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OMPRAKASH VALMIKI'S *JOOZHAN* AS A DALIT TEXT

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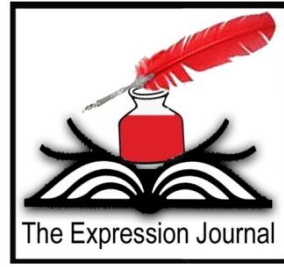
Abstract

Joozhan by Omprakash Valmiki is a wonderful autobiography written by the writer in 2003 in Hindi and then it has been translated into many other languages. It is a very good example of Dalit Literature. According to writer, the Dalit literature has coined some many new words and the prime example of it is the word 'Dalit' itself. The word Dalit has not been used as a substitution for 'Harijan'. Instead, this is a word that "expresses the anger of millions of untouchable." This autobiography is a unique work in the sense that the pain and struggle of Chuhru community has been explored by someone for the first time even-though the community has been surviving for a long time. Thus, this book is one of the most amazing works of Dalit literature as it explores the pain, plight, suffering, discrimination and the exploitation of the Dalit community. This autobiography is a powerful autobiographical narrative that explores the harsh realities of untouchability and caste discrimination in India. The book vividly depicts the author's experiences as a Dalit, highlighting the oppressive social structures and systemic prejudices faced by the marginalized community. Valmiki's narrative unveils the dehumanizing impact of caste-based discrimination on individuals and communities, exposing the deep-rooted inequalities within the social fabric. Through his personal journey, the author sheds light on the pervasive discrimination and challenges faced by Dalits, contributing to a broader discourse on social justice and equality in Indian society.

Keywords

Dalit Literature, Upper and Lower Castes, Chuhra Community, Untouchability.

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OMPRAKASH VALMIKI'S *JOOZHAN* AS A DALIT TEXT

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Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki is a wonderful autobiography written by the writer in 2003 in Hindi and then it has been translated into many other languages. It is a very good example of Dalit Literature. Valmiki is a Dalit writer and this work shows his experiences being a Dalit writer in the Indian society. This autobiography is a unique work in the sense that the pain and struggle of Chuhru community has been explored by someone for the first time even though the community has been surviving for a long time. Valmiki's *Joothan* starts with the description of the 'basti' which has been demarcated from the other sections of the village and has been situated just near the dirty pond which is the sewer point used by the people of the village. However, it is a kind of metaphor used by the writer to show the discrimination between upper and lower castes. Valmiki gives an example of pigs are in order to show the position of his community as pigs are associated with dirt, and anything that is disgusting Valmiki says, "Pigs were very important aspect of our lives. Whatever the occasion, be it in sickness or in health, in life or in death, in marriage ceremonies, pigs played a pivotal role in all of them. Even our religious ceremonies can't be imagined without the presence of pigs." (Valmiki, 28)

However, the symbol of pigs has been used by the writer so that he can create a positive identity of Dalit community. According to the writer it will create awareness among the Dalits and they will think upon it. They will realize that the time has come to change these kinds of non-sensical things.

However, one of the most popular scenes of this book is the event that is talked about by the writer. It is a known fact that the poverty of Dronacharya has been described in a moving style in the greatest epic 'Mahabharata.' It is said that he has to offer flour mixed with water to his son Ashwathama as he does not have money to offer milk to his son. However, when the teacher is discussing this, Omprakash asks his teacher why there is no reference to the Chuhra community and its suffering because this community also has no milk to drink in the same epic. The teacher is silent as he does not have any answer. This incident also shows the discrimination and the ill-treatment done to the Dalits. It has been continued for a long time. Moreover, Valmiki says that the constitution of India has abolished the evils of untouchability

but the villages of India still have the cases of untouchability because the people have still prevailed such evils even after a long time of independence Omprakash records:

Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes; it one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human. They were simple things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and throw them away. (Valmiki, 2)

Valmiki has certainly shown us the ill-treatment toward the Dalits or lower caste people and it is quite normal to them as every now and then they are regarded as the 'things for use'. There are many other writers like Soorajpal Chauhan has shared the same issue. The people of this deprived community have always been victims to the insult, ill-treatment and the beating from the people of the upper castes. The women of these people have been used for sex but when it comes to respect them or even to give them some sort of dignity, the people of upper castes, have so many issues. However, Valmiki openly says in his autobiography that, "The upper caste people did not call us by our names. If a person was older, he would be addressed 'Oye, Chuhre'. For a younger person, 'abeyChuhre' was used." (Valmiki, 78)

However, Valmiki also display one of the most surprising things of our society. Actually Dalits are the ones who do not consider themselves 'Hindu'. They are the staunch followers of the ideology proposed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who has undergone so many insulting experiences throughout his life on account of being a Dalit. For him, the people of our society discriminate among people and he does not want to be considered as those people therefore he said that he is not a Hindu he is only a Dalit. Omprakash Valmiki also gives his opinion why he is not a Hindu:

"Neither am I a Hindu? If I were really a Hindu, would the Hindus hate me so much? Or discriminate against me? Or try to fill me up with caste inferiority over the smallest things? I also wondered why one has to be Hindu in order to be a good human being." (Valmiki, 41)

Moreover, he adds that:

"I have seen and also suffered the cruelties of Hindus since childhood. Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits?" (Valmiki, 41)

According to writer, the Dalit literature has coined some many new words and the prime example of it is the word 'Dalit' itself. The word Dalit has not been used as a substitution for 'Harijan'. Instead, it is a word that "expresses the anger of millions of untouchable." (72) This word has been an expression of the plight, pain, suffering, insult, dilemma, grief, exploitation and the discrimination of millions of untouchables. None-the less, this word is also a symbol of hope and a new beginning for this deprived community. Thus, the writer feels proud of being Dalit and that is the reason why he does not hide his identity. As far as Valmiki is concerned, the Dalits always follow the philosophy of Buddha as Buddha always preaches the lesson of rationality and the freedom of the human beings Valmiki too proposes that the philosophy of Buddha is very useful as he says, "Buddha says that there is no such thing as the untouchable in a constantly changing universe, the human being alone matters. It is Karuna and Wisdom that takes a person towards transcendence." (Valmiki, 100)

Even Gandhiji has proposed the idea of treating the untouchables as 'Harijan' and by which he means that treat the untouchables as the 'Sense of God'. However, it does not change the situation and in 1970s, this caste has preferred to be called 'Dalit'.

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Thus, there are so many people being responsibility for the creation of this new ethnic group. The movement of Dalit has been pro-active since then. The Dalit consciousness has strengthened the democracy of India and that is why it is a very powerful movement.

Thus, *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki is one of the most amazing works of Dalit literature as it explores the pain, plight, suffering, discrimination and the exploitation of the Dalit community. Valmiki has beautifully expresses the perspective of an insider and the experience being a Dalit have been at the core be it a treatment like pigs or the insult that he gets. However, as a whole this work expresses the reality of our society where the discrimination between upper and lower caste is evident. This work proves to be a milestone as far as Dalit literature concerned.

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