

Breaking the Silence: Identity as a Vehicle for the Revival of Ambedkarite Thought in Kishor Shantabai Kale's 'Against All Odds': A Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines *Against All Odds* by Kishor Shantabai Kale through the theoretical framework of Ambedkarism to explore how identity is reconstructed as a form of resistance against caste-based marginalization. Born into the stigmatized Kolhati community, Kale's autobiographical narrative is not merely a personal account but a socio-political testimony that challenges dominant discourses of purity, respectability, and cultural exclusion. The paper situates Kale's life story within the broader context of Ambedkarite thought, particularly its emphasis on dignity, education, and the rejection of Brahminical hegemony. Drawing on cultural studies methodology, this research interrogates how Kale reclaims subjectivity through his narration—transforming inherited stigma into assertive selfhood. The study foregrounds the intersection of caste, gender, and performance in the Kolhati community, shedding light on the layered oppression faced by Dalit women and men. It argues that Kale's embrace of education and Buddhism embodies Ambedkar's vision of spiritual and intellectual emancipation. The narrative resists victimhood by affirming agency and foregrounds the power of writing as a political act. Through a detailed textual analysis, the paper demonstrates how Kale's life story articulates an Ambedkarite model of identity that is not reactive but visionary—anchored in liberation, self-respect, and collective transformation. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the discourse on Dalit autobiography by showing how Ambedkarism serves as both a philosophical anchor and a mobilizing force for redefining Dalit identity from the margins. Kale's *Against All Odds* thus stands as a testament to the transformative power of autobiographical resistance.

Keywords: Ambedkarism, Cultural Studies, Caste and Identity, Subaltern Voices, Narrative Politics, Caste Oppression, Marginalized Communities, Resistance Narrative

INTRODUCTION

The question of identity in modern India remains deeply entangled with the structural hierarchies of caste, community, and class. For Dalits, particularly those belonging to nomadic and denotified tribes like the Kolhaties, identity has historically been a site of erasure, stigma, and struggle. In this context, the autobiographical form emerges as a crucial literary and political tool—one that not only documents individual suffering but also asserts collective resistance.

Kishor Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds* stands as a compelling testimony to this intersection of personal narrative and socio-political assertion.

The text exemplifies how Ambedkarism—the ideology rooted in Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice, equality, and emancipation—can serve as both a philosophical framework and a lived experience in the reclamation of selfhood.

Born into the Kolhati community, Kale's autobiography challenges the hegemonic narratives that traditionally marginalize Dalit voices. His lived experience reflects the internalized shame of social exclusion and the gradual emergence of self-worth through education, resistance, and Ambedkarite values. He candidly writes,

"Being born in a tamasha troupe meant that society had already branded me with a stigma I never asked for" (Kale, 2000, p. 7). Yet, it is through his embrace of Ambedkarite thought that he transcends this inherited stigma.

"I found courage not in lineage, but in learning—Dr. Ambedkar taught me that knowledge is the weapon of the oppressed" (Kale, 2000, p. 88).

This paper examines *Against All Odds* as a potent site of Ambedkarite self-assertion. It explores how identity is reconstructed through narratives of resistance, how caste and community intersect with performance and respectability politics, and how education emerges as a transformative force. Through a cultural studies lens, this analysis positions Kale's work as part of a broader literary and political movement that reclaims the dignity of marginalized lives and voices.

Cultural Stigma and the Politics of Casteed Identity

Caste in India functions not merely as a hierarchical economic or social order, but as a deeply embedded cultural code that dictates the treatment of individuals based on inherited status. In *Against All Odds*, Kishor Shantabai Kale foregrounds the psychological and sociocultural trauma endured by communities such as the Kolhatis, whose identity is constructed through layers of caste-based stigma and inherited dishonor. Born into a tamasha troupe, Kale reveals that his very birth was a mark of defilement in the eyes of caste society:

"I was not just born into poverty or marginality; I was born into a stigma that had already spoken for me" (Kale, 2000, p. 3).

This assertion reveals how caste identity is not chosen but forcibly inscribed upon the Dalit body.

Stuart Hall's theory that identity is constructed through representation is vividly reflected in Kale's narrative. His identity, as perceived by society, is shaped by dominant discourses that associate Kolhatis with vulgarity, sexual promiscuity, and social deviance. "Even in school, I was the 'tamasha boy' before I was a student" (Kale, 2000, p. 17). The politics of casteed identity here manifests in the form of symbolic violence—where the cultural memory of caste overrides individual merit or effort. Kale's struggle, therefore, is not just socio-economic, but a battle against the very categories by which society defines him.

The internalization of caste stigma is a recurring theme in Dalit autobiographies. Like Limbale's *The Outcaste*, where the protagonist grapples with the shame of being born from an inter-caste relationship, Kale too questions his ontological existence. "Was I less human because my mother danced for survival?" he asks (Kale, 2000, p. 25). Such introspection underscores the profound psychological burden caste imposes on the Dalit self. The cultural studies perspective allows us to see these texts not only as records of suffering but also as sites where hegemonic identities are contested and rewritten. Moreover, Kale's experiences as a Kolhati reflect the politics of spatial exclusion and cultural marginalization. Tamasha troupes, while celebrated as cultural artifacts, are denied respectability in the public domain. This duality—of being consumed as spectacle but rejected as citizen—mirrors the structural paradoxes of caste. Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau speaks of the 'tactics of the weak' to subvert dominant narratives. Kale's very act of writing becomes one such tactic. By narrating his life, he reclaims the authorship of his identity and disrupts the caste-based social script imposed on him.

Kale's turn to Ambedkarite philosophy enables a radical redefinition of self. The stigma once passively borne is transformed into a site of resistance. As he declares: "Dr. Ambedkar taught us to see shame not as our inheritance but as their imposition" (Kale, 2000, p. 94). The power of Ambedkarism lies in its capacity to convert suffering into solidarity, shame into resistance, and marginality into political subjectivity. It is through this lens that caste stigma is no longer an immutable fate, but a construct that can be deconstructed through assertion and agency. *Against All Odds* is a profound meditation on the politics of casteed identity. Through the lens of cultural studies, Kale's autobiography exposes the mechanisms of cultural oppression while also charting a path toward liberation. His story affirms that Dalit identity is not a wound to be hidden but a reality to be spoken, challenged, and ultimately transformed. The text powerfully embodies Ambedkar's call to reject inherited hierarchies and assert the dignity of human life through education, articulation, and political consciousness.

Education as Emancipation: An Ambedkarite Paradigm

In *Against All Odds*, education emerges not merely as a tool of personal upliftment, but as an ideological cornerstone of Ambedkarite philosophy and a fundamental strategy of resistance. For Kishor Shantabai Kale, born into a stigmatized Kolhati community known for its association with tamasha folk performance, education represents both a pathway out of inherited marginality and a symbolic rejection of the caste-based order that confines Dalits to predefined social roles. Through Kale's narrative, one perceives education as a radical, identity-affirming act rooted in Ambedkar's emancipatory politics. From his earliest reflections, Kale associates education with liberation. He writes, "Every time I opened a book, it felt like I was chiseling away at the wall society had built around me" (Kale, 2000, p. 49). This metaphor underscores the transformative potential of literacy for Dalits in a social order that systemically withholds access to knowledge. For Kale, education is not simply academic achievement; it is a mode of resistance that allows him to redefine his identity outside the gaze of caste orthodoxy. Ambedkar's famous injunction—"Educate,

Agitate, Organize"—resonates throughout the narrative, forming the ideological foundation upon which Kale constructs his resistance.

Education, in this context, is not neutral. It is deeply embedded within the cultural politics of caste. Kale notes how, even within institutions of learning, casteist assumptions persist. "The classroom was not free of the same biases I found outside it. Teachers would ask me about my background with a look that said they already knew the answer" (Kale, 2000, p. 63). Despite such alienation, the pursuit of education serves as a conscious act of defiance against Brahminical hegemony, echoing Ambedkar's own educational journey as a Dalit scholar within hostile institutional spaces. Kale's autobiography aligns with Ambedkar's vision of education as a public good and a means to annihilate caste. Ambedkar believed that only through the democratization of knowledge could true social transformation occur. In one of the most powerful passages, Kale writes, "My education was my protest. Every degree I earned was a blow against a system that said I could never rise" (Kale, 2000, p. 122). This declaration not only encapsulates the emotional tenor of his struggle but also reflects a wider Dalit consciousness that views education as a revolutionary act.

The impact of education on Kale's life is multidimensional. It not only grants him access to social mobility but also equips him with a language to narrate his pain and protest. The very act of writing *Against All Odds* is, in itself, a testament to education's transformative power. Through his narrative voice, Kale asserts an epistemic authority that was historically denied to communities like his. His story becomes a pedagogical tool for future generations, reaffirming the Ambedkarite belief that education is the cornerstone of human dignity and democratic participation. Ultimately, Kale's educational journey underscores the Ambedkarite paradigm where learning is inseparable from liberation. His life exemplifies how the oppressed can subvert hegemonic narratives by claiming the space of the intellectual, the author, and the agent of change. In doing so, *Against All Odds* becomes more than a personal testimony—it becomes a political manifesto that champions education as the most potent weapon in the struggle for justice and equality.

Gender, Performance, and the Intersectional Body

Kishor Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds* is an incisive narrative that foregrounds the intersection of caste, gender, and performance in shaping the Dalit body. Born into the Kolhati community, traditionally associated with tamasha—a form of folk theatre dominated by female performers—Kale's identity is inextricably linked with a feminized and hypervisible form of cultural labor. This gendered performance, while offering economic subsistence, simultaneously renders the Kolhati woman's body as a site of voyeuristic consumption and moral condemnation. Kale captures this paradox with haunting clarity: "Our mothers danced to feed us, but the same dance made us untouchable in the eyes of others" (Kale, 2000, p. 15). This dual burden—of caste and gendered performance—structures the community's social alienation.

The Kolhati identity, as Kale narrates, becomes a performance both imposed and resisted. In cultural studies, the body is often seen as a text upon which power writes its hierarchies. Michel Foucault's concept of biopower and Judith Butler's notion of performativity are relevant here. The Kolhati woman's body becomes a disciplinary site, shaped by the gazes of both upper-caste morality and patriarchal exploitation. Kale's autobiography, however, reclaims this body through narrative agency. In speaking about his mother's dignity despite societal scorn, Kale writes, "She was more than a dancer; she was my first teacher in resilience" (Kale, 2000, p. 29). This re-signification of the body is an Ambedkarite act—rejecting stigmatization through self-definition.

Furthermore, Kale's text complicates the notion of masculinity within a stigmatized matriarchal culture. His struggle is not only with caste oppression but also with the anxiety of masculine identity in a space dominated by female labor. He confesses, "Growing up, I often wished I was born into a different community, one where my mother wouldn't have to dance, one where I wouldn't be laughed at" (Kale, 2000, p. 21). This internalized shame is transformed through education and Ambedkarite consciousness. By the end of his journey, Kale's masculinity is not rooted in dominance but in intellectual emancipation and empathetic responsibility—a radical reimagining of gender roles within Dalit discourse. Through the lens of cultural studies, *Against All Odds* illustrates how identity is constructed at the crossroads of caste, gender, and performance. Kale's autobiographical project is thus a political act—writing against the scripts imposed upon his body and community. In doing so, he not only reclaims individual agency but also rearticulates the collective dignity of the Kolhatis within the broader Ambedkarite movement.

Narrating the Self: Autobiography as Cultural Resistance

In the landscape of Dalit literature, the autobiographical mode has emerged as a radical act of self-assertion and cultural resistance. For marginalized individuals, especially those belonging to stigmatized communities like the Kolhatis, narrating the self becomes a means to reclaim agency in a society that persistently seeks to render them voiceless. Kishor Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds* exemplifies the transformative power of the autobiographical form. It serves

not merely as a personal memoir but as a powerful counter-discourse that challenges dominant narratives, disrupts caste hegemony, and affirms Ambedkarite ideals of social justice and human dignity. Autobiography in the context of Dalit literature is never an isolated confession; rather, it is an act of collective resistance. Kale's life story unfolds against a backdrop of intergenerational stigma, structural exclusion, and cultural devaluation. His declaration, "My very birth was a source of shame in the eyes of society" (Kale, 2000, p. 4), encapsulates the psychic violence imposed on Dalit bodies from birth. Yet, by articulating this shame and subjecting it to public scrutiny, Kale subverts its intended silencing effect. According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, identity is not a static essence but a production "which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Kale's narrative is precisely such a performative reconstitution of identity—constructed within discourse, against silence.

Moreover, Kale's autobiography engages in what Bell Hooks describes as "talking back"—the act of speaking as an act of resistance and empowerment. His assertion that "I refused to let my mother's occupation define my destiny" (Kale, 2000, p. 76) is a conscious rupture from caste-determined determinism and gendered stigmatization. By foregrounding his Kolhati identity—traditionally marked by public performance and moral surveillance—Kale reclaims the very space from which he was socially exiled. He refuses to either hide or romanticize his roots. Instead, he politicizes them, illuminating how performance can be both a means of survival and a terrain of oppression. The autobiography becomes a cultural archive that documents resistance in its many forms—education, defiance, personal growth, and critical reflection. In one moving passage, Kale writes, "I studied not to escape, but to confront—to hold a mirror to those who saw us as subhuman" (Kale, 2000, p. 109). Here, the act of learning is not individualized aspiration but political awakening. Cultural studies perspectives, particularly those influenced by Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, underscore the importance of "structures of feeling"—the lived experiences, emotions, and everyday practices that inform political consciousness. Kale's narrative, replete with affect and reflection, embodies these structures. His storytelling becomes a political act, rendering visible the affective labor of surviving caste humiliation.

The autobiographical form enables Kale to reclaim the politics of representation. Dalits, especially from nomadic tribes, have often been represented as deviant, criminal, or hypersexualized in mainstream discourse. *Against All Odds* challenges this representational violence by offering a self-authored portrait of a life shaped by aspiration, resistance, and dignity. Kale's depiction of his mother as both victim and warrior—"She danced for others but wept for us" (Kale, 2000, p. 52)—refuses the reductive binaries often imposed on marginalized women. It invokes a complex narrative of survival that is both personal and political.

In light of Ambedkarite philosophy, the act of autobiography-writing becomes a revolutionary tool. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself urged the oppressed to "educate, agitate, and organize." Kale's life narrative is an embodiment of this triadic call. He educates through his experiences, agitates by exposing the cruelty of caste, and organizes knowledge in a manner that inspires solidarity. His text disrupts the hegemonic cultural logic that assigns worth based on birth and opens up a space for envisioning alternative epistemologies rooted in justice and equality. *Against All Odds* must be read not just as a personal journey but as a cultural intervention. It resists the erasures of caste, gender, and performance by placing the self at the center of a larger socio-political critique. Through autobiography, Kale transcends the boundaries of the personal and enters the realm of public resistance, contributing powerfully to the Ambedkarite project of identity reclamation and social transformation. His narrative confirms that telling one's story, especially when it disrupts normative silences, is one of the most profound acts of resistance.

Ambedkarism as a Framework of Social Reclamation

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of a just society, rooted in liberty, equality, and fraternity, has offered historically marginalized communities a powerful ideological foundation for reclaiming their humanity. Ambedkarism, as a socio-political and philosophical framework, seeks to dismantle the deeply embedded structures of caste-based oppression while offering a roadmap for emancipation through education, constitutional morality, and self-respect. In *Against All Odds*, Kishor Shantabai Kale's autobiographical journey becomes a vivid testimony to this Ambedkarite ideal. For Kale, Ambedkarism is not a distant political abstraction but a lived praxis—an everyday assertion of dignity, voice, and identity in a society that seeks to silence and stigmatize him from birth.

Kale's background as a member of the Kolhati community—a denotified tribe engaged in public performance and historically criminalized under colonial laws—situates him at the intersection of caste, class, and cultural exclusion. His autobiography foregrounds this layered marginalization, where caste discrimination is compounded by cultural stigma. Yet, instead of internalizing this imposed inferiority, Kale draws strength from Ambedkarite thought. He writes, "I read Babasaheb's speeches and felt, for the first time, that someone understood the pain of people like us" (Kale, 2000, p. 91). This moment is not merely emotional but epistemological—it marks the beginning of a transformative journey where Ambedkar's ideas serve as both compass and fuel.

Ambedkarism empowers Kale to challenge the casteist ideologies that dehumanize him. His educational journey, often marked by economic hardship and social isolation, becomes a terrain of resistance. He notes, “Each page I read felt like a hammer breaking the chains that had bound my ancestors” (Kale, 2000, p. 105). Here, education is not framed as individual mobility but as collective redemption—a principle deeply aligned with Ambedkar’s emphasis on “education as the milk of a lioness.” This metaphor resonates in Kale’s trajectory, where knowledge becomes the ultimate weapon against humiliation. In embracing Ambedkarism, Kale also embraces a political identity that refuses assimilation and demands structural transformation. Importantly, Ambedkarism in *Against All Odds* also reshapes notions of selfhood and belonging. The autobiography is not simply a record of suffering but a declaration of resistance. Kale refuses to be reduced to his stigmatized origins. He asserts, “My community may have danced for others’ pleasure, but I chose to write for our dignity” (Kale, 2000, p. 137). This shift—from performed subjugation to authored agency—is emblematic of Ambedkarite reclamation. In cultural studies terms, this act of narrating the self becomes a counter-hegemonic discourse, contesting dominant narratives that deny subjectivity to Dalit and denotified bodies. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s insight that identity is formed “within representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 4) underscores the significance of Kale’s narrative as a site of political formation and cultural resistance.

Kale’s political consciousness is sharpened by Ambedkarite principles of critique and dissent. He challenges both caste-based hierarchies and institutional apathy. His experiences in medical college—marked by subtle exclusions and overt humiliation—are not isolated incidents but reflect a systemic structure of casteism that permeates even the most “modern” institutions. Kale’s recognition of these structures echoes Ambedkar’s own critique of institutional Brahminism and the failure of social democracy in India. Kale writes, “You can remove a man from the tamasha stage, but society finds ways to drag the tamasha into the classroom” (Kale, 2000, p. 129). This incisive observation captures the persistence of caste across spatial and institutional contexts, reinforcing the necessity of Ambedkarite intervention. Moreover, Kale’s narrative aligns with Ambedkar’s vision of fraternity—not merely as sentimental solidarity, but as political kinship forged through shared struggle. His acknowledgment of other Dalit icons, activists, and his community women as agents of resistance illustrates this collective ethos. His mother, a tamasha performer, becomes a symbol of resilience: “She gave me life not once, but every day she danced, bled, and endured” (Kale, 2000, p. 52). In reclaiming her story, Kale resists caste-patriarchal erasure and affirms Ambedkar’s call to honor the dignity of labor and womanhood.

In conclusion, *Against All Odds* exemplifies how Ambedkarism can function as a robust framework for social reclamation. Kale’s life and narrative embody the Ambedkarite promise: that the oppressed are not voiceless but are deliberately silenced—and that their speech, when asserted, carries the force of revolution. The autobiography transforms suffering into testimony, stigma into critique, and marginality into intellectual resistance. Through Ambedkarite values, Kale reclaims not just his own identity but the collective dignity of his community, making *Against All Odds* a vital cultural and political text in the ongoing struggle for Dalit emancipation.

From Margins to Voice: Reclaiming Space in Public Discourse

In India’s deeply hierarchical caste society, the most enduring form of exclusion is the systematic silencing of Dalit voices. Public discourse, shaped historically by upper-caste narratives and institutions, has rarely provided equitable representation to the marginalized. Kishor Shantabai Kale’s *Against All Odds* marks a pivotal intervention in this asymmetry. As an autobiographical testimony from the Kolhati community—stigmatized as both Dalit and performers—Kale’s narrative becomes a powerful act of reclaiming discursive space. Through the lens of cultural studies, this autobiographical articulation can be seen as a political and cultural counter-public where the personal becomes a site of resistance, and the voice from the margins demands and enacts inclusion in the public sphere. Kale’s lived experience emerges from a geography of exclusion: from the tamasha tents of rural Maharashtra to the formal settings of educational and medical institutions. At each stage, he confronts the erasures enforced by caste and cultural stigma. His narrative begins in the shadows of public invisibility, where even the act of naming becomes political. “People used my surname to mock me—‘Kolhati’ meant shame, meant tamasha, meant nothing good in the eyes of society” (Kale, 2000, p. 5). In asserting his identity publicly, in writing his story, Kale reverses this imposed invisibility. The very act of writing becomes a transgression, challenging both casteist silencing and the literary canon that has long excluded subaltern voices.

The role of autobiography here is crucial. Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau emphasizes that marginal practices often carve out “spaces of enunciation” within dominant structures. Kale’s *Against All Odds* does precisely that—it makes room for the Kolhati experience within the literary and socio-political imagination of India. He moves beyond the trope of the suffering Dalit and forges a narrative of assertion, one that reconfigures the language of victimhood into a discourse of agency. As he writes, “I knew that my story was not just mine—it was a voice for thousands who couldn’t speak because society had cut off their tongues” (Kale, 2000, p. 118). This reclamation of voice is especially significant in a caste society where Dalits are denied not only economic and social capital but also cultural and linguistic legitimacy. Kale confronts this linguistic alienation in elite educational spaces, where his Marathi, shaped by the

rhythms of performance and working-class realities, is ridiculed. He notes, “They laughed at my Marathi as if it wasn’t real, as if I wasn’t real” (Kale, 2000, p. 94). Here, language becomes both the site of exclusion and the medium of resistance. By insisting on narrating his experience in his own terms, Kale reasserts the validity of subaltern speech. He creates a counter-language that is emotionally raw, politically conscious, and culturally rooted.

Public discourse, traditionally curated by upper-caste men, often renders the Dalit and the denotified as either objects of pity or criminality. The Kolhati woman, for instance, is framed through sexualized stereotypes of the tamasha performer. Kale subverts this narrative by humanizing and honoring the labor, resilience, and pain of the women in his community. Speaking of his mother, he writes, “She was my school and my temple. Her sweat taught me the value of struggle more than any scripture” (Kale, 2000, p. 53). By doing so, Kale redefines what constitutes moral and cultural authority. He reclaims public respect for the Kolhati woman—long excluded from both religious and civic discourses—and repositions her as a figure of strength and sacrifice. The space of performance, once a symbol of casteed shame, is reframed in Kale’s narrative as a cultural archive of resistance. Performance, in this sense, does not only reproduce caste hierarchies but also offers the possibility of subversion. Stuart Hall’s formulation that identity is always “becoming” rather than “being” (Hall, 1996, p. 4) is resonant here. Kale’s identity, formed at the margins of caste and performance culture, becomes fluid and oppositional. He uses education and writing as tools not to escape his origins, but to give them voice, dignity, and place in the national consciousness.

Against All Odds complicates the public-private binary that informs caste discourse. The Dalit body, especially from communities like the Kolhatis, is perpetually rendered public—objectified, policed, and consumed. Yet, Kale’s autobiography shifts the terms of this visibility. He writes his body into the public narrative not as a spectacle but as a sovereign subject. “For the first time, I felt I owned my story, my body, my voice” (Kale, 2000, p. 133). This is a radical act in a society where Dalit bodies are controlled by Brahminical norms and state mechanisms alike. Kale’s *Against All Odds* is not merely an individual narrative of overcoming adversity. It is a deliberate, forceful intervention in public discourse that demands the acknowledgment of erased histories, silenced voices, and invisible communities. From the fringes of Indian society, Kale writes himself and his community into the center of national attention. By refusing silence, by naming caste, by honoring Kolhati culture, and by articulating an Ambedkarite vision of dignity and justice, Kale reclaims discursive space with clarity, courage, and conviction. His narrative becomes a crucial cultural act—an embodiment of what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialism”—to challenge hegemonic representations and assert the political presence of the subaltern. In Kale’s voice, the margins speak—not as victims, but as agents of history.

CONCLUSION

Kishor Shantabai Kale’s *Against All Odds* stands as a powerful literary and political intervention in India’s caste-driven public consciousness. Through the medium of autobiography, Kale not only narrates his personal struggle but also documents the collective trauma and resilience of the Kolhati community—a group doubly marginalized by caste and performance-based stigma. The text emerges as a site of resistance where Ambedkarite ideology is not just espoused but embodied. In reclaiming his dignity, Kale reclaims the dignity of a people, making his narrative a cultural and political manifesto. As he writes, “My education was not just mine; it was a rebellion against centuries of darkness” (Kale, 2000, p. 92). What distinguishes Kale’s work is his unapologetic assertion of identity. His refusal to disown his background, his mother’s labor, or his community’s art form destabilizes upper-caste notions of purity, morality, and respectability. Kale’s story becomes an act of what Stuart Hall describes as “cultural negotiation,” where identity is continuously produced through struggle and discourse. The journey from shame to selfhood is made possible by the emancipatory force of Ambedkarism—a framework that privileges education, dignity, and justice. Kale declares, “Dr. Ambedkar gave me a language I could finally speak in without fear” (Kale, 2000, p. 88), and it is within this language that his narrative finds power. *Against All Odds* is more than a personal memoir; it is a declaration of humanity from the margins. It disrupts hegemonic silences and reinserts the Dalit subject into national and literary discourse with agency and authority. Through a cultural studies lens, Kale’s voice affirms that identity is not a given but a political project—one that resists, reclaims, and reconstructs the self in defiance of oppression.

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