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## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF OMPRAKASH VALMIKI'S OWN EXPERIENCES AS A DALIT IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: "JOOTHAN"

DHARA H. JOSHI

LECTURER, (ENGLISH)  
GOVT. ARTS COLLEGE, SHAHERA, DI-PANCHMAHAL GUJARAT, INDIA.

### Abstract:

*Omprakash Valmiki has given a brief preface to his autobiography, "Joothan". He explains in that preface how this autobiography was originated or what gave him idea to write this autobiography. He begins by stating that 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 the writing of 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 and she has now a superior civilization, the condition of the dalits is the same. He also mentions that only one who has suffered those bitter experiences, knows the sting of it.*

### KEYWORDS :

Exploitation and sufferings of Dalits, liberation of dalits, degradation and ridicule, poverty and physical punishment, double standard of the people of upper caste, inter-college experiences, cowardice of the teacher, bitter experiences, constitution has not much helped,

### INTRODUCTION:

#### WHO IS DALIT?

Dalit is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor, peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Generally, Harijans and Neo-Buddhists are included in the term, "Dalit". They are treated as Dalit but such a narrow interpretation of the word, "Dalit" is not acceptable to Limbale. According to Sharankumar Limbale, all those who are treated as untouchables, those who are compelled to live outside the boundary of the village, Advisees, laborers, workers, people of nomadic tribe, and those who are economically backward should also be treated as Dalits. Limbale mentions that their suffering is common and so they should be considered as Dalits.

#### WHAT IS DALIT LITERATURE?

Dalit Literature is that literature which portrays artistically sorrows, slavery, miseries,

exploitation and sufferings of Dalits. It is a literature about poverty, degradation and ridicule of which Dalits become the victims. Dalit Literature is that literature which shows the difference between the basic human values and the ground reality of how Dalits are treated. Dalit literature is the literature about hopes and despairs of Dalit community. The Primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of dalits. Dalit struggle against castes tradition has a long history.

#### **Analysis of “Joothan” as an autobiography of a Dalit writer- Omprakash Valmiki:**

Omprakash Valmiki has recorded many bitter experiences which he had to face during his childhood and youth simply because of his being a boy from the Chuhra community. All those insults which he suffered, physically tortured which he had to undergo are described by him to show how caste factor plays a significant role in the life of a Dalit Indian. He mentions that he grew in those days of the post independent India when people in general were not ready to accept the right even to primary education for the people of Dalit community. His father had to go to

the primary school several times to request to the head master for the admission of Omprakash to the primary school. He experienced the discrimination and untouchability even within the four walls of the classroom. He experienced it not only from the side of the upper caste boys but also from the teachers who had to set an example of equality before the students. He was always referred to as “Abbey Chuhre” and he never got the mattress to sit on.

As a primary school student, he joined the scout. There was a meet of all the scouts at the district level in a city and for that purpose; all the participants were given the uniform. They were instructed that the uniform should be washed and ironed properly. Omprakash Valmiki went to the place of a washer man. The washer man refused flatly washing or ironing of his uniform simply because he belonged to the Dalit community of Chuhra. He explained that if he worked for a Chuhra boy, the people of upper caste would not come to get their clothes washed or ironed. He felt that one can become free from the torture of poverty and physical punishment but one can never escape from one's caste.

Omprakash Valmiki while narrating bitter experiences of his life as a Dalit also comments on the double standard of the people of so called upper caste. The people of upper caste used to come secretly in the darkness of night to their Basti to enjoy the pork meat. He had realized the double standard of the people of upper caste that at night they can enjoy pork prepared by Chuhra but during the day time they observe untouchability.

Omprakash Valmiki has also recorded the bitter experiences of his inter-college days. He mentions that in spite of his being a brilliant boy, his caste never allowed him to enjoy good treatment from his teachers. When he was in the inter, he was asked by a teacher to bring a glass of water for him. Omprakash said that he is not allowed even to touch those water pots because he is belonging to Chuhra caste. Omprakash was asked to sit down and the teacher himself went to take water. Omprakash Valmiki was shocked to see such cowardice of the teacher.

If we analyze the overall reading of Joothan, it presents before us the different stages of Omprakash valmiki's life just like his primary school days, secondary school days, college days, his life in indreshnagar, his stay in Dehradun, and his days in Mumbai where he became aware of the movement of Dalit literature. Omprakash Valmiki mentions that wherever he went, the situation that he had to face was the same. Everywhere he was isolated, insulted, ill-treated, and ridiculed by the people of upper caste. As long as the people did not know to which caste he belongs, their attitude remained sympathetic, positive and mixing but the moment they realize that Omprakash belongs to Chuhra community, there came a change in their attitude. While talking about his life in Mumbai, he mentions that he was invited and well-treated by the Deshpande family. Because of his surname “Valmiki”, that family was under the impression that Omprakash was a Brahmin but the moment they realize that Omprakash was not a Brahmin but a Dalit, there came a change in their attitude and it never remained the same as it was formerly.

Omprakash Valmiki by narrating the bitter experiences, of his life as a Dalit, wants to make one thing clear that untouchability needs to be removed, abolished from the psyche of an average Indian and then only equality can be experienced. The constitution has not much helped because untouchability is already removed on a piece of paper by the way of constitution. Yet it is to be found everywhere in the attitude, relations and interactions. One has to drive it out of one's mind then only untouchability would end in a real sense of term.

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**DHARA H. JOSHI**

LECTURER, (ENGLISH) GOVT. ARTS COLLEGE, SHAHERA, DI-PANCHMAHAL  
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