



**CASTE CONFLICT AND CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN A
DLIT'S LIFE
(The Special reference of Omprakash Valmiki's *JOOOTHAN*)**

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Dalit' forcefully expresses their oppressed status. It comes from the Sanskrit root 'dal', which means to crack open, spilt, crush, grind, and so forth, it has generally been used as a verb to describe the process of processing food grains and lentils. It metaphoric usage, still as a verb, can be seen in descriptions of warfare and vanquishing of enemies. Jotirao Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, two towering figures in the pantheon of Dalit history, were the first to appropriate the word, as a noun and an adjective, in the early decades of the twentieth century to describe the extreme oppression of untouchables such as suffering, frustrations, expectations and groaning of the entire cosmos. The name found a ready acceptance among untouchable communities all over India such as Achut, Pannchamas, Shudra, Atishudra, Avarnas, Antyajas, Asparshyas and Pariahs, or government-assigned designation such as Depressed Castes and Scheduled Castes, or the name bestowed by Gandhi with apparent goodwill, namely, Harijan, evoked pain and conflict. By identifying as Dalits, Omprakash Valmiki there embracing an identity that is born in a historic struggle to dismantle the caste system, responsible for their untouchable status, and to rebuild society on the principles of human dignity, equality and respect. The identity of caste as one of the central questions to underscores the dominance of high caste Hindu point of view in all walks of Indian life, whether it is literary expression, education or political governance.

Key words: *process of processing food grains; struggle to dismantle the caste system, suffering, frustrations, expectations, groaning.*

INTRODUCTION

Valmiki, or Balmiki, was widely adopted as a caste name by the Chuharas of Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh under the influence of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement in the northern India. Arya Samaj ists told Chuharas that they were the descendants of Valmiki, the creator of the Sanskrit *Ramayana*. In *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki narrates how a

Christain convert, Sewak Ram Masihi, came to his neighbourhood to teach the Chuhra children the alphabet. Valmiki's growing estrangement from Chuhra rituals makes his father worry that he may have converted to Christianity.

The Hindi word 'joothan' literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban home. However, such food would only be characterized 'joothan' if someone else besides the original eater were to eat it. The word carries the connotation of ritual purity and pollution as 'joothan' means polluted. The title *joothan* encapsulates the pain, humiliation and poverty of Valmiki's community, which not only had to rely on joothan but also relished it. Valmiki's encounters with his various school teachers' show how Dalit Children are abused verbally, physically and publically, without anyone coming to their rescue. The text, as testimony to a crimes suffered, acquires the character of a victim impact statement. Such as:

'Whenever I dared to ask my schoolteachers to answer my doubts, I got punished. They beat me up, gave me lower marks in the examinations. The taunts of my teachers and fellow students pierced me deeply. 'Look at this Chuhra ka, pretending to be a Brahmin'. (Valmiki, 62)

Valmiki places his and his friends' encounters with upper caste teachers in the context of Brahmin teacher Dronacharya tricking his low caste disciple Eklavya into cutting his thumb and presenting it to him as part of his gurudakshina or teacher's tribute. This is a famous incident in the *Mahabharata*. By doing this, dronacharya ensured that Eklavya, the better student of archery, could never compete against Arjun, the Kshatriya disciple. Indeed, having lost his thumb, Eklavya could no longer perform archery. In high caste telling, the popular story presents a casteless Eklavya as the exemplar of an obedient disciple rather than the Brahmin Dronacharya as a perfidious and biased teacher. When Valmiki's father goes to the school and calls the headmaster a Dronacharya, he links the twentieth century caste relations to those that prevailed two thousand years ago. By showing his father's ability to deconstruct the story, Valmiki portrays Dalits as articulate subjects who have been through the cherished myths of their oppressors.

'I asked them [our Hindu friend], 'you take the milk from the cows and buffaloes and when they are dead you expect us to remove the dead bodies. Why? If you carry the dead bodies of your mothers to cremate, why do you not carry the dead bodies of your 'mother-cows yourself?' (Ambedkar, 143)

Joothan is full of similar conundrums. They jolt the reader out of the contrived normative of the high caste value system that denies the claims of the Dalit speaking subject, a subject who has come to voice after centuries of enforced namelessness and voicelessness. By bearing

witness to these routinized atrocities, and passing judgement on them, Valmiki brings them into a new discourse of human rights and justice.

Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalit? (Valmiki, 41)

Caste superiority and caste pride divide human being into group lower caste and higher caste. 'Struggle' is one of the parts of Dalit life, without struggle Dalits never get anything to survive easy life. The successes of Dalits, the higher caste Hindu never like this. This heartless mentality of higher caste people become one of the obstacles for national integration. Valmiki got very bitter experiences in his life only for the sake of Chuhra caste. In UP state chuhra caste is supposed to be an untouchable. One of the bitter experiences Valmiki states:

'All right....See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation. Go... get to it.' (Valmiki, 04)

Schedule castes and Schedule Tribes people are considered to be use and through things in each and every field such as socially, politically, economically and psychologically. In an election period upper caste political people show lure to lower caste people in the form of money and wine only for the sake votes, after victory in an election they never take any care or responsibility of lower class people. This type of harassment is going on from thousands of years ago. In this Omprakash Valmiki's *JOOOTHAN* autobiographical novel, even teacher harasses the lower caste pupils mentally, psychologically and physically. Teacher never told upper caste pupils to clean class room but they always force to lower class pupils to clean the class room. These types of many incidences Valmiki told in his autobiography *JOOOTHAN*.

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