside religion". (8) It seems here that his knowledge of religions is vague or he does not

seem to acknowledge the fact that Buddha founded Buddhism in India and emancipated all the suppressed and oppressed people who were denied equal rights. It is Murli's faith in Hindu Spiritualism and Mysticism thus, forces him to change the parent religion and call it outside. Even the Ambedkar logic, he is talking about is not the simple logic, but the ocean of knowledge, the light of sun that erased the darkness of Hindu spirituality in the lives of Untouchables. The poem, "When Darkness Encountered the Sun" cited by Rangrao Bhongle, in the article, "A Semiotic Study of Dalit Poetry in Marathi" puts forth Namdev Dhasal's realistic view of Dalit life in the Varna system:

When Darkness encountered the sun  
Words thundered  
How long shall we remain trapped  
Suffocating in the prison-hole of Hell  
(172)

Here Damu's act of embracing Buddhism is the rejection of Varna system which obliterated the existence of Dalits for centuries. Hence, this acceptance of new life is for growth and emancipation.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, Damu's protest against the Varna system and his resolution to embrace Buddhism is his denial to be a victim and suffer in the prison hole of hell. He rejects Hindu Mysticism and embraces Buddhism to enlighten and empower his life and therefore, he sets an ideal example for the upcoming generations to follow in future. Hindu Spiritualism is the prison hole of Hell that trapped Untouchables and is still trapping them in it. Damu's act of embracing Buddhism makes it clear that he is aware of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his liberation movement that made Dalits to raise their voice reject the Varna system and demand for egalitarian society to turn this planet into a paradise.

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