

## THE PAINS AND PATHOS OF DALIT AS REFLECTED IN OM PRAKASH

### VALMIKI'S *JOOOTHAN*

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#### Abstract

The term 'Dalit' derives from the Sankrit vernacular 'dalita' which means scatter or split. In this sense it emphasizes the scatter or excluded communities who are being separated from the high class Brahmin society by ancient traditional society makers. Since then they are considered as downtrodden and untouchable not only physically but also mentally and treated them as animals by the upper class. They have been exploited by economically, marginalized by socially and hatred by culturally which have attracted the attention of the dalit writers who have authentically recorded their pangs, pains, pathos and anguishes. This present paper attempts to throw light on pains and pathos of dalit as reflected in Om Prakash Valmiki's narrative *Joothan*.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Scatter, Downtrodden, Exploited, Marginalized

Om Prakash Valmiki is one of the most renowned name in Dalit literature in India. He gets an international fame through his autobiographical narrative *Joothan*. It is considered as a milestone in Dalit literature. He had written autobiographical narratives and poems which deal with the problems of downtrodden marginalized communities and their pangs, anguishes and pathos. His *Joothan* is a reflective of some authentic bitter and real life experiences which have needed a greater attention.

Dalit literature has dealt with a controversial subject in the recent decade and it has taken a great attention. Throughout the ages they (Dalits) are considered as downtrodden marginalized groups like Afro-American Negro communities. They belong to backward class and lower caste. Even the upper caste people are considered as Dalit if they are

dominated and suppressed by the domineering people. Therefore they are known by different names in different parts of India. In this context Ratnakar remarks:

Dalit literature deals with not only about Harijans, Mangs, Mallas, Chambhara, Pulayas but also the upper caste people who are suppressed by the domineering people. The writers say the emergence of low caste literature has taken place alongside a broader growth of consciousness and activism, particularly in urban India. (Ratnaker 5761)

This novel *Joothan* is written in the autobiographical form. Being a Dalit child, Om Prakash Valmiki was tortured and abused everywhere in society. He was into the Chundra or Valmiki caste. The people belong to this caste generally do some lower kind of job like cleaning the toilet, sweeping the road, disposition off dead animals, and so on. In this context Moon rightly says that Dalits are as:

Downtrodden, oppressed used first by Jotiba Phule in the mid nineteen century. The word gained currency as a self chosen, proud name with the early 1970s development of the Dalit panthers and Dalit literature. Today it has replaced most other names in the vocabulary of the politically aware ex-Untouchables and the press (Moon 181).

But he was lucky enough to be born in a household where everyone loved and cared for him. The support and encouragement he gained from the family enabled him to face the dangers of being a Dalit. From the very beginning of his life, he was conscious enough for the importance of studies and hence he was always a bright student. Reading and writing made him an enlightened human being. Valmiki married Chanda. Despite a house in the government colony they had to struggle a lot during the initial days of marriage. But he soon settled down and both Valmiki and Chanda started a happy married life.

The novel *Joothan* begins with a very illustrated way in which Valmiki delineates his childhood incident. He describes the Chunhra community. They lived in a village called Taga which is located in Gaya district in Bihar. This community was separated from the other society because they belong to lower caste. From the very beginning of the novels Valmiki minutely pens down the issue of casteism. He writes:

Our house was adjacent to Chandrabhan Taga's gher or cowshed. Next to it lived the families of Muslim weavers. Right in front of Chandrabhan Taga's gher was a little johri, a pond which was created as a partition of between the Chuhra's dwellings and the village (Valmiki 1).

They had to face the casteism and discrimination even in the school.. He says: *"During the examinations we could not drink water we had to cup our hands. The peon would pour water from very high up, lest our hands touch the glass."* Their own community used to say to his parents about his schooling: *"What is the point of sending him to school? What has a crow become a swami?"* ( Valmiki)

The naming of the title word Joothan refers to scraps of food left on plates, destined for garbage or animals. In this context the people of Chuhra community are considered as animals who had to depend on the left-over thrown in pattals or plates in the marriages.

After the baratis has eaten, the dirty pattals or leaf-plates were put in the Chuhra's basket, which they took home to save the Joothan , sticking to them. The little pieces of pooris, bits of sweetmeats and a little bit of vegetable were enough to make them happy. The joothan was eaten with a relish. The bridegroom's guests who did not leave enough scraps on the pattals were denounced as gluttons (Valmiki 6).

Besides this they had to face many more problems in the name of caste. Valmiki skillfully pens down how his mother was dehumanized and insulted by Sukhdev Singh when she had begged some sweets for her children. Singh comments: *"You are having a basket of joothan. And on the top of that you want food for your children. Don't forget your place Chuhri. Pick up your basket and get going"* (Valmiki 11-12)

Omprakash Valmiki has given a brief preface to his autobiography *Joothan* in which he explains that how this autobiography was originated or what gave him the idea to write this autobiography. He begins by stating this autobiography is a record of his painful experiences which he has undergone. He mentions that a dalit's life is always painful and it does not find any place in the literary creations of the main stream of literature. In writing this autobiography, it was possible for him to change the names of places and people by

whom he was ill treated. But he didn't do that because he wanted his experiences to be authentic and verifiable so he kept the same names of places and persons. Valmiki concludes by saying that though India is changed but condition of the dalits is still the same.

The Dalit people have no identity. This weary community has been searching their identity for ages. The caste-driven social structure is the main cause for this and due to even they have no right to drink water in the same vessel used by upper caste or play with the upper caste children. If they do so, they will be polluted. In this context Limbale's words are really notable.

Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the whole village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he will defile it. Go away" I was upset because I couldn't give water to a friend. Is one's caste more important than one's friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Was not Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it? (Limbale 2003: 20)

The similar pains, pathos and anguishes have reflected through Sharat Chandra Chattarjee's short story *Mahesh* in which we find that Gafur a proletarian tenant who has no right to touch or drink water because according to Zamindar he will pollute the water. That is he at the end of the story appeals to Allah (God) for punishing them because they do not give water or grain to his Mahesh.

The reflection of the helplessness tyrannical oppression of marginalized people is represented again in the novel *Joothan* by Valmiki when he is invited by Savita, a girl for tea. While he drinks tea, he asks her why SCs are given tea in different pot, she says

Oh... why, are you mad? How can we feed them in the same dishes?

Why not? In the hotel... in the mess, everyone eats together. Then what is wrong in eating together in your home as well? I tried to reason with her.

Savita defended the discrimination as right and justified by tradition. Her arguments were infuriating me. However, I remained calm. According to her, SCs were uncultured. Dirty (57)

The same pathetic wretchedness condition faced by the marginalized community is uttered through the tune of E. M. Foster when he wrote the preface of Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable*. Here he clearly mentions:

The sweepers is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. This he is disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as she walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming... (*Untouchable* Preface 8).

After the above discussion it is quite clear to us that still in the era of globalization Indian social structure is driven by the five letters that is called caste which has divided the society into various classes. It is the root of exploitation, suppression, marginalization of Dalit community. But now with the living standard and the effect of education and globalization the mentality of people have been changing. Now the time has come to rebuild our social structure not on the basis of caste and religion but one the basis of economy. Only then our dream of liberty, equality and fraternity will be realized.

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