

A submissive and marginalized soul in omprakash valmiki's joothan: a dalit's life...

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



Dalit autobiographies are an essential part of Dalit Indian Literature. Some of Dalit autobiographies are written in a regional language and they were later translated into English. Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography Joothan: A Dalit's Life. He has explored the issues of hunt for identity, social equality, poverty, suppression, caste system and discrimination. This novel depicts how Dalit people are exploited by upper caste people. Their life is not better than animals. They have to eat (jootha) left- over food. Untouchability and fasting is the big problem for these people. Dalit's work under high caste people and even after the hard work they cannot ask for their wages. The major tool of this literary autobiographical narrative which is a dominant form of expression of quest and the construction of self-identity on the part of those who have been denied from dignity and respect. It also demonstrates the sufferings and humiliation to show the disagreeable realities of caste system. Dalit people struggled for equality and liberty. As Dalit's belong to poor peripheral categories, the upper class people never delay to dominate them in society. This paper tries to focus on how Dalit communities undergo pain trails. The hardship painful trails of untouchables in the India that how he and others was deprived of even from basic human rights.

Introduction

Literature becomes a very effective tool for the Dalit's to express their anger against the harassments and ill- treatment meted out to them. Dalit literature is literature written by the Dalit's that is those who are oppressed by the Indian caste system. Dalit literature emerged in the 1960's. The aim of Dalit writings is to bring out the change and revolution in the society

where plight of Dalit's are put to the corner. Dalit's are struggling to get their self-identity and equality in the society. Prominent writers in Dalit literature are Mulk Raj Anand, Mahasweta Devi, Bama, Omprakash Valmiki etc. For many years they have faced pain and bad experiences. They had no rights to dream for the world of joy and progress. Dalit community survival means to serve the people of higher castes.

Joothan: A Dalit's Life was written by great writer Omprakash Valmiki. It was translated into English in 2003 by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. This book won Foundation Best Book Award in 2004. It is autobiographical account of his birth and upbringing as an untouchable. The title of the book Joothan encloses the pain, humiliation and oppression suffered by Dalit community as a whole. Joothan is generally called scraps of food left on plate. It is related to the word joothe which means polluted. The novel has its setting in a village in Gaya district in Bihar. It is about Chuhra community and the people of this caste are in inferior types of jobs like sweeping, cleaning etc. These Dalit's has to live separate from the upper caste people as portrayed in the the opening of the novel. Chuhra, Chamar are the caste names of untouchable. Tyagi, Taga are the upper caste people. Chura's lower caste people are always suppressed by Taga's higher caste people. They are the victim of poverty, humiliation and hunger. " We would often have to work without pay. Nobody dared to refuse this unpaid work for which we got neither money nor gain. Instead we got swarm at and abused". These lines explain the readers about the relationships of the lower caste people, Chuhras and the upper class people, Tyagis. The upper class people set all

the rules for lower class people in village. They had to live in the mud walled huts. They worked hard for whole day under upper caste house but they had no rights to ask their wages. They are treated as slaves in upper caste people's house and beaten, scolded by them.

“ Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all rights to touch the dogs and cats or cows or buffaloes if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or pollution. The Chuhras were not seen as humans”. Dalit people were considered low class and they were engaged in unclean works. The upper class people could touch the animals but touching the Dalit's made them sinful. If any Dalit mistakenly touches the high class people, then they had to take bath for their purification. Dalit's are always dominated and beaten by upper caste people.

“ I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit away behind everybody, right near the door. And the letters on the board from there seemed faded”. Through these lines Valmiki has expressed his bitter experience faced by him in school days. Dalit's lived under such situation where they never get opportunity to express their feelings and talent. They were not allowed to get equal education. If Dalit children got admission in the school they are treated like servant not as student. They have to sit away from the other students on the floor.

“ During the examination we could not drink water from the glass when thirsty. To drink water, we had to cup our hands. The peon would pour water

from way high up, least our hands touch the glass". As Valmiki belonged to a lower poor Dalit class, the students and teacher always teased him. He was called as ' Chuhre ka' (the son of a scavenger). He was tortured without any reason. At the time of examination, lower caste students were not allowed to drink water from glasses. They are treated as object. Everywhere they are dominated because they are Dalit.

" You are having a basketful 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". These lines tell the horror experience faced by narrator in his life. Lower class people were always faced hunger problem in village. At the time of marriages the Chuhras of this caste has to collect the left- over food from the plates and they may take it to their homes for family members. In his village, in school, college wherever he went his caste followed him and he could not save himself from caste discrimination. Even in modern city like Mumbai also discriminated the low caste people. He was struggled to find his identity in every place.

" Caste is a very important element of Indian society. As soon as a person is born ' caste' determines his or her destiny. Being born is not in the control of a person. If it were in one's control, then why would I have been born in a Bhangi household?". These lines indicate the shameful situation of India after 70 years of independence has not been able to wipe the curse of untouchability from our society. Dalit's have remained eliminated not only from the economic and cultural orthodox of society but also extent of the expression of their existential notions in the hierarchical order of the society.

Conclusion

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* portrays the infernal life of Dalit's who has to face the poison of caste since their birth. It is about the voyage of a Dalit family wrangle for education and status in society. Dalit family is in search of Dalit dignity and identity. This novel reveals all the features and qualities of a true life story. It stands as a symbol for the untouchable. Valmiki had faced inferior event in his life. A Dalit had to fight for everything starting from the basic needs of food, cloth and shelter. The Dalit's of the India are activated a movement towards for their rights and equal opportunity. The suffering of the narrator's in this novel points out the need for change in human behavior, attitude and outlook in society.