CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION:

DALIT LIVID LIVES

Caste discrimination is common among the Dalits in India. The Indian English writers addressed the issue from the nationalist and progressive point of view, which suffers from the limitations of social exclusion. The Dalit writers, contrarily, narrate the discrimination authentically. This chapter attempts to examine the experience, form and nature of discrimination as narrated in Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* (2003), Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003), Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan: A Dalits Life* (2003) and Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (2008). The focus of the study is on the aspect of discrimination and humiliation. The aspect of self-respect that the authors used as the strategy to overcome the discrimination and humiliation is explored in the chapter.

I

Sharan Kumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* (2003) is about an untouchable family in general and community struggles in particular. The author narrates about how an innocent Dalit couple Kamble and Masamai are discriminated and exploited by
an upper caste landlord Hanmantha Limbale for whom the poor couple used to work day and night. Ithal Kamble, Masamai’s husband is a farm worker on a yearly contract to Hanmantha Limbale and it was a job worth seven or eight hundred rupees. Ithal Kamble toiled on the farm of Hanmantha and was helped by him during hard times. Hanmantha Patil ruined the poor family and it led to the separation of Ithal Kamble and Masamai forever. After the divorce with Masamai, Kamble left the place with two sons Surya Kanth and Dharma and remarried a woman who is also a widow.

Masamai remained a keep of Hanmantha Limbale and gave birth to Sharan Kumar Limbale. Masamai was given a rented house at Akkalkot. Limbale writes, “After my birth the mansions of the Patil community must have become tense. My first breath must have threatened the morality of the world. With my first cry at birth, milk must have splashed from the breasts of every kunti.” (Limbale, 36)\(^1\) Limbale remained like Karna in the epic, *Mahabharatha*.

Limbale states that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. As Masamai was beautiful, she was lured by Hanmanth. She was made separate from her husband and suffered a lot in her post-widowed life. Though Hanmanth enjoyed the beauty of
Masamai, he was self-conscious that Masamai was a Dalit and tried to avoid her. He also commented that the newborn child was looked after by Bhondya, the potter. Limbale writes, “Finally my mother and I come to stay with Santamai, my grandmother. Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything?” (37)

The upper caste men in every village had made whores of the wives of Dalit form labourers and Masamai was one among them. After divorced from Ithal Kamble, Masamai gave birth to Sharan Kumar Limbale. Limbale’s birth is the result of Masamai’s private and helpless relation with Hanmantha Limbale, the village patil. After Sharan Kumar and Nagi, Masamai gave birth to many children that include, apart from Sharan Kumar and Nagi, Nirmi, Vani, Suni, Pami, Tamma, Indira and Sidramma. Limbale writes:

We were all of one womb and blood. We shared a common mother but different fathers...I was born from her affair with Hanmantha Patil. Masamai had Nagubai, Nirmala, Vanmala, Sunanda, Pramila, Shrikant, Indira and Sidram from Kaka, whose name was Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil, the head of the village named Hanoor.”(38)
Masamai’s life speaks out how the poor Dalit families were destroyed and the innocent Dalit women were exploited. Masamai neither belonged to the Patil community as she was a Mahar woman nor a Mahar as she became a whore of Patils of different villages. Masamai and her children lived in Maharwada but without Mahar [Dalit] identity due to impurity in Limbale’s blood. This kind of alienation experienced by Limbale is described throughout his autobiography.

From the day Limbale was born, he was brought up by Mahmood Dastagir Jamadar, a Muslim. Jamadar, whom Limbale called Dada had been with Santamai, Limbale’s grandmother. Jamadar was Limbale’s grandfather in the sense he lived with his grandmother. Limbale writes “Does this mean I am a Muslim as well? ... Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected?” (38-39).

*The Outcaste* depicts the most humiliated events and insults Limbale and his family members underwent in different places like Akkalkot, Hanoor, Chungi, Chapalgaon, Sholapur, Ahmedpur, Barshi and Bhimnagar in Latur. Akkalkot was a small village where Masamai was kept in a rented house. Living in Akkalkat, Masamai lost her attachment with Maharwada and lived in the conditions of adversity. Hanmantha Limbale, the
Patil of Basalegaon lured Masamai but never dared to keep her in his family and always kept her in Akkalkot as she was an outsider. Hanmantha Limbale wanted Masamai’s body and not her caste. Limbale writes, “Hanmantha Limbale lured Masamai. She was given a rented house at Akkalkot, which she accepted. It was a kind of revenge to live openly with the same man who had uprooted her from her family. Hanmantha Limbale possessed her like a put dove. They lived happily. Masamai became a pregnant and gave birth to a son. Who’s the father of this boy? Hanmantha didn’t want any of this to happen, but who can disown a child? A child is a reality.” (36)

After Limbale was born, Hanmantha had been trying to avoid them and there were quarrels everyday as he did not acknowledge Limbale as his offspring. Leaving Akkalkot, Masamai went to Hanoor where Santamai, Masamai’s mother was living with Jamadar, a Muslim. Sharan Kumar Limbale calls Jamadar Dada who works as a porter in Hanoor bus stand. In Hanoor, Limbale subjected to caste discrimination. When he was a school boy, all the boys and girls in the school were set out for picnic. Knowing it, Limbale felt exited and joined the group of students and teachers. After enjoying for some time at the picnic spot, all the boys and girls sat for lunch. Though they
belonged to the same village, the Dalit students were not allowed to sit among the upper caste students. Limbale writes, “Even the tree we sat under was tattered like us. Whenever the wind shook it branches it produced waves of hot air that hit our faces. We sat in its broken shadow.” (2) After having lunch, the teacher asked the high caste boys to collect the leftovers on a piece of paper and give it to Limbale, Malya and other Dalit children. Limbale states, “The high caste girls from our village offered us their curry and bhakari’s without touching us” (3).

The following day, the teacher asked the boys and girls from first standard to seventh standard to write an essay. Limbale, being in the third farm, was unable to write anything. When the teacher noticed Limbale doing nothing, he grew annoyed and shouted, “You, son of bitch, come on, start writing! You like eating an ox, don’t you?” (4) Listening to the teacher, Limbale took his slate and pencil to write something but failed, “I didn’t know how and what to write. I kept thinking of how we had squatted in a circle under a tree in the forest, eating. I remembered the hands of high caste boys and girls offering us their leftovers, the withered tree in whole shade we sat, the bundle of leftovers, the question my mother had asked, and the
teacher calling me a son of a bitch and beef-eater. How should I start writing the essay my teacher had asked for?” (4)

The untouchable children were not allowed to sit in the class and asked to sit on the platform. Dalit children sat amidst the footwear flung all around them. Limbale states “During the school interval, the other boys threw stones at me and teased me calling aloud Mahar.” (6)

Another experience of discrimination was at the Barbar’s shop. The Barbar was immovable and not accepted to cut Limbale’s hair. Limbale states, “I was a school boy, and wanted a haircut like that of other boys in the school. So, I went to the barber for the first time.” (22) The barber first looked at Limbale and them at his head and shouted at Limbale not to stand there s he was not going to shave Limbale’s head. Then Limbale showed the barber the money he had but the barber commented to another customer who sympothised with Limbale that he was a Mahar so he didn’t want to cut his hair. In this context, Limbale raises a question, “How could this barber, who used to shave buffaloes in the village, refuse to shave my head?” (22)

Limbale’s family had no home to live. They spent most of the time inside the bus stand in Hanoor. Limbale writes:
To us the bus stand was like home...We lay like discarded bus tickets. We had to get up early in the normally or risk annoying the driver and the conductor. Once they actually thrum our sheets and rugs out on the road? (42)

The school in Hanoor village where Limbale studied had classes only up to the seventh form. When he finished his seventh form, he had to go to a high school in the neighbouring village, Chungi. After joining the Chungi School, Limbale and other students were supposed to apply for a scholarship, and the application was to be signed by their parents and forward it to the village Sarpanch. To Limbale, getting the signature of the Sarpanch was a problem as the Sarpanch was in favour of Patil Hanmantha Limbale and said, “I don’t approve the name Masamai Hanmantha Limbale?” (59) Limbale never wanted Hanmantha Limbale’s name as his guardian in the official record because Hanmantha had deserted Masamai long back and she was living with the Patil of Hanoor, Yeshwantrao Sidramappa. The Sarpanch refused to sign because he was confused to decide Masamai’s real husband. At this point Bhosale guruji, teacher of Hanoor School proposed Limbale’s grand mother Santamai’s name but the Sarpanch refused because she was living with a Muslim. Limbale writes, “The Sarpanch was in a
real fix about how to identify me. But I too was a human being. What else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this word 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)

In Hanoor village, God Mahadev festival was observed in the month of Shrawan. On that day Limbale’s mother would bathe him and powder his face to make him look smart. Because Hanmantha, because of whom Limbale was born would visit Hanoor with the group of singers. Once Kaka, the present keep to Masamai brought Hanmantha, the previous keep of Masamai along to dine with Masamai and Limbale. Masamai had made egg curry for them. Both Kaka and Hanmantha were drunk and there was a fierce quarrel between Kaka and Masamai. Masamai, Limbale’s mother cursed and abused Kaka and drove him out of their house. But after some time both Kaka and Hanmantha came back and the same quarrel took place among them. As a small boy Limbale did not understand what exactly went wrong between Masamai and Kaka who bought Hanmantha. Later he came to know the reason. He states, “It took quite sometime for me to know why my mother
was so angry Kaka was persuading my mother to sleep with Hanmantha.” (61)

Another incident Limbale experienced is about the discrimination in religious practice. In Hanoor, there was a village temple called the temple of Ithoba in which some of the villages especially from upper castes would read Holy Scriptures. One day, Limbale and his friend Parshya entered the temple of Ithoba and prostrated directly before the God. The entire scene was watched by Parshya’s father who thought that the untouchables must not enter the temple of upper caste God Ithoba and thrashed Parshya very badly stating that Parshya and Limbale polluted the God Ithoba. Limbale writes about the angry behaviour of Parshya’s father, “He was angry, because entering a temple is a crime. We were supposed to say our prayers from the steps outside. Our entering of temple will make God impure. We were expected to behave responsibly. The untouchables must not enter a temple?” (62) Limbale raised certain questions like, “Why are we ostracized? Why are we kept away from other human beings? Why are we kept out of our own selves? Why this discrimination between one human being and another? After all isn’t everybody’s blood red?” (62)
As Limbale was an illegal off-spring of a Patil, he was not treated as a true Mahar. Whenever Limbale wanted to sit in the community hall meant for Dalits, he was driven away stating that it was not his father’s community hall, “....I did not go to the community hall for a few days. Had I gone, someone might have smacked or abused me. I am an alien ...In the Maharwada I felt humiliated as I was considered a bastard; they called me Akkarmashi². Yet in the village I was considered Mahar teased as the offspring of one.”(62)

Limbale was humiliated not only by Mahars but also by his own sisters. Whenever Nagi, one of his sisters annoyed, she abused Limbale. Limbale writes about the behaviour of Nagi with him, “you have no connection with us. Nobody knows where you come from. Our fathers are not the same.”(63) Listening to there words, Limbale burned within. He writes, “Nagi’s words pierced my heart. The feeling of alienation weighed heavily on my mind.”(63)

Dalits were discriminated at the public places. One day when Parshya and Limbale were on their way to pluck the fruits of a toddy palm, they saw Shobhi, an upper caste girl face each other in a narrow path. Shobhi asked them to stay and let her pass. She felt authoritative in voice when Parshya argued. She
said, “Mahars have become bold these days. They now dare to walk straight up to you. Can’t you see I am carrying drinking water? Your touch will make it impure.” (70) In this context, Shobhi’s words make one understand that she worried more about the pollution of water due to facing the Dalits on road than walking with heavy pot on her head. Parshya and Limbale planned to take revenge on Shobhi. In fact they wanted to rape her. Limbale writes, “Shobhi stood before us as a symbol of the caste system. Her feet, her thighs, her arms, her face – everything was a part of the systems she belonged to.”(71)

Limbale completed his high school education at Chungi and joined in boarding school at Chapalgaon. Chapalgaon was four miles away from Limbale’s village, Hanoor. As majority of the boys in Chapalgaon were Dalits, Limbale slowly came to know about Buddhism which gave him sense of self-respect. One day Santamai, Limbale’s grandmother walked the long distance between Hanoor and reached Chapalgaon just to see Limbale. She also brought him a pair of old chappals of someone who had forgotten them at the Hanoor bus stand. Though the chappals were of a woman, Santamai did not give them either to Nagi or Nirmi but kept for Limbale. Because Limbale used to go to school without chappals. But one of the chappals that
Santamai brought was to be repaired and Limbale went to the cobbler. But the cobbler, who knew Santamai living with a Muslim, refused to repair the chappal. Limbale, unable to convince the cobbler, put the ladies chappals on his feet besides being teased by his friends at school.

Limbale became more and more conscious of caste as he reached one standard after another in studies. His studies changed his thinking. He felt that casteism made the Dalits bitter but had a sense of pride through education. Limbale could remember the caste discrimination in public places like at hotels and at the other meeting places was very severe. He writes, “Casteism made us bitter. There was a small tea shop in our village owned by Mangs, where a separate cup and saucer were kept for the Mahars and Mangs. I had seen the cup and saucer many times. We also had to move aside to make way for high-caste persons while passing on the road.”(76) Dalits were condemned at every place and at every stage of life whether it is public or private. Limbale mentions:

Our houses were in places that other villagers used as latrines. We felt no affection for our villages. Instead, we were scared and tense. Our caste had been thrust upon us even before we were born. (76)
Dalits were excluded from social life. All the provisions were denied on petty reasons like they were intentionally killing the animals of the upper caste people. Whenever the Dalits were accused of poisoning animals, the village Patils sit together to punish the Dalits and that kind of experience was meted out to the Dalits for very baseless reasons. Limbale quotes his grandmother Santamai’s words how the upper caste used to punish the Dalits on the reasons of stealing and poisoning their animals:

Whenever an animal in the village died, the villagers grew annoyed. They considered the Maharwada responsible for it. They tied us to a pole and beat us like animals. They accused of having poisoned the animal. Our women and children cried and shrieked. All the men in the Maharwada were very badly beaten. The village then ostracized the Maharwada for a few days. We would not get any work on the farms. We were decided any provision at the shops though we had the money and were ready to pay. We had reached a dead end. Such humiliation was agonizing. (78)

Water was under the control of the high castes. Though the village wells were dug and built by Dalits, they were not allowed to fetch water from the wells. One could also see why
Dr. Ambedkar gave stressed about the right for Dalits on water from the limitations of the upper castes. Kolakaluri Enoch, one of the distinguished Telugu Dalit writers in Andhra Pradesh states in his polemical book “Oorabaavi” (Public Well, 1969) how a Dalit woman had thrown skin into the well to save water from the upper caste hands. The Reddys never allowed Madigas, a Dalit sub-caste in Andhra Pradesh. To resolve the problem, a Dalit woman, with all her courage to make the Reddys disown the well, threw a dead animal’s skin into the well after which the upper caste Reddys left the well. Later the Dalits cleaned the well and drew water from it. This is how Dalit women succeeded in getting water. Enoch’s story contains aspects like search for self-respect, the angst and language of Dalits. Similarly Limbale claims, “Even the water was under the control of the high castes...What is so peculiar about our touch is that it pollutes water, food, houses, clothes, graveyards, teashops, god, religion, and even man.” (81)

Limbale was honest and it was witnessed through an example he mention in his autobiography. Once Limbale found thirty rupees and handed it over to the head master. The following day when Limbale entered his class, Heremath, the class teacher praised Limbale, “This year we lost in sports, but it
hardly matters. The honesty that this boy, Limbale has shown is our real victory.”(75)

Whenever people were in need of help, Limbale never stopped himself to help the needy. Once Shivappa, an upper caste one was working on his farm. Limbale noticed that Shivappa’s wife was carrying food in one hand and her child in the other. Shivappa’s wife on seeing Limbale, she requested him to put the bundle down. Meanwhile, Shivappa who watched the scene came and shouted at his wife for seeking help from Limbale stating that he was a Mahar. Stating these words to his wife, Shivappa took off one of his shoes and threw it at Limbale. This incident suggests that the mere touch of Dalits would pollute the food of the upper caste.

Though education gives self-esteem and honour, Limbale faced severe discrimination. After passing final school examinations in first class and standing second in his class, Limbale got admission in Dayanand College, Sholapur. Limbale, though good in studies, suffered to manage money for paying the fee. Santamai, his grandmother and Limbale went to an upper caste money lender who was drunk and looked at the exposed breast out of Santamai’s torn blouse. He refused to give them money. Limbale writes:
His look spread like poison in my heart. I wished that the blouse of this money – lender’s mother or sister was torn so that I could stare at their breasts. I burned with in. Our poverty was detestable. I wanted to rebel against such humiliation. (82)

Higher studies made Limbale more conscious about humiliation, discrimination that Dalits underwent. Limbale writes:

While studying in college, I was mutually a flame. I was growing amidst a conflagration. The routs of the moment were settling more firmly. Injustice towards us was assuming a new meaning. We were awakening under a new consciousness which was becoming more pervasive day by day. (83)

Limbale reminds that Dalit students live in poverty which forced them to live with limited facilities in the hostels. Living with minimum facilities in hostels was yet another form of discrimination. Limbale writes:

Our poverty didn’t allow us to enjoy the luxuries of college life ...We continued our education amidst great poverty... There were so many Dalit students like us. This pain of
poverty was not just mine. We all existed like grains crushed in a stone grinder. (83)

Limbale and Mallya were close friends who came from the same village and continued the studies up to B.A. in the same class. As they were close to each other, Limbale accompanied him. Near to Mallya’s home, Janabai, another sweeper used to live. Whenever both the boys visited Mallya’s grandmother, they talk to Janabai too. Later Janabai considered Limbale good at studies. She thought of arranging his marriage with her niece. Moved by the proposal, Limbale and Mallya went to see the girl. They reached Janabai’s place and asked if she had brought the girl whom Limbale considered his prospective wife. When they asked to show them the girl, Janabai went wild and shouted. Limbale remembers Janabai’s words, “We haven’t yet lost our self-respect. Our family is of pure blood so we also expect the same of a bridegroom. Just anyone won’t do for us. What does it matter however good the man is?” (88)

In another situation, Limbale was discriminated by the people of his community as he was born of illegal relations. Once, Limbale came to know that Santamai was going to ask for Mallya’s sister to be Limbale’s bride. Limbale was happy to marry Mallya’s sister since Mallya and Limbale were classmates
and more than that they were good friends from childhood. Limbale remembers his days with Mallya, “Mallya and I had been classmates right from the first standard in the village school up to B.A. We had eaten from the same plate and had drunk water from the same vessel. We had also shared the same bed.” (92) But, the idea of marriage resulted in a gap between them. Limbale writes, “I was very happy at the idea of marrying the sister of such a dear friend. But the news that Sivaji brought the next day pierced my heart. Mallya’s parents had refused the proposal because I was not of pure blood. These people love conventions more than they do human beings.” (92) Limbale states his helplessness:

I was terribly angry at its customs, but I was helpless. I had suffered the pain of insults. The thought of marriage was intolerable to me. The thought of selecting a girl as a match shocked me like acid thrown on me. I didn’t want such shocks. It was better to stay unmarried. (92)

Choosing the brides and bridegrooms to Masamai’s sons and daughters became a herculean task to her. She requested everyone who visited her house for drinking liquor. Masamai and Santamai tried hard in searching for the suitable matches to their children. Unable to select a Mahar bride to Limbale,
Masamai intended to marry her son with her friend’s daughter. Masamai’s friend was ‘Mang’ by caste and had a daughter, born of her liaison with a Patil. The girl went around a singer accompanying a drummer. As no one came forward to give their daughter, Masamai and Kaka decided to select a girl as the proper match. Limbale writes:

A bastard must always be matched with another bastard. No one else will marry their daughters to a bastard like me...at such moments. (98)

Limbale further mentions, “I remembered Maryappa, who under the influence of liquor had promised to give his daughter in marriage to me.” (98) To his expectations, one day Maryappa came to Sholapur and asked Limbale to marry his daughter Kusum. Limbale accepted the proposal though he did not see her by that time. Thus Limbale succeeded in selecting his life partner after a series of insults. Limbale’s wedding was filled with great uncertainty. Masamai and Kaka wanted to follow Hindu marriage order where as Limbale’s in- laws wanted do it in Buddhist way. Frustrated Limbale addressed the gathering that they were going to be wedded according to the Buddhist rituals. After the marriage, Limbale was unable to avoid
disturbances and insults due to his caste and half-breed blood and Dada’s religion.

After marriage Limbale’s in-laws refused to send their daughter with him. Limbale’s mother-in-law said that there was no discipline in his house and they left for Barsi, where they lived. Whenever Limbale went to Barsi to meet his wife, there would be a quarrel between Limbale and his in-laws. Limbale’s father-in-law quarreled with him and his mother-in-law abused at him. She said, “You are rotten people. We have purified you. You were lying on the garbage.” (100) Limbale was not allowed to meet his wife and whenever he went, he was asked to sleep outside. Limbale’s in-laws disliked him because of his association with Dada, a Muslim by religion. One day Maryappa Kamble, Limbale’s father-in-law argued with Limbale, “My son is the president of the Dalit Panthers. He is highly respected by his followers. You say that you are a relative of that Muslim. You are the cause of humiliation for us among our own caste. We have told everyone that you are of pure blood. You must have self-respect, otherwise don’t enter our house.” (101) At last Limbale took away his wife in spite of the possible protests from his in-laws’.
Limbale got a job as telephone operator at Ahmedpur. Due to his financial conditions, he accepted the job and gave up further education. Limbale had a new problem after marriage and finding a job. He found it difficult to find a house. Being unable to live as Dalit among the upper caste houses, Limbale said that he was a Lingayat by caste. To avoid discrimination, Limbale pretended that he was not related to Mahars:

If I happened to see a Dalit friend approaching, I quickly altered my route. If he abruptly appeared in front of me, I greeted him with a ‘Namaskar’ instead of ‘Jai Bhim’. Even if someone said ‘Jai Bhim’ to me, I responded with a namaskar. If I happened to be going with a high caste friend and someone greeted me with a ‘jai Bhim’, I felt like an outsider. I was worried that my caste would be revealed. (104)

Limbale’s reason for hiding his caste was that, “If they came to know my caste, they would drive me out of the house that I had rented from a high caste landlord. I would be beaten badly. They would even torture my wife.”(104) Dr. Ambedkar too experienced similar predicament. Though Limbale lived among the houses of the upper caste people, he was apprehensive of being identified as a Dalit.
In a particular context, Limbale’s grandmother arrived to take Vani back home. She brought a bundle of beef from the village. But Limbale shut the doors and windows of his house. But Santamai said, “My boy, eat this. I know you don’t get this here. Who is going to see you eat it? We will also join you.”(104)

Limbale and his wife intended to take part in the birth celebrations of Dr Ambedkar. Limbale writes, “What would happen if the volunteers of this vast Dalit movement came to know that I was impure? ... I felt extremely sad about my low birth. So what about me? I am a whirlwind.” (106) Later Limbale was transferred to Latur from Ahmedpur. He experienced displacement as all his friends were left at Ahmedpur. In Latur too, Limbale faced the problem of finding a house. He said that his caste followed him like an enemy. Though Latur was such a big place with huge buildings, houses and bungalows, Limbale was turned away wherever he had gone for rented house with the remarks, “We don’t want to rent out our house to Muslims and Mahars.”(106)

Finding that it was impossible to find a house in the town, Limbale settled in a small house in Bhimnagar, which in Latur
was also the graveyard of the Marwari community. Mahars in Bhimnagar lived under tin roofs in poor and helpless conditions:

Here the houses did not have bathrooms and toilets. Women bathed openly and urinated every where in the open. I felt awkward while walking through this locality. In the morning and evening women used to shit openly by the roadside. I felt embarrassed to walk between rows of shitting women squatting on both sides of the road. Cycle–rickshaw drivers, porters and labourers were the main inhabitants of this locality. People lived in the smallest possible spaces. Each one worried only about his hunger. The stomach was the threshold of their capability. (107)

Limbale’s autobiography speaks about many uneven conditions that he experienced as an off-spring of Mahar and upper caste private relation and struggled a lot for being identifying himself as Dalit.

II

Narendra Jadav’s *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003) is a journey of finding out remedies to trespass the boundaries of caste and gender. It is comparable to Malcolm X’s *Roots* and Maxim Gorky’s *Mother* in which history and human relations play vital role in educating oneself. Jadav’s *Outcaste* represents the
struggle of the Dalits against caste discrimination, illiteracy and poverty. Having the weapons of education, empowerment and democracy, Damu, the protagonist and his wife Sonu fought for self-assertion and self-respect which are denied to them for hundreds of years. It is not the life story of Damu and Sonu; a story of all the Dalits in the world. Narendra Jadav’s father Damu was inspired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:

Damu was not a leader...but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny. Damu had no formal education...yet he steered his children to education 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 an ordinary man, they said ...but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system. (Jadav, IX)\(^5\)

Damu educated his wife and children. Damu, a young man in his twenties, worked as a yeskar\(^6\). As a yeskar, Damu’s duty was to announce the arrival of the officials to the village and taking care of the guests and their horses and watch the dead
bodies in the village. Once Damu went home to have some tea as he spent much time in assisting the Mamledar, a senior Revenue Official. Damu announced about the great arrival of the Mamledar:

Damu was running as fast as he could in front of the Mamledar’s tonga, heralding his arrival. Outspanding the house, he ran until he felt his legs would give way. He ran singing the praises of the Mamledar, alerting the villages that an honourable person was arriving. (3)

Damu had to wait outside the house of Patil until the Mamledar came out of Patil’s home. Dame was tired and hungry by the time the Mamledar left the place and Damu walked home slowly. Scarcely had Damu reached home when a policeman came looking for him. Damu sensed that something terrible had happened. Damu was told by the constable that a dead body had been found floating in the broken well by the mangroves.

Damu who did not eat anything since morning pleaded with the constable that he would be back in no time after eating something. But the constable lifted his baton as if to strike him, “Do you see my baton?...I’ll stick it up your ass and you will see it come out of your throat. I’ll beat you up so badly that you’ll forget the name of your father.” (3) Unable to face the
constable, Damu ran towards the mangroves without stopping anywhere. Mahars were not treated as human beings and they were treated as people without self-respect. Damu worried much about his wife who would not take water without some word about him and requested the constable that at least he could inform his wife that Damu could come only after the cremation of the body found in the well.

Unable to convince the constable, Damu got ready himself to the assigned duties. Narendra Jadav explains the poor condition of Damu. He said that Damu managed to keep awake, pacing up and down and drinking water to quench his hunger. He waited impatiently for the Fauzdar. The police would draw the body out, the report would be written, and the dead women would be handed over to her family. Then he could go home. He expected this to take no more than an hour or two at the most.

(5)

Namya, one of Damu’s cousins, came to the well bringing some bhakris. Namya told Damu that everyone especially Sonu worried about Damu all the night and gave the bhakris to Damu but Damu was not ready to eat because the constable and the Fauzdar might arrive at any moment. Even as they were talking to each other, the constable arrived. The inhuman behaviour of
the constable indicates that the Mahars are not permitted to have meals, “What did they care if a Mahar liver or starved, or even died? All they were concerned about were the high-born.” (6)

He came cracking his whip, having arrogant look. Damu was ordered to fetch hay and water to the Fauzdar’s horse. Moving around, the Fauzdar looked into the old well which was out of use for a long time. Thinking of how to pull the dead body out of the well, the constable, the village Patil and Fauzdar discussed something and the constable ordered Damu finally to pull the body out. But the Fauzdar cracked his whip at Damu. The attitude the constable and the Fauzdar showed towards Damu resulted in self-realization. Unable to tolerate the discrimination, Damu stood up and gripped the half-raised whip. As the constables always prove the power of their sticks on Dalits, the two policemen severely punished Damu until he lost senses. Jadav writes, “He (Damu) lost all sense of what was happening as he lay on the ground, jerking and convulsing at every blow and whiplash as it landed on his body.” (9) Damu who was bold enough to face the punishment to any extent cried out with all his might. Patil rushed forward and pleaded with the Fauzdar to forgive Damu.
At home, all the family members found fault with Damu and said that he committed a grave mistake by disobeying the order of the Fauzdar. They scolded Damu that he had broken the Mahar’s tradition by challenging the government officials. Listening to his family members, Damu said “What kind of a tradition is this that treats Mahar’s worse than cats and dogs? Damu was ready to face death but strongly decided not to go to yeskar duties. The incident suggests how Damu was able to face the Fauzdar. He believed in dignity, which he had learnt from Dr. Ambedkar and his philosophy.

III

Om Prakash Valmiki writes in *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* (2003) that the upper and other caste people live in one side of the village pond. The Chuhras and the low caste untouchables live on the other side. The pond stood as partition between the Chuhras and the rest of the village dwellers. Chuhras did all sorts of work for the upper castes, including cleaning and agricultural work. They would often work without pay. Valmiki writes:

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 was younger or of the same age, then ‘Abey Chuhre’ was used. (Valmiki, 2)

The Dalits were not properly paid for their labour. The Chuhras were not considered human. Omprakash Valmiki writes about the experience of humiliation and social discrimination in school. Hiram Singh, one of Valmiki’s friends, was married off. When Hiram Singh went to bride’s home as a matter of custom, the bridegroom would go to greet the people at the houses where his mother-in-law worked. When Hiram Singh went with Valmiki, the upper caste women behaved insultingly. At every home, where Hiram’s mother-in-law worked, the drummer stopped and Hiram’s mother-in-law called out the women of the home very politely. Hiram’s mother-in-law would say, “Chaudhrian, do I have three or four other daughters that any other sons-in-law will come to your door? Please give something so that I can send my daughter away honourably…” (31)

Though Hiram’s mother had been working for a long time, there was no change in the treatment of the upper caste women, who would comment, “The stomachs of these Chuhras are never filled.”(31) The women offered one-rupee note to
Hiram Singh. The women commented, “However much you study...you will still remain a Chuhra.”(32) Therefore, Valmiki argued with his father Chotalal to abandon this kind of practice. In response, his father said, “Munshiji, [Valmiki’s nickname] sending you to school has been a success... I, too, have understood your point...We will now break this custom”. (32) Valmiki’s father refused to send his sons to Salaam. Valmiki’s education brought a tremendous change in his family.

Another incident of discrimination that Valmiki reveals is his experience at Tyagi Inter College in Muzaffarnagar. In the Tyagi Inter College, Phool Singh Tyagi was the physical education teacher. Phool Singh Tyagi punished the children for silly reasons. Once Ram Singh, a Chuhra by caste, was severely punished by Phool Singh. For that simple reason Phool Singh Tyagi commented Ram singh, “Abey brother-in-law, progeny of a Chuhra, let me know when you die. You think you are a hero. Today I am going to draw oil from tresses.”(47) Though all the other teachers and the Principal were watching the scene, no one stopped Phool Singh because they could not worry about the Chuhra boy. Valmiki writes:

Whatever effect the beating had on Surjan Singh, this is humane act remains fresh in my memory. The same terror
overtakes my consciousness when I think of that day. Surjan Singh had not done anything and yet he was beaten up. If laughing was a crime, we had all laughed. Then why was only Surjan Singh punished. (48)

The incident lead to Surjan Singh’s indifference to his studies and went back to Dehradun. The upper caste Tyagis always tried to humiliate Valmiki by calling his caste ‘Chuhra.’

Another incident is about Valmiki’s experience at Brajpal Singh Tyagi’s place. He was a Chemistry teacher at Tyagi Inter College. One day Brijpsl Singh Tyagi asked Bhikuram to go to his village near Devband. Valmiki felt exited to accompany Bhikuram and left for the village by bicycle. The two boys reached the village. They started their journey early in the morning and reached the teacher’s village. After that the boys were called in to have lunch. When food was ready to be served, Valmiki was hesitant due to his low caste status. After having the meal, Bhikuram sat down and Valmiki was standing at a short distance from the elder one. The elder one, knowing the two boys from Barla, asked Straight way, “What is your caste?” Valmiki answered, “We are of the Chuhra caste.” (51)

Listening to Valmiki’s caste, the old man lifted a heavy stick and hit Bhikuram on his back. Supporting the old man, many
people suggested that the two boys should be tied to a rope and hung from the trees. This incident disturbed Valmiki.

The Tyagi teachers too had insulted the untouchable children for very baseless reasons. Valmiki wrote about the cruel behaviour of Omdatta Tyagi, an upper caste English teacher. Whenever Valmiki approached Omdatta either on academic or personal problems, he made Valmiki aware of his caste, Bangi.

In 1965, when Valmiki was in class eleven, Narendra Kumar Tyagi was appointed as a lecturer of mathematics. Once, Narendra Kumar Tyagi asked Valmiki to go and bring him a glass of water from the pitcher. Valmiki said to him, “Master Saheb, I am not permitted even to touch those pitchers. Please send someone else.” As the master asked for the reason, Valmiki replied quietly “I belong to the Chuhra caste.” and continued, “If you still want me to get you water, I will go.” (64-65) The master said, “No, sit down.” and went himself to get water. Valmiki opines that the teacher was a coward and did not have courage to drink water from his hand.

Valmiki joined DAV College, Dehradun. He lived in Indresh Nagar, a distant village from Dehradun. But he never missed the first class which starts at 7 AM. Valmiki and his friend came to know about the Ordnance Factory, Dehradun and abandoned his
college education. Valmiki writes, “I knew absolutely nothing about the work before my induction into the factory. All I knew was that I don’t want to go into the line of work that my ancestor had been doing for thousands of years.”(77) Valmiki left for Jabalpur and later to Bombay for draftsman training. Wherever he went, humiliation and discrimination accompanied him. In Bombay Valmiki got met Sadahiv Kulkari, a Maharastrian Brahmin, whose family did not know that Valmiki was a Chuhra. Once, Valmiki met Professor Kamble at the Kulkarni’s place. Mrs. Kulkarni offered the Prof. Kamble a cup of tea. While drinking tea, Valmiki noticed Kamble’s cup which was different from the cups offered to the rest of them. Latter Valmiki came to know about it, “As I listened to him, my ears started to boil as though someone had poured mercury into them.”(95)

Valmiki’s interaction with Kulkarni’s family led to Kulkarni’s daughter, Savitha falling in love with him. She thought that Valmiki was a Brahmin. When she had leant the caste of Valmiki, she started to cry. Valmiki writes, “She started cry as though my being an SC was a crime. She sobbed for a log 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.” (98). The caste led to the permanent separation between Savitha and Valmiki and they never met again.

After getting job in the Ordnance Factory in Chanda [Chandrapur], Valmiki married Chandakala whom he calls Chanda. In Chandrapur Valmiki got acquainted with many people and he met Kureishi at Poetry reading. Kureishi was a Sub-Inspector of Police. Valmiki and Kureishi became good friends and whenever Kureishi went on night duty, he left his wife at Valmiki’s place. Once Valmiki was informed by Kureishi that the new Commandant of the DSC has come on transfer from Valmiki’s place. Though Valmiki had secondary interest in meeting the new DSC, Kureishi convinced him to go and meet the DSC. Valmiki and Kureishi left for the DSC’s bungalow. As soon as Kureishi introduced Valmiki to the DSC, the DSC asked about the caste of Valmiki, “The moment I said that my caste was Chuhra, he became uneasy. Suddenly all conversation stopped as though there was nothing left to talk about”. (115) Though it was common experience to Valmiki, it was new for Kureishi. The next day when Kureishi met the Commandant, the latter said:
Kureishi Saheb, he is considered a low caste in our district. He and his likes are not allowed to cross the threshold, and here you are socializing with him, even dining with him.(115)

From that moment onwards, Kureishi did not meet the Commandant as Valmiki and he grew closer.

Valmiki had been insulted everywhere because of his ‘Chuhra’ tag. He states, “The last part of my name which is also called the surname, has landed me in a lot of dire situations because of its function as a marker of caste.”(127). Some of Valmiki’s friends considered his surname a signifier of a courageous act, “when an untouchable, a person from a caste considered low, uses his caste name as his surname, with a feeling of self-assertion, he is being very brave.” But one gentleman commented, “What is so brave about that? ... After all, his is a Chuhra. His surname spares us the hassle of asking what his caste is.” (124)

The family members of Valmiki also were bothered by his surname. Valmiki’s wife Chanda preferred their gotra name ‘Khairwal’ instead of Valmiki. Despite being illiterate, Valmiki’s father had been pleased when he found out that Valmiki used his last name. But Valmiki’s wife had different mindset about
using his surname ‘Valmiki’. She said to Valmiki, “If we had a child, I would definitely have made you change your surname.”(126) whenever Valmiki heard such comments from his wife, he reacted “Yet such comments do torment me. I become unsettled when I hear them.”(126)

Valmiki experienced discrimination within the family due to his surname. He found his name missing in the list of names on the wedding card of Manju, one of his relatives, “It is easy to battle against the outsiders; the most arduous battle has to be fought against one’s own.” (129) Yet, he did not give up his determination and stood as a symbol of self assertion. Getting inspiration form Valmiki, Mahendra Bainiwal, an emerging poet expressed his desire to use ‘Valmiki’ as his surname. Valmiki writes, “We Valmiki and Bainiwal had a long correspondence on the matter. He used Valmiki for some time but later changed to Bainiwal.” (130)

Once Valmiki was invited to give a lecture on ‘Buddhist Literature and Philosophy’ at a conference. A member of the audience shouted, “How can a ‘Valmiki’ be allowed to speak on Buddhist literature and philosophy? Aren’t you ashamed?” (131). But Valmiki silenced him with his excellent speech on the pervasive spread of casteism in the Hindu society.
In 1980, Valmiki was returning to Chandrapur from a trip to Rajasthan. Valmiki and his wife have seats in the Pink City express from Jaipur. Near them, there was a prosperous family, husband, wife, and two small children. They entered into a conversation. The office’s wife asked, “what is your caste?”(133) and before his wife replied, Valmiki answered that they belonged to ‘Bangi.’ Since then, there was no communication between the two families during the rest of the journey. Valmiki writes, “A wall had come up between us, as though we had disturbed their enjoyment by encroaching on them through a trap door. The atmosphere had turned oppressive, the journey had become very painful. (133)

To overcome the experiences of discrimination, Valmiki develop resilience. Valmiki writes:

When caste is the basis of respect and merit, important for social superiority, this battle can’t be won in a day. We need an ongoing struggle, and a consciousness of struggle a consciousness that brings revolutionary change both in the outside world and in the our hearts a consciousness that leads the process of social change.” (132)

Similar to the experiences of discrimination by Limbale and Jadav, Valmiki also traces out the genesis of the caste
discrimination and its influence on Dalit even among the educated.

**IV**

Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) is considered the manifesto of Dalit women. Maya Pandit observes, “Like most Dalit autobiographies, *The Prisons We Broke* is an expression of protest against the inhuman conditions of existence to which the Hindu caste system has subjected the Dalit for thousands of years?” She notes that after Phule and Shahu Maharaj, it was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who provided the intellectual and ideological foundations for a sustained critique of the caste system and that under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, Dalit protest acquired the form and force of a militant political movement and challenged the very foundations of Hinduism.

Baby Kamble raises certain important issues like caste discrimination, women subjugation and the influence of Dr. Ambedkar on Dalit women to get themselves educated both socially and culturally. Kamble writes about caste discrimination that the poor Mahars went under. Mahars were treated as untouchable servants ‘yeskars.’ By doing yeskar jobs, the Mahars would get bhakris (leftover food) which they eat after drying them in the sun. Mahars are not allowed to use the
regular road that is used by the upper castes. Kamble writes, “When somebody from these castes walked from the opposite direction, the Mahars had to leave the road, climb down into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the road side.” (Kamble, 52)

The Mahar women would beg for the mercy of the upper castes. Every new bride had to adopt and follow this custom. If they failed, they would be severely warned by the upper castes as well as Mahars. If anyone failed to beg for mercy of the upper castes, the master would simply explode in rage and come straight to the Mahar chawdi and call the new bride a shameless bitch. Kamble writes, “Who, just tell me, who the hell is that new girl? Doesn’t she know that she has to bow down to the master? Shameless bitch! How dare she pass me without showing due respect?” (53)

The elderly women from the Mahar community would fall on the feet of the master and beg for his mercy. The poor Mahars would request the master, “No, no kind master! The girl is a new animal in the herd! Quite foolish and ignorant. If she has erred, I, her sasra, fall at your feet, but please forgive us for this crime.” (53) The newly married bride is called ‘an animal in the herd’ and whatever she did is treated as crime.
From the foregoing discussion, it may be understood that the institutionalization of caste and untouchability in the Hindu social order cause insult and humiliation to the Dalits leading to forced exclusion and isolation. The Dalits are physically excluded from the high caste locality in rural area. The Dalits are not entitled to any civic, social, cultural and religious rights. The social movements and education resulted in the growth of self-respect and assertion of the Dalit self. The four autobiographies that have been examined are indicative of the fact that solution to the discrimination lies in the self-respect and asserting the self. Sharankumar Limbale, Narendra Jadav, Omprakash Valmiki and Baby kamble proved in their respective autobiographies that the Dalits need not be ashamed of their caste. Liberation from the Dalit discrimination and humiliation lies in self-respect.

The following chapter “Writing Dalit Gender: Dalit among Dalits:” focuses on the aspect of the aspects of Dalit gender.

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1 Limbale, Sharan Kumar, *The Outcaste*, New Delhi, OUP, 2003, 36. (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).

2 Impure, incomplete, an illegitimate child.


5 Jadav, Narendra, *Outcaste*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, IX.
   (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).

6 A village servant.

   (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).


9 Kamble, Baby, 52. (Subsequent references to this addition with page numbers are given in parenthesis).

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