

# Examining Dalit Defiance and Solidarity against RSS' Hindu Nationalism in Bhanwar Meghwashi's Memoir I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS

**Prakash Dhule<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Grishma Khobragade<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Mumbai

<sup>2</sup>Head & Associate Professor, Department of English, B. K. Birla College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Kalyan, Affiliated to University of Mumbai

## Abstract

Indian society often represented as 'homogeneous Hindu society' through different Brahmanical hegemonic narratives. These portrayals consciously ignore Dalit counter-culture historical records. Despite of modern development, scientific advancements and democratic progress, the norms of caste hierarchy, discriminations, exploitations and the concept of 'pollution' are still evident in Brahmanical Hinduism. The caste norms are carried on through different religious sects, new incarnations of certain gods, cultural organizational set up and by way of sacred rituals of Vedic religion. The notion of pollution strictly followed against the Dalit which include women, backward caste, untouchables and Adivasis. The paper critically examines Dalit defiance and solidarity in response to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) Hindu nationalism in Bhanwar Meghwashi's memoir, I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS (2020). The analysis explores manifestations of RSS Hindu Nationalism and Dalits personal and collective defiance and solidarity emphasizing forms of resistance ranging from overt protest to subtle everyday refusal of RSS nationalistic narratives. Employing Culture studies and Dalit studies lenses, the paper evaluates how memoir exposed RSS claim of 'uniform Hindu identity' that often perpetuates caste exclusion under the guise of Hindu unity. Furthermore, it investigates how Dalits personal as well as collective actions and works help to foster community togetherness and political mobilization to expose Brahmanical notion of 'harmony and Hindu unity'.

**Keywords:** RSS, Hindu Nationalism, Caste, Dalits, Defiance, Solidarity etc.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bhanwar Meghwashi's memoir I Could not be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS critiques RSS ideology and organizational structure from the viewpoint of insider and reveals Dalit defiance and solidarity against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) Hindu nationalism. Born in 1975 into weaver family considered as Dalit in Rajasthan. His experiences of caste based discriminations, humiliations and silence on it in RSS organizational structures forced him to disassociate with

organization's affiliation. After separation of RSS, he works to spread awareness about Dalit history and culture among the Dalit communities in Rajasthan. The memoir divided into fifty-one parts that dismantle the 'Brahmanical utopia of Hindu nationalism of RSS' and expose presence of caste the covertly and overtly followed in the RSS and its subsidiary organizations.

The significance of this narrative lies in its author's insider account of the RSS, its functions and his personal 'experiences of caste discriminations' and 'humiliations' on the basis of his outcaste status in society and RSS attitudes towards current conflict in society. It also exposed the Brahmanical narratives that denied the existence of caste in contemporary Indian society and posits challenge before RSS and its subsidiary organizations uncovering their hypocritical behavior. It depicts alternative culture to combat with Brahmanical hegemonic culture through juxtaposing dominant narratives of history and of alternative history records together. The present paper investigates Dalit defiance and solidarity against RSS' Hindu nationalism and its enduring relevance in combating with Brahmanical hegemonic forces in present society.

## 2. RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVE

The rationale of this study is, despite of modernity, development and scientific advancement in India, Dalits continue to face systemic caste violence, discrimination and social exclusion. Recent incidents of caste atrocities on Dalit across the country highlight a grim reality of untouchability practices where Dalit lives are undervalued, beaten and forced to drink urine, stripped, naked paraded, physical assault, casteist slurs, boycotted in social, economic and religious spaces. Revisits of these incidents lead to the practices of 'pollution' that necessitates to identify new forms of untouchability in contemporary India. Bhanwar Meghwashi's *I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS* documented instances of caste discrimination and untouchability. Amid the Dalit literary world, this book is new addition from Rajasthan and remain unexplored in existing knowledge of research. Scholarly gaps persists in analysing it's from the perspectives of Culture studies and Dalit studies. The present memoir offers timely insights into caste hierarchies, new forms of untouchability and its impact on the body and mind of Dalit and their defiance and solidarity to challenge Dalit exclusion in society.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief literature reviews related to the study create the context and justification of the present study. The writings of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar highlight Dalit history, culture, movement, Dalit defiance and solidarity against Brahmanical hegemony and caste discrimination in India. Gail Omvedt's *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873-1930* (2011) traces cultural and political rebellion of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra against caste system.

Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread: Translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (2009) documented intersections of Dalit defiance and solidarity against caste oppression and atrocities. Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004) defines the distinctive aesthetic of Dalit literature, its revolutionary forms and arguing for separate critical framework based on equality, freedom and justice. Recent studies include Shyamlal's *Ambedkar and Dalit Movement with Special*

Reference to Rajasthan (2008), The Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Literature (2012) edited by Ravikumar and R. Azhagarasan, The Oxford India Anthology of Telugu Dalit Writing (2016) edited by K. Purushotham, Gita Ramaswamy and Gogu Shyamala records caste oppression, critique of Brahmanical Hinduism, revival of Dalit history, culture and resistance in society. The present paper addresses the gap in earlier research to offer analysis of Bhanwar Meghwansi memoir from the critical lenses of Culture and Dalit studies.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative study employs close textual and critical discourse analysis of I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS (Translated from the Hindi by Nivedita Menon, 2022), coding theme like RSS Hindu Nationalism, caste discriminations, untouchability practices, Dalit defiance and solidarity. Cultural studies guides to examine power structures and encourages critical thinking to improve social relationships and power structures and Dalit studies focus on presence of caste in different fields and its impact on Dalits. It also provides alternative cultural practices to counter it. Primary source: Bhanwar Meghwashi's memoir I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS; Secondary: scholarly monographs. Limitations: Analysis is based on selected primary and secondary sources.

#### 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

##### TRACING THE GENESIS OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

The genesis of caste system lied in Varna (four-fold caste system) where caste is prescribed as religious notion, tradition and racial division through sacred religious ritual practices of Brahmanical Hinduism. It is, the hierarchical caste-based social order, governed by the notion of purity and pollution. Brahmanical Hinduism promotion of virtues and contamination as sacred notion followed by some people as religious doctrine in society. The membership of caste ascribed by birth only to men and by default it becomes closed group of caste. These genesis of caste can be traced from the endogamy, patriarchy and religious codes of punishment for its deviations prescribed by Brahmin priestly class. Brahmin caste is the originators of caste system because they had customs of sati, compulsory widowhood, child marriage and celibacy for men. It was strictly followed in only Brahmin caste. In this regards, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his essay Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development observes, "These customs in all their strictness are obtainable only in one caste, namely Brahmins, who occupy the highest place in the social hierarchy of the Hindu society; and as their prevalence in non-Brahmin castes is derivative of their observance is neither strict nor complete... the strict observance of these customs and the social superiority arrogated by the priestly class in all ancient civilizations are sufficient to prove that they were the originators of this "unnatural institution" founded and maintained through these unnatural means" (15). The important characteristics of caste are endogamy, patriarchy, misogyny and enmity with fellow caste and other cultures. The primary function of caste is to maintain ritual based caste hierarchy where Brahmin men at the top of structure and control the religious rituals authority. The beneath three caste namely Kshatriya (kings and warrior), Vaishya (traders and agricultural castes) and Shudra (mere servant of above mentioned caste) are bound to follow the religion interpretations of Brahmin priests (men). Shudra place in caste system is very complex because despite being fourth Varna in caste

hierarchy faced heinous atrocities and become slave of above caste. Brahmanical Hinduism sacred scriptures like Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Dharma sutras, Manusmriti and other texts enunciate and reiterated the four-fold caste system as sacred religious tradition. Rigveda states:

Brahmanno –asya mukham-aasid Bahu rajanyah khrtah|  
Uru tad-asya yad-Vaisyah Padbhyam sudro ajayata||12||

The Brahmanas were his mouth, the kshatriyas become his arms, the vaishyas were his thighs, and the shudras were assigned to his feet.

Purusha Sukta, (verse 11)

Srimad Bhagavad Gita, a part of lager epic of Mahabharata, carried the tradition of Varna system. Krishna says:

The four orders of society (the Brahmana, the Ksatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra) were created by Me classifying them according to the mode of Prakrti predominant in each and apportioning corresponding duties to them; though the author of this creation, know Me, the immortal Lord, to be a non-doer.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita (4/13)

Manusmriti, the religious and penal code of Brahmanical Hinduism also advocates the four-fold caste system and also prescribed punishment for its deviation.

10.4. Brahmana, the Kshatriya, and the Vaisya castes (Varna) are the twice-born ones, but the fourth, the Sudra, has one birth only; there is no fifth (caste).

These religious scriptures advocated the society on the basis of four-fold caste division. However, Manusmriti clearly defined the social positions and duties of the above twice born caste namely Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishiya. It states “the Brahmana is the lord of (all) castes (Varna)” (10.1) and “Brahmana alone teach” (10.3) Veda to twice born caste. These scriptures provides authoritative position to Brahmin caste especially to priests. The genesis of caste and outcaste lied in ritual supremacy of Brahmin caste. It also states that there are only four caste and no fifth caste group exist. These code by default creates other outcaste groups such as women, backward caste, untouchables and Adivasis. The notion of pollution is attached with these groups and carried on through various religious sects and cultural organizational institutions.

## OUTCASTE (SOCIALLY-CULTURALLY ISOLATED) PEOPLE OF INDIA

A large group of people, socially and culturally distinct from the four-tier caste system, were forcibly excluded and confined outside the village inhabited by the caste groups in Indian society. The root cause of the outcaste status lay in the pollution norms embedded within the four-fold caste system. Traditionally, the outcaste ghettos were prohibited from forming social connections with the caste society and accessing its resources. They were compelled to reside outside the village and remained entirely dependent on the caste society for their livelihood.

Different nomenclature are used to refer to these people in different historical periods, such as Untouchables, Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes and currently Dalits. The hegemonic caste rules were reinforced through the norms of caste hierarchy and untouchability, deeply rooted in Vedic religious philosophy. This system functions as a mechanism that enables the Brahmin caste to maintain and exercise spiritual power over other castes within the caste hierarchy and outside of it.

One of the most prevalent forms of untouchability involved the enforcement of social and economic boycotts against Dalits. The genesis of Dalit identity lies in centuries of systematic socio-economic exclusion based on the notion of pollution upheld by the Four-fold caste system (Varna system). This group was compelled to perform tasks deemed polluting according to caste norms, such as cremation, handling dead bodies, skinning animals, cleaning bodily fluids and excreta (including manual scavenging). They were entirely excluded from the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres of caste society. Any attempt to transcend these caste boundaries was met with severe physical and psychological punishments. This notion of pollution is not merely a historical phenomenon but continues to influence contemporary public life. This is evident through careful examination of caste culture and its religious texts. Shyamlal in his book Ambedkar and Dalit Movement with Special Reference to Rajasthan writes about the notion of pollution of caste Hindus against Dalit in Rajasthan, "The sociocultural history of Rajasthan shows the conservative attitude of the orthodox Hindus and the discrimination against the untouchable in the matter of admission to schools, entry into temples, ride on a horse by bridegroom, etc. were because of the customary rules of pollution. Since they were untouchable, they could not violate social norms" (91). This demonstrates that caste society excludes Dalits because they are not part of the sacred traditions of the caste system. Dalits faced discrimination across the social, political, economic, and cultural structures of Brahmanical Hinduism.

## RSS HINDU NATIONALISM AND CONTINUANCE OF CASTE SYSTEM

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a far-right Hindu nationalist organization that operates through its affiliated groups across social, political, economic and cultural domains. It was founded in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and his associates in Nagpur. The primary objective of the organization is to "weld together the diverse groups within the Hindus Samaj and to revitalize and rejuvenate the same on the basis of Dharma and Sanskriti" (2) both India and globally.

The organizational structure of the RSS is divided into two levels: Vicharaks (Thinkers), who propagate the ideology of the RSS and Vistaraks, volunteers who work within various affiliated organizations to disseminate the activities and ideology of the RSS. The RSS ideology is propagated through daily gatherings of Swayamsevaks at Shakhas (RSS units) as well as meetings, conferences, workshops and rallies. The RSS conceptualizes the nation as comprising social groups such as Race (synonym for caste), religion, culture and language. Additionally, the organization employs the religious philosophy of Brahmanical Hinduism, along with its texts, symbols and rituals to instil Brahmanical ideology among the masses. The use of Sanskrit-infused Hindi in the Shakha gatherings creates a distinctly religious atmosphere. Currently, six men serve as the heads (Sarsanghchalak) of the organization, five of whom belong exclusively to the Brahmin caste. In this regard, Jean Dreze writes:

The Hindutva project is good deal for the upper caste, since it effectively stands for the restoration of the traditional social order that places them at the top. As one might expect, the RSS is particularly popular among the upper castes. Its founders, incidentally, were all Brahmins, as were all the RSS chiefs so far except one (Rajendra Singh, a Rajput), and many other leading figures of the Hindutva movement – Savarkar, Hedgewar, Golwalkar, Nathuram Godse, Syama Prasad Mukherjee, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Mohan Bhagwat, Ram Madhav, to name a few. Over time, of course, the RSS has expanded its influence beyond the upper caste, but the upper caste remain their most loyal reliable base.

The predominance of Brahmin caste in the decision-making positions within the RSS indicates the organization's commitment to reviving caste-based hierarchy and promoting the philosophy of Brahmanical Hinduism within its structure. The literatures produced by the RSS and the various programs organized by its affiliated groups confirm its efforts to restore the Brahmanical hierarchy grounded in religious scriptures. In short, RSS Hindu nationalism is deeply rooted in the supremacy of Brahmanical ritualistic authority in society.

From its inception, the RSS has maintained a clear stance on caste, endorsing the caste system and defending its significance through religious texts such as the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Manusmriti and other sacred Sanskrit scriptures. The second chief of the organization Madadev Sadashiv Golwalkar in his book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, upheld the 'Varna-caste system' (54), "eulogised the Manusmriti", (55) "portrayed the past as a golden era" (62) and defended the caste system. In another of his book entitled *Bunch of Thoughts*, Golwalkar explains that "the Dharma is a way of life". It must be noted that by Dharma he means Varnadharma and not religion. While glorifying the Varnashram system he wrote under the title 'Nation and its Problems': "Society was conceived of as the four-fold manifestation of the Almighty to be worshipped by all, each in his own way and according to his capacity" (107). In addition, in the same book he defends the caste, "Castes there were in those ancient times too, continuing for thousands of years of our glorious national life. There is nowhere any instance of it having hampered the progress or disrupted the unity of society. It, in fact, served as a great bond of social cohesion" (108). Further, he praise the caste system notes, "If the caste system had really been the root cause of our weakness, then our people should have succumbed to foreign invasion far more easily than those people who had no castes" (108).

The works and writings of M. S. Golwalkar are regarded as sacred within the RSS. Consequently, the RSS strongly supports the caste system and advocates for samarasata (social cohesion) rather than samata (social equality). It upholds the belief that each caste should preserve its distinct identity and continue to exist, rejecting the notion of caste annihilation. Thus, RSS nationalism is rooted in the Brahmanical hierarchy in society and this ideology is disseminated through both official and unofficial channels such as *Organiser*, *Panchajanya*, and others. In this context, Srinivasan Ramanujan, in his article entitled *The RSS and the Making of the Ideal Hindu: Faith, Power, and Untouchability*, observes:

The entire caste structure operates on the binary of the idea of the Brahmin and untouchability. While Brahmanism in the medieval period shaped the practice of untouchability, the idea of being Hindu is intrinsically tied to the designation of certain people as 'Untouchables'. The RSS is an organisation that seeks to combine Brahminism (the ideal Brahmin/untouchability) and Hinduism

(the ideal Hindu/Untouchables), functioning as a Hindu math, akin to the traditional maths of various religious groups.

It exhibits that the concept of caste traditionally operates on a binary framework, distinguishing Brahmins from untouchables. Over time, this binary expanded to include specific occupations deemed "polluted," thus deepening social stratification. In the twentieth century, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) sought to unify these opposing cultural elements under the banner of 'Hindu Unity.' However, this unification did not dissolve caste distinctions; rather, caste remained central to the RSS's social and ideological functions, reflecting a continuity of hierarchical structures despite the rhetoric of unity.

## **DALIT DEFIANCE AND SOLIDARITY AGAINST RSS CULTURAL HOMOGENEITY IN THE MEMOIR**

Bhanwar Meghwashi's memoir, *I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS*, offers an insider perspective on the experiences of a Dalit within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The memoir highlights the ongoing struggle between Dalits and RSS Hindu nationalism, exposing the deep-rooted conflict between caste and outcaste groups within Indian society. This auto-narrative articulates Dalit resistance and collective solidarity in opposition to the RSS's vision of 'Hindu unity,' emphasizing the tensions and contradictions inherent in attempts to unify diverse social groups under a nationalist framework that continues to uphold caste hierarchies. The author of the auto-narrative joined the RSS basic unit (Shakha) in his village at the age of twelve, encouraged by his geography teacher, Banshilal Sen. As a curious student eager to understand the world around him, he often asked questions. When his geography teacher explained in class that the sun is a "ball of fire," and contradict himself at the Shakha, saying "the sun is a god". Confused, Bhanwar asked his teacher, "Gurudev, is the sun a god or a ball of fire?" (27). His teacher silenced him by saying that in the Shakha, the sun is regarded as a god, while in school, it is described scientifically as a ball of fire. Bhanwar Meghwanshi's strong desire to understand did not allow him to remain silent during RSS meetings. He frequently questioned fellow members and higher authorities about the ideology and functions of the RSS to grasp its structure and principles. When told that the 'Flag is their Guru,' he asked, "How a lifeless object like the flag guide us the way a guru should?" (55). His habit of questioning fostered a deeper understanding of the subjects and encouraged critical thinking. While traveling by train to Ayodhya to demolish the Babri Masjid, an Islamic place of worship, Bhanwar Meghwashi observed that all the prominent members (the so-called upper caste individuals) of the RSS disembarked. Bhanwar questioned the behavior of these upper caste members, noting that only the outcaste individuals were proceeding to demolish the Babri Masjid. He asked, "What was happening? Why were they getting off? Will the RSS pracharaks stay back as well? Won't they accompany us?" (18). Through these questions, he expressed his personal defiance toward the functions and ideology of the RSS.

Bhanwar Meghwanshi's journey within the RSS began as a volunteer at the basic unit level and progressed to the position of district president. As an active member, he became aware of the role caste played in the organization's functions and hierarchy. Although the RSS officially denied the existence of caste within its structure, it nonetheless maintained a caste-based hierarchy. Bhanwar also observed that

the most ardent supporters of the Sangh were Brahmins and Baniyas, both groups enjoying significant social privileges. When Bhanwar expressed his desire to become a thinker (pracharak), the district pracharak ridiculed his intellect, saying, "You people think too much and you are only strong above the neck, not physically... we don't really want people like you, vicharaks who are constantly questioning and thinking" (66). He was told that due to his social position, he would not be accepted as a pracharak in society. While appreciating his ideals, the pracharak emphasized the reality of caste in society and highlighted his outcaste status. The district pracharak of the RSS said to Bhanwar Meghwashi:

It's all very well that you're excited about becoming a pracharak, but our society is very complicated. Tomorrow, someone asks you your name, your village, your samaj [he said community but meant my caste], and the moment he realises that pracharak-ji is from a marginalized community, his attitude to you might change. You would have to swallow the insult. I can see this and it's why I'm telling you. You will be upset, want to retaliate. Arguments will follow. All this will weaken the work of the Sangh, not strengthen it. My advice is to remain a vistaraka for a while and serve the nation in that capacity. (64-65)

After this incident, Bhanwar realized that within the RSS, he was regarded as a lesser Hindu compared to the caste Hindus. He was frequently mocked for his habit of questioning. During the Asthi Kalash (funerary urn) welcome ceremony he organized in the Dalit ghetto, many so-called sadhus, saints of the RSS and office bearers of subsidiary organizations arrived in the village. Bhanwar arranged food for all the guests, but when he invited them to his home for a meal, there was a sudden hesitation among the participants, as they were aware it was a Dalit household. One office bearer from a subsidiary organization took Bhanwar aside, praised his work in the Sangh for nation-building affectionately, and then said:

Friend, you are aware of the inequality in our society. Despite all the efforts of the Sangh, Hindu society has not become one. As far as we ourselves are concerned, we would sit down with you any day and eat from the same plate, but today there are sadhu-sants and others also here. They will be really upset if without informing them, we give them food from a lower caste home. They could be so angry they might leave. (82)

He tried to convince Bhanwar that the organization did not endorse untouchability but the presence of the sadhus, saints, and others prevented them from dining in the Dalit ghetto. At the end of their conversation, he instructed Bhanwar to pack the food and place it in the car, promising to serve it to them in the next village. However, the food packed from the Dalit household was discarded near the village and the guests had their meal at an upper-caste home. Upon learning of this, Bhanwar was deeply upset and sought clarification from various levels within the organization but received no response. Their silence on caste discrimination and untouchability practices troubled him profoundly, leading him to contemplate ending his life. Yet, even in this despair, he continued to question himself: Were they the masters of his life? Was the Sangh's love or hatred a reason to live or die? Why should he die? Why did he need their approval? Who were they to dictate the course of his thoughts and his life? Why was he still with them? Why was he working alongside such petty, narrow-minded, hypocritical people? Why was he contributing to a Hindu Rashtra that would discriminate against him? (91)

Subsequently, Bhanwar Meghwashi recognized that the RSS did not merely exclude him personally but marginalized entire outcaste communities. This realization motivated him to raise awareness about caste discrimination and untouchability practices embedded within the RSS's ideology and operations. His persistent questioning nurtured critical thinking, leading him to engage with alternative Dalit histories. This enabled him to challenge the assumptions upheld by the RSS and prevalent in broader society, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the Brahmanical religion promoted by the organization. His critical approach enhanced both individual and collective capacities to analyze information, assess evidence and form well-informed opinions on these issues. Bhanwar's inquiries inspired not only himself but also other Dalits to explore new ideas, identify instances of discrimination, seek solutions and demand transparency and accountability from religious and political power structures within the Indian republic. Through his persistent questioning, he exposed the hypocritical nature of the RSS in its societal role. After the refusal of RSS, he tried to take revenge through religious conversion into Christianity and started reading alternative writings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste, riddles in Hinduism, Manusmriti, Sant Kabir, E.V. Ramaswami Periyar, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and others critical works on RSS and accept that "Ambedkarite and humanist thought liberated me from the mental slavery. Egalitarian thought changed the direction of my life" (117).

Bhanwar Meghwashi's personal experiences of exclusion and confrontation with the RSS revealed that Dalit defiance and solidarity extend beyond mere opposition; they embody an assertion of a distinct Dalit consciousness inspired by Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Through continuous reading and writing, Bhanwar raised awareness among Dalits about their constitutional rights and the caste-based discrimination and untouchability practices within the RSS. Utilizing his knowledge and organizational skills, he worked to establish alternative associations aimed at combating discrimination and inequality. Together with his friends, he founded a student organization to challenge the RSS's student wing (ABVP), which eventually evolved into the Vidyarthi Adhikar Rakshak Sangh (VARS). This alternative body sought to protect students from casteism and communalism, promoting student politics grounded in dialogue rather than violence. Alongside his supporters, Bhanwar launched a monthly journal called Diamond India, dedicated to "combating communalism, casteism and corruption, and spreading the message of love, solidarity and humanity" (148). The journal featured investigative reports, offered alternative perspectives on a polarized society, and opposed commodification and market-driven forces. Through his work and ideas, Bhanwar challenged the RSS's ideology and actively promoted equality and a democratic social environment.

Through his writings and public speeches, Bhanwar Meghwashi critically questioned the role and treatment of Dalits and Adivasis within the RSS's vision of a Hindu Rashtra. He challenged the organization by asking, "Will we [Dalit] be used only to carry out violence? To die and to kill in riots? Of what use were lathis and trishuls to us in this nuclear age? When their own children study in English medium convent schools, why give us the slogan of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan? Humanity has reached the moon and circled Mars, while in their shakhas they still teach puranic mythology? I asked the Sangh why, in this age of science, they want to promote primitive weaponry like the trishul and a primitive Taliban mentality" (190). This interrogation highlights his rejection of the RSS's anachronistic and violent ideology, as well as his call for a more progressive, inclusive understanding of society that transcends caste-based violence and regressive symbolism.

These questions reveal the underlying agenda of the RSS toward Dalits, as the organization simultaneously propagated mythological notions of superiority among Dalits while providing modern education exclusively to their own children. Bhanwar Meghwashi's efforts exposed this hypocrisy and raised awareness among Dalits and Adivasis, prompting critical reflection on the persistent exclusion of these groups from the RSS's central leadership. Even after a century, no Dalit or Adivasis has attained a national-level position within the organization. Bhanwar posed a pointed question: "How then will Dalit and Adivasis be part of a Hindu Rashtra?" (44).

Dalits and Adivasis are often mobilized to attack religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians. Witnessing the violence and barbarism of these riots, Bhanwar asked to Dalits and Adivasis questions: "religious minority they attack, are largely from their own community, Dalits who converted out of Hinduism, seeking equality? How to make them see that it is their own blood they shed when they kill the other, and the instigators enjoy the show? Have leaders of the VHP or Bajrang Dal or RSS ever lost their lives in a riot? Even at Ayodhya, why is it that the majority who get killed are Dalits and other Backward Castes?... If they cannot understand this simple fact, how foolish are they?" (178). This critique underscores the exploitation of Dalits and Adivasis as instruments of violence within a broader ideological framework that excludes them from genuine power and recognition, thus perpetuating systemic discrimination under the guise of Hindu nationalism.

His writings and works created solidarity among Dalits and emerges as a vital counter-cultural discourse, constructed through community bonds, shared experiences and political mobilization. The defiance and solidarity of Dalit is not just reactive but proactive and reconstructive. The assertion of Dalit culture and history in RSS nationalistic framework become proponent of socio-political change. The campaign of awareness about constitutional rights provides confidence among Dalit communities to fight against socio-economic injustices and encourages them to take education and raise their voice against social, economic, political, and cultural exclusion in society. Dalit understood that for the assertions of human rights need organizational structures. Their socio-economic discriminations in contemporary society leads to the creation of many organizations. To assert the constitutional right of equality, Dalit in Suliya village launched a campaign of temple entry movement. It has gone more than three months and taught Dalit how to organize, conduct struggle and reach towards its victory.

Bhawar Meghwansi's writings and activism fostered a strong sense of solidarity among Dalits, establishing a vital counter-cultural discourse rooted in shared experiences, community bonds and political mobilization. This defiance was not merely reactive but proactive and reconstructive, positioning Dalit culture and history as agents of socio-political transformation against the RSS's nationalist framework. His campaigns to raise awareness about constitutional rights empowered Dalit communities to confront socio-economic injustices actively, encouraging education and vocal opposition to social, economic, political, and cultural exclusion. Recognizing that effective assertion of human rights required organized collective action, Dalits responded to ongoing discrimination by forming multiple organizations. For instance, the temple entry movement initiated by Dalits in Suliya village lasted over three months, teaching participants how to organize, sustain struggle, and work toward victory. This movement catalyzed the formation of the Dalit, Adivasi, and Ghumantu Rights Campaign (DAGAR), uniting marginalized groups in southern Rajasthan, including the denotified nomadic Ghumantu tribe. Youth from these communities expanded the movement's reach across several districts, strengthening marginalized voices through

sustained activism. “Young people from these communities built a powerful movement, which spread to Bhilwara, Rajsamand, Chittorhagh, Udaipur, Pali, Ajmer, and Banswada, where the voices of the marginalized were strengthened by their intervention” (214).

Bhanwar Meghwashi’s approach emphasized working within a democratic framework to achieve cultural and social change by asserting constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice. He understood that exposing the RSS’s hypocrisy particularly its claims of Hindu unity, propagation of myths and the false harmony maintained by Brahminical dominance was essential to advancing these constitutional ideals. Together with his supporters, Bhanwar challenged the RSS narrative by posing difficult questions about its organizational functions and caste-based structures, thus promoting critical awareness and resistance within the socio-political discourse.

## 6. FINDINGS

The analysis highlights several critical dimensions within *I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS*. The memoir documented how the RSS has adopted contemporary mechanism of caste hierarchies and perpetuating untouchability in less overt but structurally embedded ways. The organizational hierarchy of the RSS illustrating entrenched caste power dynamics that maintain Brahmin hegemony in RSS structures. The RSS strategically mobilizes non-Brahmin caste groups to serve its broader agenda of religious dominance, revealing complex caste alliances that reinforce hierarchical control. Dalit voices in the memoir expose the ideological inconsistencies of Hindu nationalism, which claims unity but practices exclusion based on caste. The memoir foregrounds Dalit defiance and solidarity, which carve out spaces of empowerment that challenge the homogenizing and exclusionary nature of RSS Hindu nationalism. This layered analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how caste operates within RSS Hindu nationalist structures, simultaneously revealing power, resistance, and the possibility of alternative identities and solidarities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study of Bhanwar Meghwashi’s memoir, *I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS*, reveals the persistent entrenchment of caste hierarchies within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s (RSS) Hindu nationalist framework, despite its claims of promoting Hindu unity. Through a critical lens of Cultural and Dalit studies, the memoir exposes the contradictions between the RSS’s rhetoric and its lived realities, highlighting systemic caste discrimination, untouchability practices, and Brahmanical dominance within RSS and its subsidiary organizations. Meghwashi’s personal narrative of defiance and Dalits solidarity not only challenges the RSS’s exclusionary ideology but also exemplifies the emergence of a proactive Dalit consciousness striving for socio-political transformation. His activism and writings foster Dalits community empowerment, constitutional awareness, and collective mobilization that resist caste oppression and promote egalitarian values. Ultimately, the memoir underscores the enduring need to confront Brahmanical hegemony and caste-based exclusion within RSS Hindu nationalism, advocating for inclusive, democratic and just social frameworks that recognize and uplift marginalized Dalit identities.

## References

1. Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb. "Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development".
2. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. I, Complied by Vasant Moon, Government of Maharashtra, 2016.
3. Dreze, Jean. "The Revolt of the Upper Castes". The India Forum; A Journal-Magazine on Contemporary issues. 18 February, 2020. [www.theindiaforum.in/article/revolt-upper-castes](http://www.theindiaforum.in/article/revolt-upper-castes)
4. Golwalkar, M.S. We or Our Nationhood Defined. Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt Ltd, 2023.
5. \_\_\_. Bunch of Thoughts. Vikrama Prakashan, 1968.
6. Meghwansi, Bhanwar. I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS. Translated by Nivedita Menon, Navayana, 2020.
7. Manusmriti. [archive.org/details/ManuSmriti\\_201601](http://archive.org/details/ManuSmriti_201601)/page/n219/mode/2up  
Gail, Omdvet. Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India, 1873-1930. Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2011.
8. Dangle, Arjun, editor. Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature.
9. Orient BlackSwan, 2009.
10. Limbale, Sharankumar. Towards an Aesthetics of dalit Literature. Orient BlackSwan, 2004.
11. Rigveda. [shlokam.org/purushasuktam/](http://shlokam.org/purushasuktam/) The Constitution of The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (Translated from the original in Hindi). Internet Archives, [dn790003.ca.archive.org/0/items/the-constitution-of-rashtriyaswayamsevaksangh/The%20Constitution%20of%20Rashtriya%20Swayamsevak%20Sangh\\_text.pdf](http://dn790003.ca.archive.org/0/items/the-constitution-of-rashtriyaswayamsevaksangh/The%20Constitution%20of%20Rashtriya%20Swayamsevak%20Sangh_text.pdf)
12. Shyamlal. Ambedkar and Dalit Movement Special Reference to Rajasthan. Rawat Publications, 2008.
13. Srimad Bhagavad Gita (Sanskrit, Hindi and English). Editor, Ashok Kaushik. Star Publications Pvt.Ltd, 1994, [ignca.gov.in/Asi\\_data/279.pdf](http://ignca.gov.in/Asi_data/279.pdf)
14. Srinivasan Ramanujam. "The RSS and the Making of the Ideal Hindu: Faith, Power, and Untouchability". Outlook, 8 October, 2025. [www.outlookindia.com/national/the-rss-and-the-making-of-the-ideal-hindu-faith-power-and-untouchability](http://www.outlookindia.com/national/the-rss-and-the-making-of-the-ideal-hindu-faith-power-and-untouchability)