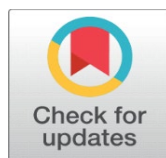
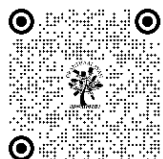


JOOOTHAN: A VOICE FROM THE DALIT EXPERIENCE

Dr. V. R. Dalavai ¹ 

¹ Associate Professor, Department of English, Government First Grade College, Hunnur, India



Corresponding Author

V. R. Dalavai, dalavaivrd@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v2.i1.2021.1602](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v2.i1.2021.1602)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2021 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The article "Joothan: A Voice from the Dalit Experience" looks at the long-standing social disparities and caste-based discrimination in India, focusing on Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography Joothan. Valmiki's work is a moving portrayal of his life as a Dalit, highlighting the terrible reality of untouchability and the structural oppression that underprivileged populations experience. The article places Joothan within the larger context of Dalit literature, emphasizing its significance in post-independence India. Dr. Dalavai examines how Valmiki's tale breaks new ground by giving voice to realities that have previously been excluded from mainstream Hindi literature. The article also discusses the historical and social factors that support casteism in India, connecting parallels to worldwide issues such as racism and social injustice to achieve true equality and justice. Ultimately, it emphasizes the necessity for social reform.

Keywords: Joothan, Dalit, Valmiki's, Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is plagued by widespread injustice, violence, and anarchy. Racism, indirect slavery, and societal discrimination are some of the causes of this. According to Alan Bullock, "Socially, race has a significant dependent not upon science but upon belief" (The Fontana Dictionary, 714) Racism was prevalent in America and certain sections of Europe. In India, we have caste concerns and were formerly untouchable. Novels like as Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Baama's *Karukku* depict unimaginable miseries caused by social inequality. So is Arundatti Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. B.R. Ambedkar considers caste a social construct. Sociologist Emily Durkheim believed that India had not abolished caste practices, although China and Japan had. Rammanohar Lohia passed his judgement to the effect that India does not improve unless it bans its casteism.

Joothan (1997), an autobiography by Hindi writer Omprakash Walmiki, is a famous work that critiques Indian casteism and untouchability. Joothan is a story

about Dalits. It discusses how Dalits were excluded from the varna system until recently. Past Dalit writers, such as AnnabhauSathe, BaburaoBagul, Siddhalingayya, BaraguruRamachandrappa, DevanurMahadev, DayaPawar, NamadevDhasal, and P. Shivakami, have written about the bloody situation in their works. Many regional writers, including Kuvempu and ShivaramKaranth, have produced novels depicting caste-based social division, prejudice, and oppression.

ArunPrabha Mukherjee adapted OmprakashValmiki'sJoothan into English. The Samya has published the same. According to a translator from the University of York in Toronto.

OmprakashValmiki'sJoothan was one of the earliest Hindi writings to identify as part of Dalit literature, a significant literary trend in post-independence India (Mukherjee xi).

OmprakashValmiki (1950–2013) was an Indian writer and poet who primarily wrote in Hindi. His book Joothan (1997) is a significant Dalit autobiography. MrOmprakash, who was born in the village of Barla in Uttar Pradesh's Muzzafarnagar district, describes how untouchability restricted him socially and economically. After retiring from the Government Ordinance Factory, he lived in Dehradun, where he died from health difficulties in 2013.

OmprakashValmiki released three books of poetry: SadiyakaSantaap (1989), Bas! Bahut Ho Chuka (1997), and AbAurNahin (2009). His two collections of short stories are Salaam (2000) and Ghuspethiya (2004). His critical writings include Dalit SahityaKaSaudaryashastra (2001) and SafaiDevata (2009). Do Chera is his play.

2. JOOTHAN: A DALIT LITERARY TEXT

Valmiki argues in his Preface that Joothan exposes 'those experiences that did not find a place in literary representations'. Valmiki's experiences, including his birth and upbringing in the untouchable caste of Chuhra, the heroic struggle he waged to survive this preordained life of perpetual physical and mental persecution, and his transformation into a speaking subject and record of the oppression and exploitation he endured, not only as an individual but also as a member of a stigmatized and oppressed community, had never been represented in the annals of Hindi literature. As a result, he has pioneered and surveyed new area. Aside from a few odd poems and short stories by canonical Hindi writers that depict Dalit folks as tragic beings and objects of sadness, Dalit representations are conspicuously absent from contemporary Hindi literature.

The contents comprise an introduction, Joothan's text, and translator's annotations.

Some portions from the texts are as follows:

- Literature can only envision hell. For us, the wet season was hell. The horrible agony of village life has not been mentioned by the epic poets of Hindi. What a horrific fact. (Joothan 24)
- My great grandfather's name was Zahana. He has two sons. The older son's name was Buddha, but everyone nicknamed him Buddhhu. The younger one was named Kundan. Buddha had two sons: the elder, Suganchand, and the younger, Chotan Lai, who is my father. Sугan had only one daughter, who was married at Paniala village, near Roorki. Her husband lives with his in-laws. (Joothan 24)

The college was about 1.5 miles from the bus stand. There was only one intercollege in the area. Aside from the Barla boys, boys from Fallauda, Mandla,

Bhaiyani, Khaikheri, Basera, Tajpur, Chapar, Nagla, and Kutubpur attended this college. There were barely five or six girls studying at the college. They came from rich households. A few girls were the daughters of instructors. The majority of the lads were Tyagis. Only one or two guys from Dalit backgrounds attended college. Some of them would make a frown and say, 'These Chuhra's tummies are never filled.' (Joothan 28).

Those Dalit folks went home after being severely beaten, devoid of all hope. Silence clung to their faces. Their eyes were filled with tremendous pain. Their bodies had been harmed. That day, no one lit a stove in the basti. Everyone was nervous. This catastrophe put a stop to all shared feelings. Then came a string of departures from the village. Dhannu, Harnam, Gurnam, Fauza, and Jasbir. They took off one by one for the metropolis, where a new brilliance beckoned. When the village's soil becomes barren, no one wants to water or fertilize it. When one's town is no longer one's own, leaving has no negative consequences. (Joothan 39).

A new word, 'Dalit', has entered my language; it is not a substitute for 'Harijan', but rather a statement of wrath among millions of untouchables. A new path was opening for me. I was also beginning to realize that the education we received in schools and colleges had not made us secular, but rather narrow-minded, fundamentalist Hindus. As I dug more into this material, my wrath grew more articulate. I began to dispute with my college buddies and express my concerns to my lecturers. (Joothan 29).

The Training Institute followed a predetermined daily routine. We had to leave for the Institute's workshop at 7:30 a.m. The workshop was located inside the Ordnance Factory. Tea and breakfast were served at 7 a.m. Lunch was at twelve. After lunch, we had technical education sessions from 1 to 4:30 p.m. at the Institute's main building. Here, we studied engineering and associated disciplines. (Joothan 1983).

Jabalpur altered me. My speech pattern changed. My "manners" have also changed. I made numerous acquaintances who were deeply engaged in current problems and frequently disagreed about them. I took part in lectures and cultural events. I became involved with Jabalpur's literary scene. I also began to form my own opinions about books. Social realism appealed to me more than aestheticist and formalist literature. (Joothan 85).

In 1978, the Dalit Panthers held a massive march in Bombay, asking that Marathwada University be renamed Dr. Ambedkar University. Dalit Panther activists from throughout Maharashtra have congregated in front of the Bombay legislative assembly. (Joothan, 106)

Babasaheb had turned to Buddhism. Mahars had converted beside him. However, many families continued to worship Hindu gods and goddesses. Babasaheb's word had not reached the Mehtarbastis at all. Whatever had trickled in had been packaged in a casteist mould. Whenever I discussed it with a Mehtar (Valmiki)' (Joothan 109)

Ballarpur paper mills held a theatrical competition every year. This competition for Hindi and Marathi plays was significant not just for theatre professionals, but also for the Ballarpur community. Meghdoot Natya Sanstha had established itself in this competition by performing plays such as Aadhe Adhure, Himalaya hi Chhaya, Sinhasan Khali Hai, and Paisa Bolta Hai. (Joothan 120).

Dalits who have gotten educated are facing a horrible crisis--the identity crisis--and are looking for an easy and immediate route out of it. After some minor adjustments, they began using their family gotra as their surname. For example,

'Chinaliye' has become 'Chandril' or 'Chanchal', while 'Saude' has become 'Saudai' or 'Sood'. One gentleman changed 'Parchha' to 'Partha'. My mother's family gotra is 'Kesle', which some people have shortened to 'Keswal'. They see that as the easiest way out. All such acts stem from an identity crisis caused by the glaring inhumanity of casteism. (Joothan, 126).

This surname, Valmiki, is now an integral part of my name. 'Omprakash' lacks individuality without it. 'Identity' and 'Recognition' are two terms that communicate a lot by themselves. Dr. Ambedkar was born to a Dalit household. However, 'Ambedkar' refers to a Brahmin caste name; it was a pseudonym provided by a Brahmin teacher of his. When combined with 'Bhimrao', it became his identity, radically altering its meaning in the process. Today, 'Bhimrao' means nothing without 'Ambedkar'. (Joothan 132).

Critics believe that caste is a significant aspect of Indian society. Caste determines a person's destiny from birth. A person has no control over the fact that they were born. "If it were in one's control, then why would I have been,"

Various mythology were created, including those of chivalry and ideals. What was the result? A defeated social order gripped by hopelessness, poverty, illiteracy, narrow-mindedness, religious inertia, and priestocracy, a ritualistic social order that was repeatedly defeated by the Greeks, Shakas, Huns, Afghans, Moghuls, French, and English. Nonetheless, under the name of their courage and glory, the Savarnas continued to attack the weak and vulnerable. Continued to burn residences. They continued to insult and rape women. What kind of nation-building is being imagined when people drown in self-praise and turn away from the reality, never learning from history? (Limbale 18.)

3. CONCLUSION

The ongoing concerns of casteism, racism, and societal inequality around the world highlight the underlying injustices that continue to plague humanity. Works such as Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan and the writings of different Dalit authors highlight the terrible reality experienced by underprivileged populations, notably in India, where caste continues to govern the social order. These literary masterpieces are not only forceful critiques of historical and ongoing oppression, but also calls to action for society change. True equality and justice will continue to elude us as long as these societal conceptions are upheld.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Bullock, Alan. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. London: Fontana Dictionary Press, 1986.
- Limbale, Sharanakumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2004.
- Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*. Kolkata: Samya, 1914.
- Baama. Karukku. Translated by Lakshmi Holmström, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997.
Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press, 1984.