

**The Voice of Voiceless: A Study of Dalit's Tribulation in Omprakash Valmiki's
"Joothan"**

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Abstract:

The paper aims to scrutinize the Dalit marginalization, discrimination, mortification, and inequality that occurred under the regimes of Casteism. And it also throws light on how the dominant class put the marginalized people at the center of the narrative and how it leads them to lose their freedom, culture and to take pride in their individuality. Possibly, amongst all other Omprakash Valmiki works, his autobiography Joothan is one of the iconic works considering Dalit Literature. It significantly traces the principal issues of Dalit's tribulation under the regimes of the prevailing caste. Moreover, this autobiography became a milestone in allowing the readers to understand marginalized people's social veracities effectively. However, this paper attentively focuses on many asserting issues and solid observations of Dalit life. Through the subject of Dalit's tribulations, the paper underlines the issues like mortification, dehumanization, power relations, and ill-treatment of Dalits.

Keywords: Marginalization, Dalit's tribulations, Casteism, Dalit Autobiography.

Introduction:

As time passed by, after centuries, after endless misery and utter dehumanization, the Dalits have become defiant and have assembled audacity to confront the upper-caste Hindu hegemony. They have learned to fight back the casteist forces and recuperate their self-esteem as human beings. They have organized many emancipation movements and protests in diverse forms. One of the forms is literature through which they have articulated their century-long anguish and deprivation, which they have been enduring. They have expressed their voice for their fundamental human rights through their writings.

Dalit literature is regarding the sufferings of the 'subjugated class'. It also emphasizes that Dalits are not subjugated class but exploited by those who assert themselves as high class. Dalit literature was constantly marked by great revolt and resistance of the lower caste against the high-class people. For example, some texts like Growing up untouchable in India Vasant Moon, Mulk raj Anand's Untouchable, Bama's Karukku, Babytai Kamble's Prisons WeBroke. Through their writings, they have voiced against the atrocious caste system which continues to suppress them in all spheres of life.

As a Dalit writer, Omprakash Valmiki outlines the diverse issues and tribulations faced by Dalit community people, which they are experiencing for an extended period due to their caste. This paper is an endeavor to mark out the diverse issues of Dalits in the autobiography Joothan.

Dalit Autobiographies:

One of the favorites and prominent genres adopted by Dalit writers is an autobiography. Besides autobiographies, Dalit writers also touched upon such genres as poetry, short stories, novels, etc. Since the 1970s, Dalit poets and writers have been writing poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies dealing with the subject matter of cast domination, issue of identity, scarcity, untouchability, and revolution.

It was asserted as a literary genre by the Dalit writers because their experience declares genuineness. Omprakash Valmiki says, "Dalit writers should write autobiographies so that not only our history will stay alive, but also our true portrayals of wrongdoers" (Valmiki: xxxvi). It acts as a motivation to the next generations. Dalit Autobiographies are not about individual's lives but it's all about the description of a particular group of people, class and therefore, it is an extensive collection. As it is in the fiction, it does not surround only by a problematic hero, instead, it covers problematic collective situations for centuries they have been fighting against the uncivilized and controversial injustice that has been for decades and decades.

Dalit writers have taken the step to give voice to their aspiration to achieve equality. Dalit autobiography is written in the way of remembering the past of the writer. In other words, it helps the Dalit readers to stimulate enthusiasm for change. Dalit writers consider that their autobiography carries out the most crucial character: the authenticity of the experience. Valmiki's autobiography laid the groundwork for Dalit literature in Hindi. Joothan has become a pioneer autobiography in Hindi, which has an outlook of personal - condemn among the Dalits.

Valmiki's Joothan is the depiction of Dalit Voice:

Omprakash Valmiki portrays his life as untouchable. "Joothan" refers to the waste of food left on a plate, destined for the trash or animals. India's untouchables have been enforced to allow and eat joothan for centuries, and the word summarizes the pain, degradation, and poverty of a community imposed to live at the bottom of India's social pyramid. Moreover, Joothan is deemed to be the voice of numerous marginalized people. The text contributes to Dalit history, and its voice-over acts as a remedial touch to the oppressors. The very opening line disparages the place and the people of Valmiki's caste. The Indian democratic system has opened an approach to educate Dalits to articulate their experiences. On the contrary, he

depicts the atrocious veracities very powerfully and underlines that India has not kept its promise wholly made in the Indian constitution of independence. Valmiki's "Joothan" harshly questions the hegemony over Dalits and demands a place for Dalits in the existing society.

Dalits tribulations under the regimes of Casteism:

Valmiki depicts the social veracities of his time in his autobiography. He writes, "One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste" (Valmiki 21). With this affirmation, Valmiki emphasizes India's caste system's firmness that has resulted in thousands across India's socio-economic repression over centuries only because of the "lower caste" to which they fit in.

Omprakash Valmiki, from his individual experiences, portrays the anguish of the Dalits who have no right, even to fight for food and education, but their job was solely to sweep up the roads and clean the cattle barns. Further, their task is to dispose of deceased animals, work in the fields during the harvests and carry out other physical labor for higher caste people, including the Tyagi Brahmins. He portrays how these people are subjected to institutionalized slavery. At the beginning of the text itself, we can see the miserable plight of Dalits, especially Dalit women's predicament to go for nature calls, due to the lack of basic toilet facilities, as Valmiki writes:

The homes of the Chuhras were on the edges of the pond. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides, would sit in the open space behind these homes at the edges of the pond to take a shit. Not just under the cover of darkness but even in daylight. (Valmiki 1)

The above lines reveal the lack of minimum facilities for the Dalit women who have to expose their nakedness while going for nature calls. While their counterparts in the Upper caste are guarded against showing even their faces to the strangers; these poor Dalit women have to forget the feeling of shame and excrete in the open place. And even though Dalits worked hard for Tyagis, they have not been given wages for their hard work.

As I mentioned earlier, Chuhras had to work without pay for the Tagas, and wherever one worked, the disposal of the employer's dead cattle was a part of the job. No wages were paid for doing this work. (Valmiki 40)

Discrimination and Humiliation in Schools:

School and college is a place where young minds are cherished and are permitted to comprehend life's principles by teaching them the various portions such as integrity, discipline, togetherness, impartiality, decency, etc., which are the essential aspects of one's life. They learn new things regarding the world and get to disseminate themselves with different worldly affairs. But, what will happen when schools and colleges discriminate the students based on caste? The circumstances of Dalits in the Indian education system were deplorable. Children from lower strata are forced to take a seat in the open-air, while those who belong to higher castes are pampered to sit inside the classrooms. Teachers used to prevent themselves from touching children from lower strata. They fling wicker canes from a distance, thus making Dalits apprehend that they are contaminated or untouchables.

Valmiki's Joothan provides much evidence in the text where upper-class school teachers ill-treatment towards Dalit children physically and mentally. Valmiki relives the anguish of sitting away from his classmates on the floor. Further, he is not permitted to drink the water from the common pitcher, and he is not allowed to the lab, consequentially he fails in the examination. Moreover, Dalit children at schools are cruelly penalized, and teachers set them for doing such menial works instead of studying, as Valmiki writes:

I had to sit away from the others in the class, and that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody; right near the door...Sometimes they would beat me without any reason. (Valmiki 3)

When he was in 5th class, the headmaster asked Valmiki to clean the school and the playground. He says, "The playground was way larger than my small physique could handle, and in cleaning it, my back began to ache. My face was covered with dust. The dust had gone inside my mouth. The other children in my class were studying, and I was sweeping". (Valmiki 5)

Valmiki depicts the spiteful reality of the society he experienced when he was beaten up and ill-treated by his school friends. He didn't only undergo physical assault, but he also endured the abuses which were hurled on him. When he complained regarding the destructive behaviors of the students, instead of scolding the students for misbehaving, those teachers abused him. These incidents showcase the discriminating atmosphere prevailing in schools, where Dalit boys suffer just because they are born into a lower caste.

Dalits Voice against the Hegemony:

In Joothan, we witness the painful experiences; and along with that, Valmiki also effectively showed the voice of protest raised by the oppressed despite the intimidation of the upper class. Valmiki was made to sweep the school and the playground for the next

couple of days. And this merely came to an end when his father saw his son sweeping and his confrontation with the teachers and then walking out from the school, holding Valmiki's hand. He shouted for all of them to hear, "You are a teacher...So I am leaving now but remember this much, Master: This Chuhre ka will study right here, in this school. And not just him; there will be more coming after him." (Valmiki 7). For the first time, he witnessed his father full of audacity and strength in front of the ruling community. This particular event assisted him in increasing self-confidence in many circumstances.

Further, in another incident, we can see the rebel voice of Valmiki's father when the upper caste Tyagi ill-treated his son Valmiki just because he is going to school and learning new things. When upper-caste Tyagi brutally mistreated Valmiki, his father revolted against him by saying that, "Abey, Sohro, if my children learn a few letters, how does it bother you?"(Valmiki 33). Moreover, Dalit people boldly refuse to work for Tyagis without paying wages.

On another occasion, when the landlord rejected to provide the leftover food at the wedding party and ill-treated her, Valmiki's mother appeared like Goddess Durga and said, "Feed it to them . . . without being afraid" (Valmiki 11). The attitude of Valmiki's mother is a sign of the gradual empowerment of the Dalits and their voice against the oppressors. In another incident we can see the rebel voice of Valmiki against the teacher; he says "How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn't an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?"(Valmiki 23).

Conclusion:

All these incidents unveil the crucial fact that, though the voices of the Dalits are muted by the landlords, they have massive potentialities and the capability to fight back. Towards the end of the narration, Valmiki raises a very legitimate question that what kind of progress India will witness if one branch of the society is dominated and discriminated. He implores the fellow Hindus, why do they differentiate Dalits whereas they adore trees and plants. "The Hindus who worship trees and plants, beasts and birds, why are they so intolerant of Dalits?" (Valmiki 134). Valmiki is angry with the dominant nature of the so-called upper-class people who are enthusiastic to preserve the old caste system and exploit the oppressed. In utter disappointment, he concludes his narration with the most emotional and influential statement "Because in their eyes, I am only an SC, the one who stands outside the door" (Valmiki 134). Thus, it can be concluded that Joothan is an autobiography that gives the voice to Dalits' to establish their place in society. Further, we have to acknowledge that Omprakash Valmiki used his autobiography as a great platform to show the plight of Dalits. And his story is the voice from the heart of India that has been voiceless for numerous generations.

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