



A STUDY OF JOOTHAN AS A NARRATION OF PAINS

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ABSTRACT

Literature from the beginning has its own grounds for studying and reading. New theories are being invented day by day to offering novel approaches for studying literature. Writers used it as a powerful means for expressing their protest against illogical behavior of their countrymen and women. Literature not only amuses us but it also gives us information about customs and traditions were continued once upon a time. Dates and time of anonymous literature can be traced from the description and account of the things of that literary work. It also gives us information about different cultures and human societies.

Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan: A Dalit's life is his autobiography which provides us information about the pains of his community. Though autobiography as a literary form delineates individual's life, Dalit autobiography is rather distinct experience. In this autobiography Valmiki portrays his humiliated life; his painful story of eating leftover food to survive. He gets insulted for leftover food just because he was born in a caste Chuhra. Since he belongs to low caste he was suffered from caste biased mentality. Being Hindu he was declined human rights by the so called upper caste Hindus. His school experiences are horrid, full of pangs and unimaginable. The aim of the paper is to study the narration of pains Valmiki had gone through.

Key words: Joothan, Omprakash Valmiki, Pain, narration

INTRODUCTION:

Omprakash Valmiki has written his autobiography in Hindi and then after it is translated in English by Arun Prabha Mukharjee. Unlike non-dalit autobiography this autobiography is full of painful memories of Valmiki. It highlights the pangs and humiliation of the defenseless society and its exploitation over a period of thousand years. Omprakash narrates the tale of oppression and subjugation in his autobiography. His panic experiences make this

autobiography a narrative of pain. The high caste Hindus exploited their own brethren (the low caste communities) in the name of caste and culture. They laughed scornfully at their economic and social conditions instead of offering them helping hands to live the life of dignity and respect. Human beings of similar organs were discriminated due to their birth in a typical society which is totally not in our hands. From his schooling to growing up as a successful writer Valmiki suffered from the mania of caste divisions developed by the High caste people. Nature had not discriminated them, nevertheless, man overcoming Nature and created his own order.

The chief aim of the paper is to discuss the autobiography as a narrative of pains. Besides the principle purpose the study is undertaken to make critical analysis of the painful experiences of the autobiographer. To study the reasons of the backwardness of the masses who had become the victims of castes patterns.

It is hypothesized that all Dalit autobiographical narratives are the narration of pains. Valmiki's hostile condition helped him to grow as successful human being. Every dalit autobiography shows upward social mobility. Valmiki suffered more just because of his birth in low Caste. There are many painful incidents in the autobiography. The title itself is very much suggestive and while translating in English Mukharjee kept it intentionally unchanged. The word joothan means leftover food, the food that remains in the plate of the eater. Due to dire poverty the Dalits from Chuhra caste were to survive through this joothan. Valmiki had very insulting experiences regarding this joothan. Valmiki's mother would work at Tagas, the High Caste in the village. She would get five seers of grain per two animals and leftover roti at every afternoon, especially made from husk and flour. Moreover the leftover food, scraps would be there with rotis in her basket.

During marriage ceremonies at Tagas the Chuhras would wait outside of the house for the leftover food with huge basket. Having finished their meals they would put the dirty pattals in the Chuhra's baskets. They would carry it to their homes to enjoy the sticking food to leaf-plates. They were enjoying the short pieces of pooris, crust of sweets and little vegetables. Valmiki recalls such incidents and writes:

"The joothan was eaten with a lot of relish. The bridegroom's guest who didn't leave enough scraps and their pattals were denounced as gluttons. Poor things, they had never enjoyed a wedding feast. So they had licked it all up. During the marriage season, our elders narrated, in thrilled voices, stories of the baratis that had left several months of joothan." (1)

The pooris would be dried in the sun. These dried pooris were very helpful during hard days. This is how the community would get their delicious food only on the occasion of wedding ceremonies at Tagas. Actually it was leftover, but it was no less than relishing food for them.



When Valmiki grew old, he would recall those bitter memories. It makes him shade tears at the typical social condition. He, in his autobiography, narrates these memories:

“When I think about all those things today, thorns begin to prick my heart. What sort of life that was? After working hard day and night, the price of our sweat was just joothan. And yet no one had any grudges. Or shame. Or repentance.” (2).

It is even after many years Valmiki is unable to forget those bitter and insulting experiences. The wounds are still fresh in his mind and seem the scratches of the iron on mirror. The deep imprint of all those humiliating, inhuman experiences charred his life completely.

Teacher, a civilized, rational and learned human being always leads the society morally. Teachers are next to parents in shaping personality of a child. Almost all remember their teachers due to their love and affection, teaching and encouragement, and making students able to stand on their own. Francis Bacon in his essay of Studies rightly says:

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.”(3)

Teachers indulge themselves in all these activities more or less. His act of teaching is treated equal to God’s service. But the teachers Valmiki got in his school would not possess any of the above said qualities of the teachers. They were the ‘goondas’ as Valmiki remembers them. He says when someone talks about great guru. He said he can remember all those teachers who used to swear about mothers and sisters.

“The teachers of Tyagi Inter College, Barla, thrashed the boys with kicks and fists. These kicks and fists were not those of a teacher but of goonda. How a teacher could beat his pupils so heartlessly.”(4)

He narrates one of painful and humiliating experiences in school. The headmaster of the school calls him and asks for his name. In reply Valmiki discloses his belonging to the caste of Chuhra, a scavenger. Knowing his caste the headmaster asked him to make broom of some of the twigs of the tree to clean the entire ground as clear as mirror. The other students in his school were studying and he was busy in sweeping and cleaning the ground for consecutive three days. On the third day when he was trying to hide himself from the headmaster’s gaze, he was picked up; pounced on his neck; dragged out of the class and thrown on ground by headmaster. The headmaster groans,

“Go sweep the whole playground. . . . Otherwise I will shove chilies up your arse and throw you out of the school.” (5)

This is how Valmiki was humiliated by the head of the school. He was insulted and all strategies were used by the teachers and students to remove him from school. Their beating was animal like.

Moreover, the series of maltreatment does not end here; ironically it was growing as he was growing old. He narrates one of such incidents of his teacher's maltreatment. A physical education teacher in the school where he was pursuing education was terrorizing students. One day it happened that at the time of prayer Ram Singh, a school mate of Valmiki was up to some mischief. The physical teacher scolded Ram Singh by calling him Kala Dogra. At this word all the boys standing in queue laughed loudly. This made the physical teacher angry. But leaving all students the physical teacher started to kick and slap Surjan Singh, Valmiki's cousin. He was beating Surjan without showing any pity towards him. In Valmiki's language it was going on as a ruffian was beating an innocent victim. He was beating him continuously by belt and kick. The physical teacher in fury said some sharp words which, Valmiki says, he remembers even today. The teacher said:

"Abey, brother-in-Law, progeny of Chuhra, let me know when you die. You think you're a hero. Today I am going to draw oil from your tresses." (6)

This comment, Valmiki says, 'is still etched in my mind like a scratch on glass.' These painful memories stir one's heart when one reads them in the autobiography.

At the intermediate valmiki's Chemistry teacher was intentionally keeping him out during practical. He never gave him any explanation to his question that why he was kept out continuously. Even headmaster's mediator ship didn't work. As it seems this was not enough he was given low marks in the examination against his excellent performance in examination. This is why he failed in intermediate. He had acquired good marks in all subjects except Chemistry. He was failed by his teacher.

The treatment based on caste never changes in case of Valmiki. Whenever he discloses his caste he had tormenting experiences. His upward social mobility underlined a message that birth in a typical society never affects the talent one possesses but many talents had been wiped out by the caste system in India. He gets an opportunity for apprenticeships. His father congratulates him and says after all you have escaped from the clutches of caste by overcoming all the hurdles. He ponders over his father's statement and speaks to himself.

"One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste."(7)

It can be summed up by the above discussion that the autobiography is full of painful experiences of the author. He has gone through these all insulting and humiliating experiences due to his birth in low caste only. His struggle with the conditions and caste biased mentality proved that caliber is not something one gets because of his birth in affluent family and so called high caste. Being a part of Hindu society he was exploited by his fellow brethren; they created obstacle in his road to success but he won the battle against these all odds. Dr. R. P. Singh comments in his book about this autobiography: “*This belongingness of the experiences of insult and indignity strikes the readers in this autobiography.*” (8) Thus, the autobiography is series of painful struggles of a human being for dignity and respect. His caliber helped him to put those bitter experiences in front of the world in the hope of a new dawn for his upcoming generation.

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