

## **Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan as a Tale of Domination and Hegemony Indian Society**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examines Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan as a tale of domination, subordination and hegemony imposed upon the lower caste and class in Indian society. The Hindi word Joothan literally means food left on plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle-class urban home. However, such food would be characterized as Joothan only if someone else were to eat it. The word carries the connotation of ritual purity and pollution, because Joothan means polluted. In Joothan, Omprakash Valmiki deals with the issue of humiliation meted out of the Dalits by Indian society, no matter where they lived. This humiliation stems from the fact that Dalit inferiority has gotten embedded in the psyche of the upper caste, the members of which have developed on extraordinary repertoire of idioms, symbols and gestures of verbal and physical lenigration of the Dalit over centuries. It is embedded in the literary and artistic imagination and sensibility of the upper caste. Joothan stridently asks for the promissory note, joining a chorus of Dalit voice that are demanding their rightful place under the sun. A manifesto for revolutionary transformation of society and human consciousness, Joothan confronts its readers with difficult questions about their own humanity and invites them to join the universal project of human liberation.*

**Keywords:** - Hegemony, Caste, Class, Untouchability, Humanity, Liberty and Humility.

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### **I. Introduction**

The acclaimed Indian writer, Omprakash Valmiki, has shown how the people are dominated and suppressed by so called 'upper caste' in India. This research focuses on how upper caste dominates the scheduled caste by using different apparatus like custom, law, religion, civilization, language of the dominant group of people, actually who are in power. The writer in his novel Joothan brings such a character from the group of minorities, labours and peasants. The protagonist, Omprakash who is compelled to sow sugarcane in Fauz Sing's field though his examination was approaching. There are lots of evidences to forward his muteness that multiply his state of subalternity. Misbehaviour in school by head teacher, Kaliram, working in Tyagi's family without wage, keeping him out of extra-curricular activities at school are the examples. In these all condition, he is illtreated. The title also encapsulates the pain, humiliation and poverty of Valmiki's community, which not only had to rely on Joothan but also relished. Valmiki gives a detail description of collecting, preserving and eating Joothan. His memories of being assigned to guard and drying Joothan from crows to chicken and of his realizing the dried and reprocessed Joothan burn his with renewed pain and humiliation many years later. On one level, this is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's journey from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in the newly independent India of the 1950s to today and his pride in being a Dalit. On another level, Joothan is also a record on the condition of people who are now routinely called "erstwhile untouchable" or "exuntouchable."

Douglas Bom's observation on Joothan per locates the theme of domination in Indian society. In his review of Joothan Bom argues that by saying "One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation but it is impossible to get past caste" with this statement, Valmiki highlights the rigidity of the caste system in India that has resulted in the socio-economic oppression of thousands across India over centuries merely because of the lesser caste to which they belong. This novel expresses the pain, poverty of the untouchable Chuhra community of Uttar Pradesh to which the author belongs. The treatment done upon scheduled caste was worse than to animals. Bom further writes:

Instead of following a linear pattern, the author moves from memory to memory demonstrating how his present is deeply scarred by his past in spite of the distances he has traversed to become one of the prominent authors in Dalit literature. Valmiki describes his childhood in the village Barla district of Uttar Pradesh. He writes about the ill treatment meted out to him when he was at school because he was an untouchable. He describes the trauma he went through when he asked to spend three days sweeping the school courtyard instead of accompanying his classmates belonging to the higher caste, in the study class.

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The author's objective doesn't stop at evoking compassion towards the oppressed Dalit in the mind of the reader but questions "Why is my caste my only identity?" This one query leads the reader into introspection. In India caste has always defined the socio-political scenario of the country. Whether it is the debate on the reservation policy for government job and education to aid the socially and economically backward classes or political gimmickry. Everything has an undertone of caste and religion. Thus, the text *Joothan* reveals to the reader the rigidity and narrow mindedness of castiest India, which as relevant today as it was in the early part of the last century.

## II. DISCUSSION

Valmiki finds similar problem of caste and class bias in contemporary Hindi literature and says that upper-caste writers don't know the miseries of Dalit, what they write remains superficial, born out of sympathy but not out of a desire for change or repentance Dalit writers and critics have contested attempts by mainstream critics to include these high caste portrayals of Dalit under the rubric of Dalit literature. They claim that Dalit literature can be written only by Dalits "Dragging and cutting dead animals - how will non-Dalits write about the experience of Dalits with the power of their imagination? How will they feel the angry ideas rising in the hearts of untouchables on the basis of their helpless imagination" (Limbale xxxiv). In a similar vein, Valmiki ridicules the Hindi writers Kashinath Singh who said that "One doesn't have to be a horse in order to write about one . . . only the horse tethered to its stall after a whole days exhausting labour, knows how it feels and not it's owner" . In making such claims, Dalit writers are not alone, aboriginal writers in the United States and Canada have made similar declarations.

Arunprabha Mukharjee in her criticism "*Joothan, A Dalit Literary Text*" says that *Joothan* presents "Experiences that didn't find room in literary creation." Experience like Valmiki's - his birth and growing up in the untouchable caste of Chuhra, the bottom slot preassigned to him because of this accident of birth, the heroic struggle that he waged to survive this preordained life of perpetual physical and mental persecution, his coming to unconscious under the influences of Amberkarite thought and his transformation into a speaking subject and recorder of the oppression and exploitation that he endured not only as an individual but as a member of stigmatized and oppressed community had never been in the annals of Hindi literature. He, therefore has broken new ground, mapped a new territory. Besides a few stray poems and short stories by canonical Hindi writers, which ations are conspicuously absent from contemporary Hindi - literature Arun Kukharjee Prabha further writes:

How far removed Valmiki's subject matter is evident from the very title, *Joothan*. It proves the truth of Dangle's claim that Dalit writing demands a new dictionary, for the words that it uses are as new as the objects, situations, and activities that they describe. The Hindi word *Joothan* literally means food left on a plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle-class urban home. However, such food would be characterized *Joothan* only if someone else were to eat it. The word carries the connotations of ritual purity and pollution, because *Jootha* mean polluted.

The elite culture refers to the customs, law, religion, civilization, language of the dominant group of people, actually who are in power and whose voice is heard and history is recorded. Such elitism is depicted as pervasive Valmiki writes:

In Sukhdev Singh Tyayi's daughter marriage, my mother used to clean their place. When all the people had left after the feast, my mother said to Sukhdev Singh Tyagi as he was crossing the courtyard to come to the front door Chdhurji "all of your guest have eaten and gone . . . please put on a leaf plate for my children. They too have waited for this day." Pointing at the basket full of dirty leaf plate he said "you are taking a basketful of *Joothan* don't forget your place, Chuhri, pick up your basket and get go in it. (10)

This act clearly exposes that through cultural practice, elite people always try to subordinate the marginal people.

Valmiki in *Joothan* presents the traumatic moments of encounter with his persecutors as dramatized scenes, as cinematic moments. His narration of the event captures the intensity of the memory and suggests that he has not yet healed from these traumas of the past. We see a full-dress reenactment of the event from the perspective of the child or the adolescent Valmiki. Many Dalit texts share this strategy of staging encounters between the Dalit narrator and people of upper castes. Often these encounters are between a Dalit child at his or her most vulnerable and an upper caste adult in apposition of authority. The fullness of detail with which they are inscribed suggests how strongly these past events are imprinted in the narrator's mind.

Indeed, *Joothan* demands a radical shift from the upper-caste and upperclass reader by insisting that such readers not forget their caste or class privilege. Unlike canonical Hindi or English writing, where the reader's or the writer's caste and class are often considered irrelevant, *Joothan*'s dual approach problematizes the reader's caste and class. While Valmiki directs his irony, satire, harangue and anger at non-Dalit readers, he sees Dalit readers as fellow sufferers. While the indictment of an unjust social system and its benefactors is one thrust of the text, its other important preoccupation is substantive examination of Dalit lives. *Joothan* combines

representations of struggle with the external enemy and the enemy within the internalization by Dalit people of upper-caste Brahminic values the superstitions of Dalit villagers, the patriarchal oppression of Dalit women by their men, the attempts by Dalits who have attained a middle class economic status to "pass" as high caste and attendant denial of their inferiority complex, which makes them criticize the practice of rural Dalits of rearing pig—all these aspects of Dalit struggle are an equally important aspect of Joothan. This self-critique has earned him brickbats from many Dalits who find the frank portrayal of Dalit Society to be humiliating for them, it is tantamount to washing dirty linen in public. Valmiki accuses these Dalits of succumbing to Brahminism. His frank critique of his own family members who hide their caste and therefore deny their relationship to Valmiki in public must have been painful for the people involved, particularly because he named them.

Joothan, is a multivalent, polyvocal text, healing the fractured self through narrating, contributing to the archive of Dalit history, opening a dialogue with the silencing oppressors, and providing solace as well as frank criticism to his own people. Thus, on the one hand, Valmiki's becoming a speaking subject shows that Indian democracy has opened some escape hatches through which a critical mass of articulate, educated Dalit has emerged. On the other hand, the harsh realities that he portrays so powerfully underscore the failure to fully meet the promises made in the constitution of independent India. Joothan stridently asks for the promissory note, joining a chorus of Dalit voices that are demanding their rightful place under the sun. A manifesto for revolutionary transformation of society and human consciousness, Joothan confronts its readers with difficult questions about their own humanity and invites them to join the universal project of human liberation.

The idea of the liberation of Dalits in India began with Mahatma Gandhi: Gandhi's, is clearly grounded in a vision of local empowerment. Gandhi emphasized de-centralization, the traditional village as a self-contained republic, social harmony, and anti-secularism, sentiments that many new social movements in India share. While Gandhi's ideas underwrite the activities of most social movements in India the Dalit Movement today rejects Gandhism in favour of another towering figure in Indian history, the Dalit, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956). For Dalits Ambedkar is a source of immense pride and respect, not for only his remarkable educational achievements – two doctorates, one from the London School of Economics, the other from Columbia University – but also for his leadership against untouchability, Hinduism, and his role as a founder of the modern Indian state. Today, Ambedkar serves not only as an inspiration for the Dalit movement but also as a source of legitimacy for actions including fighting casteism not only internally but externally.

### III. CONCLUSION

It is in this context of the Dalit movement in India, the researcher has analysed Joothan by Om Prakash Valmiki as an integral part of Dalit movement. In Joothan, Omprakash Valmiki deals with the issue of humiliation meted out to the Dalits by Indian society, no matter where they lived. This humiliation stems from the fact that Dalit inferiority has got embedded in the psyche of the upper caste, the members of which have developed an extraordinary repertoire of idioms, symbols and gestures of verbal and physical lenigration of the Dalit over centuries. It is embedded in the literary and artistic imagination and sensibility of the upper caste. The research concludes that Joothan is a representative Dalit literary text that not only exposes the pain and humiliation one suffers from in a caste ridden society but also by maintaining solidarity with Dalit movement, it proposes to resist against discrimination and liberate the otherwise suppressed castes and classes.

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