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Quest for Revolt in *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki

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Abstract

Omprakash Valmiki, like other writers of autobiographies, articulates the Dalit confrontation in his renowned story, *Joothan*. He describes every aspect of his disturbing social experiences, unfolding his complete life. Thus, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* is about the voyage of Dalit discrimination and social boycott. The Valmiki kin is under pressure for schooling and position in the social order. In the meantime, it is also the fairy-tale of a Dalit family unit in search of self-esteem and identity in the Indian Hindu society. Omprakash Valmiki portrayed his life as an untouchable and Dalit in the newly self-governing India. The tale of *Joothan* refers to scraps of food left on a plate; this is meant for waste and animals. India's untouchables have been obligatory to acknowledge and eat leftovers for centuries, and these terms encompasses the pain, humiliation and poverty of the group of people enforced to survive at the underneath of India's societal pyramid. Although untouchability was abolished in 1949, But Dalits is being unrelenting to face prejudice, economic deficiency, aggression and mockery. Even after attaining Independence, the Dalits had to struggle a long time to get education; *Joothan* takes it seriously. Valmiki shares his daring resist to escape a prearranged

life of steady physical and mental agony and his transformation into a speaking subject under the influence of the great Dalit political manager, BR Ambedkar. An article of the long silenced and long denied sufferings of Dalits, *Joothan* is a key role to the archives of Dalit history and a proposal for a radical transform of humanity and human consciousness. Dalits are being unrelenting to face unfairness, economic deprivation, hostility and ridicule. This paper is trying to portray the Quest for Revolt in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*.

Keywords: Dalit, Revolt, Joothan, Caste, Discrimination

Omprakash Valmiki was an Indian Dalit writer and poet. He was known for his autobiography, *Joothan*, considered a milestone in Dalit literature. He was born in Barla village of Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh. Omprakash Valmiki was a poet as well as a very good storyteller. He has also written on critical questions related to Dalit literature and his book has also been published on the subject. His story collections have been published and they contain one of the most touching and influential stories. Valmiki raised the voice of Dalits vocally in literary forums. As a person Omprakash Valmiki was very easy going, bold and courageous to tell the truth of his thinking. Omprakash Valmiki has an important role in the development of Dalit literature in Hindi. Omprakash Valmiki is one of the top litterateurs who have got respect and place in literature for his creation. He was a man of versatility. Valmiki has composed a poignant composition on the strength of his talent and ability, whose name is 'Joothan'.

Dalit literature is exposing the character of Dalits. It is a subordinate Indian group of students under the Indian caste classification. It is an important and distinctive element of Indian English literature. This writing appeared after 1960. The humiliation and mental agony of Dalits is not only unbearable, but it is also a pain to understand how cruel they have been treated at the hands of their comrades. Their formidable pain can be easily felt only when Dalit literature is full of pain, sorrows and sufferings of Dalits and readers feel the tenderness of Dalits. This literature is a mouthpiece and empowers Dalits to raise their voice against all kinds of prejudice and humiliation. Many books have been written in English literature keeping the life of Dalits in the center. *Joothan* has made a special place in Dalit literature. The popularity that this book has earned among Dalit, non-Dalit readers and critics is remarkable.

Joothan is one of the best works of Dalit literature. *Joothan* is a book about caste discrimination, a book about the brahmanical atrocities and humiliations that India brings to its own. This is a book about identity crisis. From 1950, the practice of untouchability was legally abolished. Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiographical novel, *Joothan* highlights that untouchability was practiced by teachers, educated-like-minded upper-caste people and their relatives belonging to the same community. Through *Juthan*, he reveals that the instances of enmity caused by caste organization remain etched throughout life. Om Prakash through his endeavor portrayed the importance of literature in providing a platform for dissemination of knowledge about Dalit life and their experiences. His work stands out remarkably for its

realistically sensible description of caste supremacy, but still struggles to be included in mainstream literature in the nation. Along with his non-linear style of script, his work is a compilation of memoirs, including detailed accounts of racial aggression during his school and adult life. In this book, readers are drawn into a world where cruelty and deprivation seem to be the only reality, and they become aware of the complexities of caste oppression. Omprakash Valmiki talks of growing up in Chuhra, an untouchable caste, long before the word 'Dalit' was coined in a village in North India. It is a story of overcoming great obstacles, of terrifying suffering and oppression, of surviving, emerging as a free man.

As Valmiki's uncompromising candor makes clear, India's class system has legitimately survived abolition as a powerful cultural reality that has removed millions of untouchables from social taboo, degrading labor and depressing scarcity. Valmiki details these harsh realities as he tells them of living in the dilapidated huts of the settlement, cleaning flesh and leather from rotten streets and suffering ridicule and oppression by social superiors. But Valmiki also shares with his readers the inspiring story of how he and other untouchables – who called themselves Dalits– created a strong social and political pressure group for their rights as Indian citizens. Though often angered by the Hindu elite, Dalits have pursued their cause with extraordinary confidence and courage. As an editor and writer, Valmiki has done much to make room for Dalit literary expression, which is well exemplified in this story.

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Literary, cultural and socio-political movements against oppression and inequality have lost a true companion like Valmiki. The English literature and literature of other Indian languages cannot be called truly progressive and people-oriented without the realistic and heartwarming depiction of Dalit life which has come into English literature through his writings. His literary and critical works are of lasting importance not only for English literature but for the whole of Indian literature. He always made a significant contribution in making Indian literature democratic and public friendly, fighting against Brahmanism, feudalism, capitalism and gender discrimination.

Quest for Revolt in Valmiki's *Joothan*:

Through *Joothan*, Valmiki reveals that the instances of violence caused by the caste system remain faced throughout life. Om Prakash Valmiki provides a chilling account of

caste oppression in the newly Independent Indian state. His autobiographical article brings to light one of those rare, detailed and lively accounts on Dalit life. Juthan marked the first Dalit autobiography in Hindi literature and was later translated into English by Arun Prabhaskar Mukherjee in 2003. Om Prakash Valmiki through his work highlighted the importance of literature in providing a platform for dissemination of knowledge about Dalit life and their experiences. His work stands-out exceptionally for its very realistic description of caste oppression but still struggles to be included in mainstream literature in the nation. Along with his non-linear style of writing, his work is a collection of memoirs, which contain detailed accounts of caste violence during his school and adult life.

Dalits today constitute about one-sixth of India's population. They are spreading across the country, speaking many languages and belonging to many religions, they have become a key political force. As a document of the long silenced and long denied sufferings of Dalits, *Juthan* is not only a gift to the archives of Dalit history, but a policy for a revolutionary change of society and human realization. Omprakash Valmiki described his life as an untouchable and Dalit in the newly India. *Joothan* is a collection of memoirs. The non-linearity nature of the story prevents the monotony to put a heavy burden on the mind of the readers. Rather it encapsulates the memories of the writer's childhood filled with difficulties belonging to the 'Chuhra' community. Throughout the text, Valmiki makes a point of emphasizing the undeniable differences between the untouchables and the upper caste people, which were already created by the caste hierarchy of society. He is highly controversial for reacting to Gandhi's hypocrisy of calling the untouchables the children of God as well as urging for the preservation of the varna system of Indian society.

Joothan is an expression of the oppression of the brahminical, feudal mindset of western Uttar Pradesh, India. It is a poignant expression of a Dalit struggling for education in the rural areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh. This is a typical story of Dalit literature. The feeling of instilling self-respect and self-confidence in Dalits prepares the land. The outrage that thousands of years of oppression have aroused among Dalits is naturally expressed in this story. The Indian social system not only took away the fundamental rights of Dalits but also forced them to lead a miserable life and imposed strict laws on them. This story attacks the varna-system, brahminical, feudal-system with sternness. The author has also told how the Dalits had to do 'begar' in *Joothan*. The upper caste zamindars used to force the Dalits to work in their fields. If someone did not, he was also punished. This practice has crushed the honour and dignity of the Dalits.

Conclusion

This story tries to awaken the human feelings by connecting the pain and struggle of the Dalits with the feelings of the reader. The renowned story 'Juthan' refers to the food left on a plate, destined for waste and animals. India's untouchables have been forced to acknowledge and eat leftovers for centuries and the word encompasses the pain, disgrace and poverty of the community forced to live at the bottom of India's social pyramid. Valmiki concludes by saying that even if India has changed and now has a superior culture, the situation of Dalits remains the same. He has also mentioned that the one who has experienced

those bitter experiences knows the sting of it. The caste organization is seen as a vital weapon to defend civilizing homogeneity. Valmiki's account attempts to challenge this notion and disclose the contrasting experiences of caste oppression. He cited various examples of facing disgrace because of his class identity. The question of caste-system that has been created in Indian life has been raised with deep concern in this work.

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