CHAPTER II

DENIAL OF EDUCATION:

SUBVERTING THE MONOPOLY

This chapter attempts to study how institution of the caste excluded Dalits from education. The focus of the chapter is to examine how Dalits consider education an essential tool to break the chains of caste and social exclusion. The aspect of denial of education and using education as a tool by the Dalits is illustrated through the narratives of select Dalit autobiographies.

I

The Brahmins in India built an oppressive culture through which they operated their ideological hegemony. They constituted different laws which are available only in Sanskrit language. The power structures they made are quite ambiguous. Primarily the Brahmins gave much priority to dismantle the existing culture of the Dalits.

Culture determines the language acquisition of its people because language and culture go hand in hand in terms of identity formulations. To demoralize the Dalits, the Hindus used knowledge as the manipulator. Kancha Ilaiah points out two aspects of knowledge. They are: the oppressor’s knowledge and the knowledge of the oppressed. Ilaiah considers Brahma’s knowledge is the oppressor’s knowledge:
The Dalitbahujans have their own knowledge, reflected in several of the ideas of the Charvakas (Dalitbahujan materialists) of the ancient period. The ancient Brahmins hegemonized their knowledge and marginalized the knowledge of the Dalitbahujan Charvakas, using the image of Brahma. Brahma, thus represented the Brahmin patriarchs, and Saraswathi represented the Brahmin women who had been turned into sexual objects.¹

The Dalits were alienated from the knowledge system of the Brahmins. This was accomplished through Sanskrit. The Brahmins dubbed the native languages and culture as uncivilized and unacceptable. The Brahmins succeeded in establishing their power over education system in India. They successfully made education synonymous with Sanskrit language and its slokas. The Brahmins succeeded in influencing the other communities and the people through religious practices. Those who turned against their knowledge monopoly were treated as untouchables.

The Brahmins maintain their monopoly over knowledge taking the support of the rest of the communities like Kshtriyas, Vyshyas and Sudhras. This kind of exclusion is found in every aspect of the Dalit lives. The Dalits’ entry into knowledge centres is completely prohibited. Uma Chakrvarthy made a significant study on how
knowledge is monopolised by the Brahmins: “The monopoly over knowledge in the hands of the Brahmanas and the concomitant barring of knowledge to the lowest castes...Sudras and ‘untouchables’ were to be severely punished for violating the ban according to the brahmanical texts. Women too were barred from knowledge, especially scared knowledge.”(17)² The Brahmins chose education as an important area to put the Dalits under their control. Kancha Ilaiah illustrates that though the Swaraj allowed educational opportunities to Dalits, the knowledge available in the schools and colleges which are completely ruled by non-Dalits is nowhere related to Dalit culture:

Childhood formations are important for a person-female or male-to become a full human being. But our childhoods were mutilated by constant abuse and by silence, and by a stunning silence at that. There was the conspiracy to suppress the formation of our consciousness...Even after schools were opened to us because of independence or swaraj, a word which even today I fail to understand, the school teacher was against us, the textbook language was against us. Our homes have one culture and the schools have another culture...The gap between the two
was enormous. There was no way in which one resembled the other. In fact these two cultures were poles apart. (14)³

Caste is the major factor in education.

Uma Chakravarthty argues that, “The monopoly of the upper castes’ ‘sacred knowledge’, ‘book knowledge’, ‘intellectual inquiries’ like astronomy, were superior.”⁴ The lower castes, who labored, developed and preserved the knowledge of agriculture, of plants, animals, domestic livestock, weather, soil, pests, tools used in goldsmith, fishing and hunting are not considered as skilled professionals. Even the crafts skill, one of the primitive skills of the Dalits which is also implied knowledge of the materials used like metals, wood, clay bamboo, reed and bricks is also considered as an outsider’s profession.

The denial of knowledge has been a crucial part of the ideology of the caste system and it was one of the most elementary formulations of inequality in traditional India. It is because of the traditional exclusion from learning that Dalit intellectuals choose education as a weapon to be used in the resistance to Brahmanism.⁵ The Dalit intellectuals understand the politics of the non-Dalit pedagogy constructed by the Brahmins by excluding the Dalits from educational opportunities. The punishment of the Dalit heroes by the
Brahmins in the so called Indian Epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* made the Dalits understand the Brahminical ploy. Cutting-off the sudhra (untouchable) Sambuka’s head, demanding for Ekalavy’s thumb as gurudakshina to Dhronacharya, the cunning Brahmin teacher of archery and Karna’s ill-fate are the true examples of the denial of knowledge to the non-Brahmins, especially to the untouchables. Uma Chakravarthy studies the cunning nature of the Brahmins and kin-brahmana who incidentally excluded the untouchables from learning knowledge and mastering the archery skills:

Over the centuries the monopoly over knowledge that brahmana men had was not merely evident in the area of knowledge...At an early stage, the growing monopolization of knowledge by the brahmanas may have met with some resistance...Ultimately the tension between the kshatriyas and the brahmanas was resolved to accommodate them in separate spheres: brahmana men had a monopoly over ritual knowledge and kshatriya men over the means of arms. Thus the kin-brahmana duo, or the priest dominant caste duo, came into operation...In any case the occasional examples of those who did not conform to the codes and sought to gain knowledge or skills from which they had
been barred such as Shambuka, who practiced austerities normally reserved for brahmanas, or Ekalavya, who required skills in archery, a privilege of kshatriyas who alone had the right to bear arms, or in other words, to wield the instruments of coercion, met with severe punishment. Women too were barred from knowledge under threat of violence as the story of Gargi illustrates.  

Uma Chakrvarthy dealt with how the Brahmins and Kshatriyas went hand in hand to get control over the untouchables. She also mentioned how women are excluded from learning knowledge. She mentions that Gargi, a women philosopher who questioned the Brahmin monopoly over knowledge is severely criticized and excluded in the name of woman’s entry into public places for debating. This needs to be understood as uncivic and anti-social.

Nevertheless, the British opened the education for all sections during the late nineteenth century. Jyotirao Phule recognized the importance of education and demanded the access of it to all sections. Phule stressed the importance of women education and started a separate school for women. But the historians incidentally ignore the great contribution of Mahatma Phule and his wife Savithri Bai Phule.
All the sections of the Indian society recognized the importance of education. The upper castes fought against the domination of Brahmins in colonial employment and educational institutions. Under the banner of non-brahmin movement, the upper castes from the princely states got benefited. For instance, the upper castes such as Kammas, Velama and Reddies started their caste associations such as *Kamma Mahajana Sabha* and *Reddy Mahajana Sabha* and *Velama Mahajana Sabha* in order to get their share in educational and beauracratic institutions. The missionaries opened schools in Dalit colonies during the late nineteen century and early twentieth century for various political interests. Moreover, colonial modernity produced a space for Dalits to occupy small positions in the administration, military and various industries. This process witnessed widespread awakening of political consciousness among the lower castes and communities. Their egalitarian aspirations also produced several streams of movement against the strangehold of hierarchy, slavery and feudal exploitation. These struggles threw up a determined lot of leaders who were unrelenting critics of caste and its consequences. These anti-caste campaigners confronted the hypocritical nationalist leadership for keeping pro-equality social
movements out of the ‘national agenda’. Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Ambedkar in Maharashtra; Iyothee Thass and Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker in Tamil Nadu; Narayana Guru, Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan, Ayyankali and K. Ayyappan in Kerala; Bhagyareddy Varma in Andhra; Mangoo Ram and Chhotu Ram in Punjab; Acchutananda and Ram Charan in Utter Pradesh; Hari Chanda Thakur, Guru Chanda and Jogendranath Mandal in Bengal; Sonadhar Senapathy in Assam; and many lesser-known social crusaders all mocked the patriotic pretensions of indigenous elites, and attacked the system of exploitation at every level. The great contribution of the social reformers in educating Dalits is discussed in Chapter V, “Construction of Dalit Identity.” They rejected the high caste culture and its tradition and tried to rebuild an egalitarian society.

Chinnaiah Jangam acknowledges, “Untouchables and other oppressed sections of Indian society gained access to modern institutions and ideas such as secular education through the initiatives of the government and the work of Christian missionaries. This was an important breakthrough in the history of these communities, since through these institutions they learned the language of rights and the means of mobilization against oppression, inequality and exploitation.”
Many other factors contributed to bring about substantial consciousness among the Dalits inspiring them to participate in the contemporary socio-political movements. At the beginning of the twentieth century, two major developments induced Dalits to develop their own politics. They are: search out their history and assert their identity. The special nature of the British response to the rising Indian nationalism changed the context of Dalit resistance after 1910 and particularly after 1920s. In the Morely-Minto reforms of 1909-10, the Government of India began the process of conceding elected as opposed to merely nominated Indian representation to its Legislative Councils. But the basis of representation continued to be the interests rather than geographical units. Crucially, the British expanded the concept of interest to allow for separate electorates for Muslims. This development had a dual relevance to the untouchables. Firstly, the communal status of untouchables had been brought into direct political contention by the argument of the Muslim League that Hindu numbers were being inflated relative to Muslims through false identification of what they termed the ‘degraded castes’ as Hindus. And secondly, the concession of representation to Muslims established a precedent for political representation of other minorities.⁹
Apart from the awareness generated by the early Dalit leaders, Ambedkar’s involvement in Indian socio-political scenario made a major mark in Dalits’ lives across the country. Ambedkar gave more importance to educate the Dalits. His clarion call ‘educates, organize and agitate’ made an indelible impression in Dalits lives.

The Indian Constitution provides special provisions for the Dalits empowerment. Particularly, the provision of positive discrimination helped a good number Dalits to occupy important positions in Government bodies and also a good number of educated people emerged as poets, writers, intellectuals, politicians and artists. They tried to explore the reasons behind the backwardness of their community. They all have undergone caste discrimination like Ambedkar and they also wanted to document their struggle and suffering. Interestingly, they have chosen Autobiography as a form of reconstructing Dalit history and exposing the inhuman nature of Hindu social system. The following section examines the works of Sharankumar Limbale, Narendra Jadav, Omprakash Valmiki and Baby Kamble to understand how they used the genre of the autobiography for reconstructing the Dalit history and exposing the evil practices of Hinduism against the Dalits.
Sharankumar Limbale is one among the most renowned Dalit writers in India. He was born on 01 June 1956. He speaks and writes in Marati, Hindi and English. Most of his writings are in Marati and translated into English and other languages. Limbale got his B.A. degree in English in 1978, M.A. in Marati in 1990 and Ph.D degree in Marati in 1996 from Shivaji University, Kolhapur. He is a good academician as well as a writer and he occupied so many positions in YCM Open University and now he is the Regional Director of the Regional centre in Pune of Y C M Open University, Nashik. He is an illustrious writer his writes mostly on the Dalit struggle and identity. He wrote forty books. He is known for poetry, short stories, including his autobiography *The Outcaste* (2004). His autobiography is written in Marati language and translated into Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi, Malayalam languages. *The Outcaste* caught the attention of the readers on its English version by Santhosh Bhoomkar. Limbale got many awards and won the wider acclaim from the public for his literary talents. He is also known for the critical work, *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Studies* (2004). He is a member of many academic and cultural organisations and many scholars did research on his writings.

Limbale’s autobiography *The Outcaste* (2003) narrates the complexities of caste system and the most shocking experience
as an illegitimate son whose mother is Mahar by caste and father is Lingayat, an upper caste who does not acknowledge that Limbale was born because of his relation with his mother. In this illegitimate relationship, Limbale’s educational journey is disturbed by the father figure. His autobiography raises several questions such as the role of caste system, teacher, and father figure. He begins his school experience by participating in a picnic programme. Limbale who lives in Mahar colony got excited at the thought of being out of school. He participated in the picnic. He narrates the kind of discrimination that the Mahar boys are subjected to both by the upper caste students and teachers. Limbale writes:

The Wani and Brahmin boys played kabbadi. Being marked as Mahars we couldn’t join them. So Mallya, Umbyra, Parshya, all from my caste, began to play touch-and-go. We played one kind of game while the high-caste village boys played another. The two games were played separately like two separate whirlwinds. Play over, we settled down to eat. Boys and girls from the high castes like Wani, Brahmin, Marwari, Muslim, Maratha, Teli, fishermen, goldsmiths and all the teachers, about hundred or so sat in a circle under a banyan tree. We, the Mahar
boys and girls, were asked to sit under another tree. The high-caste ones said a prayer before eating, which didn’t make any sense to us. (Limbale, 2)¹⁰

The teachers in the classroom never took any measures to create an amicable atmosphere with fellow student’s community. They did not disturb the statuquo of caste practice in the premises of school. The girls sat close to the teachers. They were all chatting and the Dalit students both girls and boys sat like owls watching them. The teacher asked the high-caste boys and girls to collect the leftovers on a piece of paper and give it to Dalit students. Limbale and Parshya carried the bundle of leftover food on the way back. The high-caste boys and girls were laughing and joking, but Limbale’s whole attention was on the bundle. Limbale says, “Mallya carried a bundle of bhakari on his head and we, the Mahar boys, followed him excitedly like hungry vultures. At last we gathered in Girmallya’s farm and opened the bundle. It contained crumbs of different kinds of food and their spicy smell filled the air. We squatted in a circle and stuffed ourselves greedily. We had never tasted food like that before. We were all really gluttonous. Our stomachs were as greedy as a beggar’s sack.”(3) He further narrates the pathetic conditions of his family and community life. He states,
“When I got home, I told my mother all this. Like the victim of a famine she said, ‘Why didn’t you get at least a small portion of it for me?’”(3)

Dalit students get their education under psychological disturbances. Caste discrimination is an everyday experience for them in their life. School and educational system is no exception to this kind of discrimination. For instance, when Limbale went to school the following day, the teacher had asked the boys and girls to write an essay on the picnic. The students of the seventh form were busy in writing the essay. The teacher had asked the Mahar boys of third class also to write. Both the classes were run in the same room. While the senior boys and girls wrote swiftly, Limbale sat worrying. When the teacher noticed him, apparently doing nothing, he grew annoyed and shouted, “You, son of a bitch, come on, start writing! You like eating an ox, don’t you?”(7) Limbale picked up his slate and pencil, spat on the slate, smeared it and wiped his slate with his shirt which was already dirty having been used like this so many times before. Limbale did not know how and what to write. He kept thinking of how the Mahar boys and girls had squatted in a circle under a tree in the forest, eating. He remembered the hands of high-caste boys and girls offering them their leftovers, the
withered tree in whose shade they sat, the bundle of leftovers, the question his mother had asked, and the teacher calling him a son of a bitch and a beef-eater.

The major problem with the teachers is that they arrange different rows for different community. It seems that the teachers never initiated to mix different caste background students into one row. Limbale reminds us, “Our school where the pupils came from high castes like Wani and Brahmin was run in the temple of Ithoba. The girls sat in a separate section. Further down the temple hall sat boys and girls from the cobbler community and then at the entrance sat we, the Mahar boys and girls. Arjya, a Mang, never sat with us. On Saturdays the teacher asked us to clear the floor and walls with cow dung paste.”(4) Apart from dividing the students on the caste lines, the teachers make use of Dalit students for all menial works. The teacher had a particular admiration for Limbale because he was an expert in gathering dung and smearing it evenly. At home he would not do even the smallest chore, but in the school on Saturdays he was made to do this duty that was allotted to him. Limbale knows that a man from his community had to carry out such duties in the village for the high-caste people.
Limbale also states that whenever the school was held in the Marwari’s mansion during the rainy days, the Mahar boys had to sit on the floor whereas the other boys sat on a raised platform which was located outside the mansion. In the drawing room, adjoining the entrance door, the teacher taught mathematics. Mahars sat amidst the footwear flung all around them and not allowed into the core part of the class room. Limbale writes, “Babali’s chappals were beautiful. I never touched my teacher’s chappals as I was afraid of tainting their sanctity. To me his chappals were like Rama’s sandals. I was used to filthy children in the Maharwada. We hardly knew what a village actually meant as we played and grew up only in the Maharwada. Heaps of garbage, tin sheds, dogs, and pigs were our only companions. We spent most of our time on Jaganath Patil’s garbage, playing, where we found bits of waste paper and sandals.”

Limbale was excited at seeing his school in his first visit. He narrates, “When I first saw our school, it was crammed with children. For the first time I saw a chair, a blackboard, a cane, and a teacher. Most of all I admired my teacher’s umbrella. My schooling started in the real sense from the third form onward.” It seems that Dalit students could not see any kind
of affection or faith in teachers. Therefore they do not hold much respect for the teachers like mainstream students.

Dalit students make casual remarks on teachers also. Limbale writes, “We saw him. We used to shout, Teacher, ‘Teacher how big you are? The boys have run away so hold your cock.’ saying which we ran away.”(6) The more Limbale grew, the more he realized that caste discrimination was everywhere. The teacher decided to enroll his name in the register. When the teacher was convinced that Limbale was serious about his schooling, he asked Limbale his father’s name. Limbale says that “I did not know my father’s name. Strange that I too could have a father!”(45) Limbale started attending school regularly. The teacher, Bhosale by name, would sarcastically call him the Patil of Baslegaon knowing that Limbale was an off-spring of the Patil of Baslegaon. Limbale felt good as well as bad to be called Patil.

The name of Hanmantha Limbale, the Patil of Baslegaon, was added to Limbale’s name in the school record. When Hanmantha, who is an illegitimate father of Limbale, came to know this, he arrived with four or five rowdies to school. His relatives too joined him and they all went to the headmaster. Hanmantha tried to bribe the headmaster by offering him a
hundred rupees. In those days the salary of a teacher was only seventy rupees a month. Next he threatened the headmaster at gun point. But Bhosale, the headmaster, was an upright man. He did not yield either to bribery or to threats. The teacher said boldly, “The mother of this boy will say who the father is, and I will register only that name in the record.”(45) There was a quarrel between the teacher and Hanmantha. Hanmantha applied all his tricks desperately to avoid his name as the father of Limbale and even pleaded the teacher. Finally he had gone away unsuccessful. Hanmantha deliberately denies that he is the father of Limbale. Limbale felt that his studies would suffer because of the identity crisis.

Limbale got an opportunity to escape from the stigma of being an illegitimate son. As the school in his village had classes only up to the seventh form, Limbale had to go to a high school in the neighboring village, Chungi. Mahar students were supposed to apply for a freeship [scholarship] when they reached high school studies. To avail the scholarship, Limbale put an application form which was to be signed by their parents and the village Sarpanch. Limbale narrates:

All this while whenever it was required, I used to put my own thumb impression in place of my parent’s signature.
Getting the signature of the Sarpanch was always a problem. Also, all this while, I had named my mother as my guardian because Masamai was not married to Hanmantha, and I couldn’t very well enter his name, though I was born of their relationship...This is almost a tradition—a Patil, always a big landowner, has Dalit woman as his whore.(58)

Limbale never wanted Hanmantha Limbale’s name as his guardian in the official record. Because Hanmantha had deserted Masamai for the last eight or ten years. Limbale knew that Masamai remained a keep of another Patil. He worries for the sort of life she had been living, mortgaging herself to one owner after another and being used as a commodity. Limbale feels that her life has been nothing but the tyranny of sex. When the sarpanch refused to sign on the application form of Limbale, he felt humiliated. He expresses, “I too was a human being. What else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither a father’s name, nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all.”(59) The Sarpanch finally signed on Limbale’s freeship application because of Bhosale guruji, the school teacher and he was annoyed at what had happened.
The following day while submitting his application form, the class teacher asked Limbale, “Don’t you have a father?” And Limbale replied, ‘He is dead.’ The teacher asked next, ‘What about your mother?’ Limbale replied, 'She too is dead.’

Listening to Limbale’s answer, the boys from his village, who knew it wasn’t true, stared at him like vultures. He writes, “The classroom fell dead silent like the calm after a big storm. But I was swinging like a snapped kite in the storm that went on tossing in my mind.”(60) This incident depicts Limbale’s helpless condition that made him adamant of the caste system that prevails only in India.

Limbale completed his high school education at Chungi and Chapalgaon. He traveled daily to Chungi from his village but he was sent to a boarding school at Chapalgaon because he had often played truant from the school at Chungi. Skipping school was not possible at Chapalgaon. He was no longer pampered as he had been at home. He had to stay with other boys from different places.

When he shifted to the boarding school at Chapalgaon all those impressions faded slowly. There were several Dalit boys around him all the time. He used to practice Hindu rituals at
home but after joining in Chapalgaon boarding school, Buddhism began to cast its spell on him. There was a scope for him to explore his individual talent. He views, “I couldn’t do anything much while at Chapalgaon except study. While my love for maths and drawing ended, my English improved. I was one of the intelligent boys in my class and moved with the brighter students most of the time.”(81) He states that he got through the final school examination with a first class and stood second in his class. Mallya, Shirole, and Limbale had passed with merit and were greatly admired. Limbale stands out as one of the most brilliant students among the students of the school.

As he had completed his high school studies, he had to earn some money for college days. In the process of borrowing money from different persons, he had experienced humiliation and insults. Santamai, Limbale’s grandmother with all her curiosity to see Limbale must be educated begged every one for help but in vain. For an incident, he writes:

Santamai and I went to a moneylender. He was drunk. Santamai and I stood at some distance from him. Santamai’s blouse was torn exposing her breast. The moneylender kept staring at the peeping breast, but he refused to lend us the money. His look spread like poison
in my heart. I wished that the blouse of this moneylender’s mother or sister was torn so that I could stare at their breasts. I burned within. Our poverty was detestable. I wanted to rebel against such humiliation.

(82)

He went to Sholapur for his college education and got admission in Dayanand College. After the school in his village, he felt free in new environment. This new atmosphere was encouraging and it made him enthusiastic. He felt that the urban atmosphere was free from caste. But his enthusiasm remained short-lived. There was a clerk in Dayanand College by name Nimbale. He was there at the counter at the time of Limbale’s admission. Entering Limbale’s name in the college records, the clerk asked for Limbale’s caste and religion. Limbale replied that he was a Hindu Mahar. The clerk asked in surprise if there was Limbale among the Mahar as well. Because, the clerk suspected that Limbale was a Patil’s name and how it would be of Sharankumar Limbale, a Mahar boy. To avoid further discussion over his caste, Limbale said yes and walked away. Limbale writes, “I was afraid of my caste because I couldn’t claim my father’s caste and religion. In a sense I was not a Mahar, because high-caste blood ran in my body. Could I
drain this blood out of my body? My own body nauseated me. The agony I lived through is my own as much as that of my village. The life of my village was mine. I was wounded by this landlord’s mansion.”(82) While studying in college, he was growing amidst a conflagration. The roots of the Dalit Panther’s Movement were settling more firmly. Dalits were awakening under a new consciousness which became more pervasive day by day.

Friendship takes place along caste lines. Mallya, Dupargude, Dolare, and Limbale were room-mates. They were all Dalit who entered the college together with seventy generations of utter poverty behind them. Mallya had a maternal uncle, Nivruti, who worked in the post office and he gave Mallya his old clothes. Mallya gave Limbale a pair of trousers and a shirt from that lot. They had these clothes altered by a street tailor. After alteration, the clothes had two creases, one the original, the other which appeared after the clothes were altered. Both the creases were visible and made them look rather odd. But they had to use those clothes as they covered their nakedness at least.

All the boys in Limbale’s hostel were Dalits. It was more or less like a camp. Dalit students were awed by their great
struggle. Limbale stopped saying ‘namaskar’ and started saying ‘Jai Bhim’ instead. He substituted ‘Babasaheb’ for Ambedkar since it sounded less formal and more respectful. His youth had assumed a new meaning and significance. The blood flowed like hot lava through his body.

Limbale’s *The Outcaste* (2003) stands as an example for picturing how Limbale and other Dalit students were denied from educational opportunities and the humiliation they went under throughout their career. It also represents how the philosophy of Phule and Ambedkar helped them to design their characters and how Dalit Panther’s Movement filled their minds with true Dalit spirit.

III

Narendra Jadhav, currently serving as a Member, Planning Commission, is known for his personal narrative *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003) in which he narrates the story of his family and of himself by invoking his identity as a Dalit. The main character, Damu is an illiterate, ordinary Dalit but refuses to be defined by his low caste identity and sub-human traditions. He asserts his human dignity and runs away to Mumbai for freedom. He defines himself as a Dalit through his involvement in the Dalit movement led by Ambedkar. He converts to Buddhism. Similarly, Jadhav locates himself in a global
space and calls himself a Dalit. This identity can be called a Cosmopolitan Dalit identity.

Damu whom his family members called Dada once asked Jadav not to change his opinions for the sake of others. Damu’s education was the one he received from life. He told Jadav that one should select one’s path on interest but not by force: “All I have to say to you is this...Reach the top in whatever you do. You want to be a thief? No problem, but then, be so good at it that the world will salute at you and say, Oh, what a thief! What a crafty mind!”

Damu’s philosophy found a permanent place in Jadav’s mind and remained a driving force behind his ambition. Damu also explained about the relevance of getting an academic degree. To him, it was like getting a driving license. He said to his son, “You get a license, and you keep on driving ...you don’t just sit on it!”

Damu’s determination to see his children educated was due to the discrimination he and his family and community underwent in Ozar, his village and Juna Wadala in Mumbai. The influence of Ambedkar who encountered the holy scripts through his western education made Damu educate his children, irrespective of all kinds of odds they experienced. Being a strong follower of Dr. Ambedkar, Damu and his wife Sonu decided to give education to their children. It
was because of the words of Dr. Ambedkar to Damu when he attended meeting:

After the speech was over, Dada clutched my brothers’ shoulders and shoved them past everyone towards Dr. Ambedkar. They were terrified...but Dr. Ambedkar patted my brothers on the back, and asked my father, ‘Are these your sons, Damu? Send them to school...Give them a good education ...they will surely rise to make big names.’ (210)

Inspired by Ambedkar, Damu sent Janu, his eldest son to Chhabildas School in Dadar and the rest of the children were admitted to the local Port Trust School in Wadala, Mumbai. Jadav was out of experience in terms of caste when he was a school going boy as most of the teachers in Port Trust school were Dalits. He writes, “The teachers knew all children and their parents personally. There were many dangerous habits to pick up in the railway depot: alcohol, gambling, and burglaries. But our teachers watched us carefully and taught us the importance of education even in those adverse circumstances.” (218)

After having lower education at Port Trust School in Wadala, Jadav joined a school in Dadar, where Jadav experienced caste discrimination:
We had to get up early in orders to walk the 2-mile distance school in Dadar...Other Wadala children who also went to Chhabildas maintained a distance from us on the pretext that we mixed with children of bootleggers and poor people. Our low caste was probably the main factor in keeping us apart. During the Ganpathi festival, when we went to their house, we would be given Prasad on our outstretched palms outside the door. They were careful not to touch us. Of course, some families made an exception to this practice and welcomed us to stay for the puja. (230-31)

Jadav discusses the on denial of Dalits from knowledge. Jadav dealt with the alienated experience Janu, Jadav’s brother had at Elphinstone College, Mumbai where Dr. Ambedkar himself had studied. Jadav writes:

Janu was not happy at Elphinstone. He felt ignored and unaccepted by other students, mostly from high caste, well-to-do families. So he took admission in the Siddharth College started by Dr. Ambedkar, and was granted a government Scholarship. (231)

Jadav writes how the college atmosphere brought change in the attitude of his brother. Janu who felt alienated and ignored, was then able to take active role in debates and other co-curricular activities.
Jadav writes, “Siddharth College gave Janu a new direction. He participated in debates and was a member of the mock parliament. The topic of all these writings and speeches was always Babasaheb and his Dalit movement.” (231)

Though Janu was able to manage to come out of caste discrimination, that lead to the denial of education, the financial situation of his family stopped him to take part in extra-curricular activities. Being the eldest son, Janu did not stop himself to earn something to support his family. Janu joined morning College started by Ambedkar so as to take up part–time job as a clerk in the customs department.

Janu stands as an example of the achievement when he got selected for Indian Administrative service (IAS). Both the father and the son and the entire family recollect the words of Dr. Ambedkar:

Many years ago, Babasaheb had told Dada, looking at Janu, ‘Educate your son well.’ Dada had obeyed Babasaheb’s command and, in the process, Babasaheb’s advice to his Dalit followers, ‘Win the seats of respect and power’ had borne fruit. (233)

Jadav’s *Outcaste* explores the world Jadav and his family lived and struggled in. Outcaste is the success story of a Dalit family who started their life journey from nothingness, and achieved everything. They confess that the philosophy of Ambedkar was the cause of the
success. Janu’s success as an IAS, Dina’s successful career as a boxer and Jadav’s position as a successful economist and administrator are the examples of accomplishment.

IV

Like other Dalit autobiographies, Omprakash Valmiki’s Joothan: A Dalit’s Life (1998) also reflects the self of the Dalit community. He starts his life narrative with a description of his village and the place where his community people live together but aside the upper caste dwelling place. He writes, “All the quarrels of the village would be discussed in the shape of a Round Table Conference at this same spot….The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment of my childhood.” (Valmiki, 1) From such a degraded social poison Valmiki emerges as an enlighten personality through his education. He indicates that he had never felt ashamed of being a low caste person. He is concerned about the continuous persecution of his community by the upper caste Tagas:

We did all sorts of work for the Tagas, including cleaning, agricultural work and general labor. We would often have to work without pay. Nobody dared to refuse this unpaid work for which we got neither money nor grain. Instead,
we got sworn at and abused. They did not call us by our names. If a person were older, then he would be called ‘Oe Chuhre’. If the person were younger or of the same age, then ‘Abey Churhre’ was used. (2)

Valmiki delineates that the practice of untouchability was so rampant that while it was acceptable to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, but not a Chuhra. The Chuhras were not seen as human. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away.

Valmiki illustrates the Post-independent era as the new era which promised equal opportunities and democratic space for Dalits. He says that “the country had become independent eight years ago. Gandhiji’s uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables; the mentality of the ordinary people had not challenged much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody, right near the door. And the letters on the board from there seemed faded.” (2-3)

He writes about the upper caste children’s aggressive mentality:
The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me ‘Chuhre ka’ Sometimes they would beat me without any reason. This was an absurd tormented life that made me introverted and irritable. If I got thirsty in school, then I had to stand near the hand-pump. The boys would beat me in any case, but the teachers also punished me. All sorts of stratagems were tried so that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born, According to these perpetrators; my attempts to get schooling were unwarranted. (3)

Valmiki had only two friends in his school days: Ram Singh and Sukkhan Singh. Ram Singh was a Chamar and Sukkhan Singh was Jhinwar. The three of them studied together, grew up together, experienced the sweet and sour moments of childhood together. All the three of them were very good in their studies but their lower caste background dogged them at every stage.

The general notion is that teachers do not show any partiality and treat all the students equally. But, Valmiki’s experience suggests that the teachers also discriminated him in all walks of life by practicing caste. Valmiki reminds us that “Headmaster Bishamabr Singh had been replaced by Kaliram. Along with him had come another new teacher. After the arrival
of these two, the three of us fell on terrible times. We would be thrashed at the slightest excuse. Ram Singh would escape once in a while, but Sukhman Singh and I got beaten almost daily. I was very weak and skinny those days.” (4) He further narrates his bitter experience with the upper caste teachers:

One day the headmaster Kaliram called me to his room and asked: ‘Abey, what is your name?’... ‘Omprakash,’ I answered... ‘Chuhre ka?’ Headmaster threw his second question at me ‘ji’... All right... See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after your family occupation...Go...get to it.’...Obeying Headmaster’s orders, I cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as I was about to finish, he came to me and said, ‘After you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the playground’...The other children in my class were studying and I was sweeping. Headmaster was sitting in his room and watching me. I was not even allowed to get a drink of water. I swept the whole day. I had never done so much work, being the pampered one among my brothers...‘Abey Chuhre ke, motherfucker, where are you hiding...Your mother...As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged
me out of the class and threw me on the ground...Each pore of my body was submerged in an abyss of anguish...(4-5)

Valmiki writes that his father and mother were his great inspiration and strength. His father happens to see the kind of menial work Valmiki is forced to do by the upper caste teachers within the premise of school which is supposed to generate knowledge. His father stopped abruptly when he saw Valmiki while sweeping the school compound. He asks: ‘Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya, who forces my son to sweep?’...Valmiki has never forgotten the courage and the resilience with which his father confronted the headmaster that day. Valmiki says that “his father had all sorts of weakness, but the decisive turn that he gave my future that day has had a great impact on my personality.” (6) Valmiki used to interrogate the teachers about their love towards the Hindu epics. In return, he was humiliated with caste remarks by the upper caste teachers:

Once in school, Master Saheb was teaching the lesson on Dronacharya. He told us, almost with tears in his eyes, that Dronacharya had fed flour dissolves in water to his famished son, Ashwatthama, in lieu of milk. The whole
The class had responded with great emotion to this story of Dronacharyas’s dire poverty. This episode was penned by Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata to highlight Drona’s poverty. I had the temerity to stand up and ask Master Saheb a question afterwards. So Ashwatthama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who had to drink mar? How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn’t an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?... Master Saheb screamed, Darkest Kliyuga has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back’. The teacher ordered me to stand in the murga or rooster pose... He ordered a boy to get a long teak stick. ‘Chuhre, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya... Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body.’ (23)

Valmiki was humiliated both in his school and college. He realized that the kind of caste discrimination was more rampant at the college and university. He felt that the universities are no exception in terms of practicing caste in the evaluation. Interestingly, Valmiki was exposed to know the importance of Ambedkar’s life during his college days. Ambedkar was an unknown entity to him up to that time. The
college library also did not have a single book on Ambedkar. Valmiki quotes the inspiration of Ambedkar on him and his writings:

Dr. Ambedkar’s life-long struggle had shaken me up. I spent many days and nights in great turmoil. The restlessness inside me had increased. My stone-like silence had suddenly begun to melt. I proceeded to read all of Ambedkar’s books that I found in the library. I expressed my gratitude to Hemlal. He had truly shown me a new path. (72)

Education empowered Valmiki to be part of new artistic skill. He also began to write short stories, one-act plays and to stage them. He did both acting and directing. It was the beginning of his involvement in theatre. Shri Verma Ji was well-known theatre person in Khamaria. He staged several plays under his direction. He became involved in Jabalpur’s literary life. He also began to develop his own views on literature. He was more attracted to social realism than to aestheticist and formalist types of writings. Valmiki keenly observed the caste discrimination at every walk of his life. He feels that the entire value system of the Brahmins is based on lies and deception, “I
had come to a decision. Things should be cleared up. I would face whatever happened.” (96)

The relationship is no exception from caste discriminatory factor. Valmiki explains his love relation with Savita, a Brahmin girl who fell in love with him without knowing his caste. He also loved her truly. But he could not digest when he observes her practicing and supporting the caste discrimination in her encounter with Dalits and Muslims. Caste can become a hurdle to love between Dalit and upper caste teenagers as in the following conversation:

‘You had given him tea in a different cup?’

‘Yes, the SCs and the Muslims who come to our house, we keep their dishes separate,’ savita replied evenly.

‘Do you think this discrimination is right?’ I asked, she felt the sharp edge in my voice now.

‘Oh...why, are you mad? How can we feed them in the same dishes?’

‘Why not? In the hotel...in the mess, everyone eats together. Then what is wrong in eating together in your home as well?’ I tried to reason with her.

Savita defended the discrimination as right and justified by tradition. Her arguments were infuriating me. However, I
remained calm. According to her, SCs were uncultured. Dirty.

I asked her, ‘how many SCs do you know? What is your personal experience in this regard?’

She fell silent. Her bubbliness subsided. We kept sitting on the ledge for a while. Then I asked her, ‘what do you think of me?’

‘Aai and Baba praise you. They say you are very different from their preconceptions about U.P. people,’ Savita cooed.

‘I had asked for your opinion.’

‘I like you.’ She leaned on my arm.

I pushed her away and asked, ‘Ok...Would you like me even if I were an SC?’

‘How can you be an SC?’ she laughed.

‘Why not, what if I am?’ I had insisted.

‘You are a Brahmin,’ she said with conviction.

‘Who told you that?’

‘Baba.’

‘He is wrong. I am an SC.’ I put all my energy into those words. I felt that a fire had lit inside me.

‘Why do you say such things?’ She said angrily.
'I am telling you the truth. I won’t lie to you. I never claimed that I am a Brahmin.’

She stared at me, totally shocked. She still thought I was joking with her.

I said as plainly as I could that I was born in a Chuhra family of U.P.

Savita appeared grave. Her eyes were filled with tears and she said tearfully, ‘You are lying, right?’

‘No, Savi…it is the truth... you ought to know this.’ I had convinced her.

She started to cry. As though my being an SC was a crime. She sobbed for a long time. Suddenly the distance between us had increased. The hatred of thousands of years had entered our hearts. What a lie culture and civilization are.

On the way back, we were both quiet. Immersed in the uproar that was going on inside me, I could feel that the tension inside me was dissipating. As though a great burden had lifted off my chest. Crossing the railway line near the station, I said to Savita, ‘this is our last meeting.’ (97-98).
What one can understand from the above conversation is that the relation between Valmiki and Savita suggests that secular education alone cannot annihilate the caste system even among the educated people.

V

Baby Kamble, being Dalit woman, provides in her autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) a remarkable account of Dalit women’s point of view on the importance of education. She is strongly inspired by Ambedkar’s thought and philosophy on education from her childhood days. Baby’s father and brother were part of Ambedkar’s socio-political activities and they used to closely discuss and follow everyday activities of Ambedkar. Kamble used to take part in all those discussions. Eventually she became an Ambedkarite. She has taken a pledge to educate her community and critique the myths, superstitions and Hinduism. The mainstream students usually carry high opinion of the notions of the teacher god and Gandhi. But, these figures mean nothing in front of Ambedkar’s image. She recollects the speech made by Ambedkar:

My brothers and sisters, all you folks, including the old men, women and children who have come to Jejuri from far off places. You walked barefoot for eight to ten days to
get here. While on the way, you were tired, your feet ached, you had nothing but a few stale pieces of *bhakri* to eat, yet you kept on walking and finally reached Jejuri. Why? Because you wanted to see your family deity *Khandoba*. But tell me, did *Khandoba* see you? What did he say to you? Could he see your condition? Did he see your suffering? ...What good has this god ever done to you? (Baby Kamble, 64)

Baby Kamble writes how the Dalits have been asked to follow a different path after the speech delivered by Ambedkar. She states that the Dalits must educate their children. They must divert the attention of the children from god and teach them good things and send them to schools. She views that when their children begin to be educated, their condition will start improving. She mentions what Ambedkar had told the Dalits:

Our women have had a major role in being superstitious but I’m sure they will now give up these superstitions and take a lead in educating their children. They will have the honour of being the first to take this step forward. I have full faith in you, my sisters. Go ahead, educate your children. Let all our women take this step. Discard all such customs that strengthen our ignorance. My poor dear
brothers and sisters do not eat carcass. Don’t clean the filth of the village. Let those who make the filth clean it up themselves. Let us teach them this lesson. This slavery, which has been imposed upon us, will not disappear easily. For that we need to brine about a revolution. (65)

Baby Kamble repeatedly illustrates the personality of Ambedkar in order to reform the community from the bondage of Hinduism. She invokes that Babasaheb’s sturdy physique, his glowing youth, his fair complexion, his high forehead, and his European attire, his suit and boots—all of these impressed people to no end. She also states about the influence of Ambedkar on Dalit women. She asks the Dalits to resolve and start educating their children. One of the women who listened to Ambedkar addressed the whole gathering:

‘Let me assure you, my sisters, what Bhimrao Ambedkar says is absolutely right. We must educate our children. We must not and will not eat dead animals. We must reform our community. Let us resolve to fight along with Ambedkar. He speaks nothing but the truth. Let’s follow him to the end. That is what I say’. (65)

Interestingly, Baby Kamble suggests that her grandparents were influenced by Ambedkar, “My grandparents
started repeating Ambedkar’s words to every person they met. They never got tilted of repeating the things that he said. All the people who came to our house had to listen to them. Here Kamble remembers what her grand parents repeatedly told her about the speech made by Ambedkar.” (66)

Baby Kamble, who is strongly influenced by Ambedkar’s ideology from her childhood suggests that there have been a good number of people who are influenced by Ambedkar’s ideology like her. She writes:

So many young activists, under the influence of Babasaheb’s ideas, started enrolling their children in schools en masse. My father enrolled me school no. 2. His friends enrolled their children in the same school. We were about ten girls in the elementary school—Susheela, Hausa, Shanta Bagad, Begum, Savu. Ulka, Gulbakavali, Shaku, Asha and I. Quite a big group! After school, we all used to rush to the chawdi to listen to the discussions there. One newspaper or the other would invariably carry a report of Baba’s speech in some public meeting. My father read out the report and people would listen attentively. None of us had seen Baba but his words were like elixir to our ears. (106)
She further says that “the revolutionary fervour of his words set our blood coursing through the veins. We felt as if we should go and shake the orthodox by the scruff of their neck. By the time we reached the fourth standard, we had sort of become grown-ups. We were then transferred from School no. 2 to School no. 5. This school was known as Bahulichi Shala. This turned all the boys into staunch supporters and soldiers of Baba. Students from other villages also started living in this boarding school.”(106-07) They started studying Baba’s philosophy and his writings. Baba’s thinking influenced them greatly and all of them became his dedicated followers. Their unit gave them an identity and strength for the first time in their life. But, when they joined in mainstream school for their further studies they had to experience and encounter caste discrimination both from the mainstream students and teachers. Kamble sates:

Our school was predominantly high caste. A majority of girls in our class belonged to the higher castes. For the first time in their lives, they had girls like us — who could pollute them - studying with them. They treated us like lepers, as if our bodies dripped with dirty blood or as if pus oozed out of our rotten flesh. If they had to pass by us,
they would cover their nose, mutter ‘chee, chee’, and run as if their lives were in mortal danger. (108)

The teacher allotted them a place in a corner near the door from where Dalit girls could not move till school was over for the day. The blackboard would be in another corner. Dalit girls could neither see what the teacher was writing on the board, nor could they raise their doubts in the classroom. If they went to drink at the school tap, the other girls would raise hell. But Dalit girls never listened to them. They were greatly emboldened by Baba’s brave spirit. They would move together as one person. The higher caste girls would hurl taunts and abuses at them. The Mahar girls put on such airs. They have even touched the taps. Upper caste girls usually comment.

Generally the upper caste men usually practice caste discrimination but not their women. But Kamble breaks that notion and provides that upper caste women is no exception in terms of discriminate the Dalits through caste prejudices and hierarchy. In such conditions, while upper caste women struck with patriarchal Hindu caste structure:

They would hurl stones at us and throw dust into our eyes. Then we would get angry and attack them. Tucking up our long skirts, we would just barge into their groups like
battering rams and scatter them. They would run away and those left behind would be prey in our hands. We would attack them furiously, pull their long plaits, push them to the ground, pinch their cheeks and hands, and torture them as much as we could. But we would get back all of this and more. (109)

The role of the teachers in India is objectionable from Dalit perspective. They are no exception in terms of promoting and practicing caste discrimination. The higher caste girls also got together to surround Dalit students. They would hurl insults at Dalit students and made comments: ‘That Ambedkar has educated himself, that’s why these dirty Mahars are showing off! That filthy Mahar, Ambedkar, eats dead animals but look at the airs he gives himself!’ The idea that students are socially and politically innocents are completely misrepresented in Indian context. They are being brought up with the family culture: culture of caste, culture of religion, culture of politics. When upper caste girls are physically unable to fight with Dalits they abuse verbally.

In retaliation, we said, ‘You shaven widows, how dare you take our Ambedkar’s name! You have your own baldy, that stupid Gandhi! He has neither a shirt on his body, nor teeth in his
mouth! That toothless old bugger hasn’t any teeth! Ha ha ha! (109)

Baby Kamble breaks the myth that the children are innocent. She foregrounds the childhood experience and believes in terms of Indian politics and leaders. She adroitly brings the opinions of national figures like Gandhi and Ambedkar. In one morning, the higher caste girls hurled all kinds of insults and abuses at Dalit students in front of the teachers.

Baby Kamble and the remaining Dalit students did not stop themselves to give counter attack against the upper caste students. Baby Kamle’s personal narrative builds a kind of resistance against the denial of education to Dalits. Especially from gender point of view, Kamble’s concern is very pertinent about questioning the knowledge monopoly of the Brahmins.

From the four autobiographies examined, it becomes evident that education has potential for the liberation of Dalits. The Dalits considered education as a critical cultural resource in the context of struggles that emerged out of contradictions generated during colonial times. The pursuit of education itself is emancipatory. The Dalits battled to gain entry to schools. The subaltern ideologies of the Dalit protest saw in education a
powerful weapon that could fulfil multiple social transformatory goals. Education enables the Dalits to challenge the hierarchical structure and ideology of the Brahmanical hegemony. It raises critical social consciousness, instills new values leading to emancipation.

The following chapter, “Experiencing Discrimination: Dalit Livid Lives” deals with the aspects Dalits experiencing the social boycott at public places. The chapter examines how the Dalits were subjected to collective alienation from public life and how their culture is treated as unique.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


5 Uma Chakravarthy, 21-22.

6 Uma Chakravarthy, 18.


10 Limbale, Sharan Kumar, *The Outcaste*, New Delhi: Oxford, 2003, 2. Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parentheses.

11 Jadav, Narendra, *Outcaste*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, 204. (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).
12 Valmiki, Omprakash, *Joothan: Dalit’s Life*, New Delhi: Samya, 2003, 1. Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parentheses.

13 Kamble, Baby, *The Prisons We Broke*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008, 64. Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parentheses.

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