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JOOOTHAN AS AN AFFIDAVIT OF DALIT OPPRESSION

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**Abstract**

Dalits were the group in the Indian society that was frequently marginalised. This very marginalisation and oppression built in them an anger and anguish which they let out through the writings of theirs. They made sure that they reached out the masses by writing about their perceptions, views and moreover their own experiences. By doing so they believed would bring a gradual change in the societal thought process. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* by Om Prakash Valmiki is a concrete example of the same. In this very book of his, the readers get a firm idea regarding the extent of Dalit marginalisation, the caste hierarchy and the philosophy of work being preached in the Indian society.

**Keywords:** Dalits, marginalisation, oppression, caste hierarchy.

**Introduction**

Dalit Literature is the writing about the Dalit's, a mistreated Indian class under the Indian rank framework. It frames a significant and unmistakable piece of

Indian writing. This writing developed into the front line after 1960. It began with the Marathi language and long before, showed up in other Indian dialects through stories, for example, poems, short stories and autobiographies. Dalit Literature is interestingly Indian as it is a result of the evil caste system that existed for quite a long time in our nation. In spite of the fact that, the constitution of India has cancelled the position framework, it actually waits in numerous different backgrounds with its grips as firm in the mind of people. The writing that emerges as an outburst against casteism is Dalit writing. Dalits or the "Shudras" have been suffering in the name of caste system. Their life is marked with humiliation, shame, and discrimination. For a long time, they have gone through pain and humiliation. The pain that the Dalits had endured is intolerable which is depicted in the autobiography of Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*. This paper will attempt to see how Om Prakash Valmiki has utilized his personal history, *Joothan*, as a method for the depiction of agony and opposition against untouchability. Even though India is one among the fastest growing countries in the world, the people

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of our country still follow the caste system. The word caste is actually derived from a Portuguese word “casta” meaning lineage or race. This caste system has been deeply rooted and has been prevalent in our country for a long period. It is known that the caste system and the practice of untouchability has been evolved with time, as a result of conflicts over land, resources and cultural practices between people who called themselves Aryans when they began arriving in India about the beginning of the second millennium B.C. In time, these conflicts produced the chaturvarna system of society. Varna literally means colour and chaturvarna, meaning four gradations, comprised of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

**Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*:  
Portrayal of a Dalit's Life**

*Joothan* by Om Prakash Valmiki is a work of Dalit writing, first published in Hindi in 1997 and translated into English by Arun Prabh Mukherjee in 2003. It is a journal of growing up as an 'untouchable'. Beginning during the 1950s outside an ordinary town in Uttar Pradesh. Told as a progression of wounding experience, *Joothan* is additionally a significant record of an uncommon Indian journey, one that took a kid from amazingly pitiable financial conditions to prominence as a writer and a critic.

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is the most adequate model for a Dalit literary text. This book is by all accounts a personal record of Valmiki's life from his birth and childhood as an untouchable in the recently free India of the fifties to his present as a Dalit writer. Yet, at the more profound level it isn't just the individual story of Valmiki's own personal life yet of every one of those subalterns who are not in the mainstream of the general public. So *Joothan* explains those painful experiences which were difficult to find in a literary context. Encounters like Valmiki's own personal, for example, his introduction to the world, experiencing childhood in the untouchable caste Chuhra and his brave battle to endure this predetermined existence of never-ending physical and mental discrimination and his change into a speaking subject and recorder of the mistreatment and abuse as he suffered, not just as an individual yet in addition as an individual from a marginalised community which was never showed up in chronicles of Hindi literature.

Om Prakash Valmiki starts his work by expressing “Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionate towards Dalits.” (Valmiki,7) Valmiki portrays how his whole community relies upon the extra

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food tossed out by the upper castes as a by-product of their hard however unpaid work. The people of the upper caste who, rather than paying for the work, misuse them. The title of the biography account *Joothan* in a real sense implies food left on an eater's plate, generally bound for the trash bucket in a working-class home. However, such food would just be described 'joothan' on the off chance that another person other than the first eater were to eat it. Valmiki, gives a point to point depiction of gathering, protecting and eating joothan. He has assigned the work to watch the drying joothan from crows and chickens. They used to savour the dried and reprocessed joothan. These recollections of the past consume him with re-established torment and embarrassment in the present. All through the novel, Valmiki over and again portrays his encounters of pain he suffered due to the practice of untouchability. He writes "I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions, I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so-called descendants of the gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door." (Valmiki,16)

In *Joothan*, Valmiki depicts the harsh reality of his adolescence in the town in the Barla in Uttar Pradesh. He writes on the horrible treatment done to him when he was

at school since he was an untouchable. He states, "I had to sit away from the others in the class, and that too on the floor. The mat ran out before door....sometimes they would beat me without any reason" (Valmiki,2).

Valmiki was blessed enough to have a family that upheld him to consider and dispose of the existence that the others in the community were leading. His book is dedicated to his mother and father, both depicted as brave figures, who wanted something better for their kid and battled for his security and development with courage. Valmiki's dad's aspirations for his child are clear in the nickname, "Munshiji", that he gives to Valmiki. Corresponding to this Valmiki depicts an experience in the novel where he was made to sweep the play area of the school by the principal. He states, "Just then my father passed by the school. He stopped abruptly when he saw me sweeping the school compound. He called me, 'Munshiji, what are you doing?' When I saw him I burst out sobbing. He entered the school compound and came towards me. Seeing me crying, he asked, 'Munshiji, why are you crying? Tell me, what has happened?' I told the whole story to my father: that the teachers had been making me sweep for the last three days; that they did not let me enter the classroom at all." (Valmiki,6). His father confronted the teachers and then walking away from the school holding Valmiki's hand, he said

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loudly enough for the head master to hear, “You are a teacher...So I am leaving you. But remember this much, Master .... This Chuhre ka will study right here.....in this school. And not just him, but there will be more coming after him”(Valmiki,6).

The conditions of Dalit women were pathetic. We can see in the beginning of the novel itself as there are no latrine facilities. “On the edge of the pond were the homes of Chuhras. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides would sit in the open space behind these homes at the edge of the pond to take a shit. Not just under the cover of darkness but even in daylight. The purdah observing Tyagi women, their faces covered with their saris, shawls around their shoulders, found relief in this ‘open air latrine’. They sat on Dabbowali’s shores without worrying about decency exposing their private parts” (Valmiki,1).

Most fundamentally, however, Valmiki's story is a voice from very nearly one third of India that has been voiceless for infinite ages. Rather than following a straight example, the author moves from memory to memory, exhibiting how his present is profoundly scarred by his past. Along these lines *Joothan* isn't only a recalling of things past. It is the organizing of functions in the life of a Dalit so as to empower one to examine and understand the social request that formed the life. The portrayal typifies the trouble,

embarrassment and humiliation of Valmiki's people group which needed to depend on Joothan for fulfilling their craving. The life account is a remembering of his past. It tells how 'his story' becomes history. This remembering of the past consumes him with recharged pain in the present. As Arun Prabha Mukherjee has noted in the presentation "Valmiki moves from memory to memory, indicating how the present is profoundly scarred by his past in spite of the significant stretch he has gone to move away from it" (xxxii). The author is making an effort to rethink history. Through this revaluation, Valmiki voices the emotions of the underestimated Dalits of India.

Inspired by the works of Dr B. R. Ambedkar for the socio-economic improvement of the Dalits and the cancellation of untouchability, Omprakash Valmiki made a gigantic commitment to Dalit writing by featuring the situation of Dalits in the post-independence period which isn't exactly unique from that of the pre-independence time, *Joothan* being one of the principal commitments to Dalit writing. Valmiki also took an interest in plays, being effectively upheld by wife, Chanda. The contents in *Joothan*, uncovers the shows of unbending nature and the tradition of caste in India, which is thoroughly practised even today as it was in the early period. The author's goal doesn't stop at inspiring empathy towards the

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abused Dalits in the minds of the reader, but also questions, "why my caste is my only identity?" This one question drives the reader into contemplation.

In India the caste has always defined the socio-political scenario of the country. Regardless of whether it is the discussion on the reservation for government occupations and schooling, to help the socially and economically weaker classes, everything has a feeling of caste and religion in it. Valmiki additionally composes that regardless of government undertaking for the advancement of mistreated classes, through reservations, their accomplishments are not really seen and are criticized regularly. *Joothan – A Dalit's Life*, is an excellent bit of abstract work. As an unsure Dalit abstract content, *Joothan* makes an incredible explanation against the harsh standing framework still existing in many places of India. Valmiki's utilization of self-portrayal causes him to involve a vantage subject position from which he presents a Dalit's insight on his life. The 'valid to life' arrangement of the personal history encourages him to expose the true nature of the rank framework, which subsequently turns into an incredible contention for destroying this unfortunate type of social association. Simultaneously, Valmiki's own personal battles and achievement, goes about as inspiration for others to battle and accomplish their objectives. In this way, *Joothan* represents

the battle for respect and basic freedoms also, shows that a progressive change of society isn't simply alluring yet conceivable also.

**Conclusion**

Om Prakash Valmiki has taken some pride in sharing the issues which have been silenced for a long time. He had suffered a lot in his lifetime. He had very bad experiences of the life. However, he says "Times have changed. But there is something somewhere that continues to irk."(Valmiki,134). *Joothan* is a book that voices the interest of the Dalits for their right place in the general public. He says, "Today caste remains a pre-eminent factor in social life. As long as people don't know that you are a Dalit, things are fine. The moment they find out your caste, everything changes." (Valmiki,134). As implied by Valmiki, *Joothan* is a proclamation for transformation of society and human consciousness.

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