

# Study on Joothon: Metaphor of Poverty, Pollution and Humiliation

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**Abstract** – “Omprakash Valmiki, an accomplished Indian writer, has shown how the so-called “higher caste” in India oppresses and dominates the populace. The emphasis of this study is on how the upper caste controls the scheduled caste by many machinery such as custom, law, religion, culture, and language of the dominant group of individuals in power. In his work Joothan, the author includes a character from the category of minorities, labourers, and peasants. Omprakash, the protagonist, is forced to seed sugarcane on Fauz Sing's land despite the fact that his examination is coming. There are several evidences that support his muteness, which add to his sense of inferiority. Head teacher Kaliram's misbehaviour at school, working in Tyagi's home without pay, and keeping him out of extra-curricular activities at school are instances. He gets mistreated in all of these circumstances. The term also captures Valmiki's community's anguish, humiliation, and poverty, which they not only had to depend on but also cherished. Valmiki describes how to gather, preserve, and consume Joothan in great detail. His recollections of being assigned to guard and drying Joothan from crows to chicken, as well as the anguish and humiliation he felt when he realised the dried and reprocessed Joothan burned him again many years later. On one level, this is an autobiographical description of Valmiki's life, from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in newly independent India in the 1950s through his pleasure in being a Dalit today. Joothan is also a record of the state of those who are now often referred to be “erstwhile untouchable” or “exuntouchable.” The comment of Douglas Bom on Joothan encapsulates the topic of dominance in Indian culture

**Keywords:** Joothon, Metaphor, Poverty, Pollution, Humiliation

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## INTRODUCTION

Douglas Bom's remark on Joothan repositions the subject of dominance in Indian culture. In his review of Joothan Boom, argues that by saying "One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste," Valmiki highlights the rigidity of India's caste system, which has resulted in the socio-economic oppression of thousands across India over centuries simply because they belong to a lower caste. This work exposes the anguish and poverty of the author's untouchable Chuhra people in Uttar Pradesh. The treatment meted out to scheduled castes was harsher than that meted out to animals. Bom goes on to say:

*Instead of following a linear pattern, the author moves from memory to memory demonstrating how his present is deeply scarred by his past in spite of the distances he has traversed to become one of the prominent authors in Dalit literature. Valmiki describes his childhood in the village Barla district of Uttar Pradesh. He writes about the ill treatment meted out to him when he was at school because he was an*

*untouchable. He describes the trauma he went through when he asked to spend three days sweeping the school courtyard instead of accompanying his classmates belonging to the higher caste, in the study class. (13)*

A human's life is impossible without society; without it, he is either a God or a beast. He is not only financially reliant on society, but he is also emotionally, mentally, and spiritually dependent on it. Dalits suffer a slew of issues in society, including social, economic, political, and cultural issues. Dalit literature is a ferocious response against the exploitation of the downtrodden. Dalit literature argues for a revolution that functions as a wake-up call to the Dalit community's misbehaviour. The purpose of this chapter is to use chosen texts to investigate the social, economic, political, and cultural exploitation of Dalits.

*The term Dalit refers to a group of people who have a same viewpoint and way of life. On the basis of which a certain social, economic, and political class is stripped of its social, economic, and political*

*foundations, and is relegated to such a low place in society, abusing their privileges to the point where they are unworthy of touching others.*

Caste prejudice continues to exist among the Dalits even after so many years of freedom. Indeed, there is a lengthy history of exploitation and prejudice against them, as well as their crimes, which have been ingrained in the country's culture, particularly among the multi-ethnic Hindu population. Dalits are still humiliated and tormented as a result of caste inequality, including beatings, stripping nude and sluing around the hamlet, setting fire to homes, rapping women, and murdering them.

*According to the National Crime Records Bureau 2011 of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India, 27 caste atrocities every day in India, murder of 13 Dalits every week, burning of 5 Dalit houses each week, kidnapping of 6 Dalits every week, Rape of 5 women each day, beating of 11 Dalits every day, in every 18th minutes Dalits are being oppressed.\* (Chandra 74)*

Caste-based Varna Vyavastha, untouchability, internal casteism, ban of visiting sacred locations and praying, and other forms of discrimination based on social exploitation abound. On the one hand, Dalits are exploited on the basis of mischief, misunderstanding, misbelief, and festivals on the same culture, and they are denied of their political rights on the other hand, Dalits are exploited on the basis of mischief, misconception, misbelief, and festivals on the same culture. Dalits have always been exploited in this manner on a social, economic, cultural, and political level since it has always been the higher castes' norm to deny them their rights. In this sense, Dalit literature is the consequence of centuries of socioeconomic, cultural, and political struggles.

Dalit writing has made social equality and political involvement a literary theme, completing the unfinished task of economic equality. Man cannot attain total equality without achieving equality on these three concerns. This perfect equality is fought for in Dalit literature.

### The Dalits

"Ground, broken, or reduced to bits in general" is what the term Dalit implies. It is derived from the Sanskrit term 'dal,' which is itself a Hebrew borrowing. 'Dal' has two meanings in Hebrew: 'it may relate either to physical frailty or to a lower unimportant social standing.' They have suffered as a result of the caste system. Disgrace, humiliation, dishonour, repression, and prejudice have all been part of their lives. They have been through harsh and horrific situations for millennia. Their aspirations and dreams were meaningless since they had no right to aspire for a world of happiness and development. They were created to live and serve the upper castes, as well as to die for them. With the passage of time, however,

certain members of the Dalit community became aware of the trauma and sufferings of their community's members, and they chose to use writing to give voice to their miseries and agony. Autobiographies, novels, short tales, essays, and poetry have all been written on Dalit difficulties.

The suffering of Dalits is awful. Only if we come across literature that is full with Dalit agony, misery, and despair will we be able to appreciate their suffering. For the Dalits, literature became a powerful medium for expressing their pain as well as their outrage at the humiliation and ill-treatment they were subjected to. Mulk Raj Anand, Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Sharankumar Limbale, Lakshman Gaekwad, Sivakami, Poonami, Om Prakash Valmiki, and others are notable Dalit authors. Dalits have communicated their suffering in their works in a sensitive and straightforward way, and as a result, their literature has become a means of resistance. Their literature sends a message to the Dalit community that they can never achieve a respectable status in society until they fight back against all the injustices that have been done to them.

### About the Author

Om Prakash Valmiki was an Indian Dalit poet and writer who lived from 30 June 1950 to 17 November 2013. He is well known for his autobiography, *Joothan*, which is regarded as a landmark in Dalit writing. He was born in the Uttar Pradesh hamlet of Barla, in the Muzzafarnagar district. He resided in Dehradun after retiring from the Government Ordinance Factory, where he died on November 17, 2013, of symptoms related to stomach cancer.

He was tormented and mistreated wherever he went as a Dalit youngster. He was lucky enough to be born into a family who adored and looked after him. He was able to confront the perils of being a Dalit because of the family's love and encouragement. Valmiki was always a great student since he was aware of the value of academics from the beginning of his existence. He became an enlightened human being as a result of his reading and writing. Despite his father's protests, Valmiki married Chanda and accepted her as his daughter-in-law. In the government colony, he was not given a home. They had to fight a lot at the beginning of their marriage. But he quickly adjusted, and Valmiki and Chanda began a happy married life. Valmiki has published three books of poetry, *Sadiyon Ka Santaap* (1989), *Bas! Bahut Ho Chuka* (1997), and *Ab Aur Nahin* (2009), as well as two collections of short tales, *Salaam* (2000) and *Ghuspethiye* (2001) (2004). He also published *Dalit Saahitya Ka Saundaryshastra* (2001) and *Safai Devata* (2009), a history of the Valmiki community (Play)

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study on Joothan: Metaphor of Poverty, Pollution and Humiliation
2. To study on consequence of centuries of socioeconomic, cultural, and political struggles.

### 'Joothan'

Joothan, a work of Dalit literature by Omprakash Valmiki, was initially published in Hindi in 1997 and translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee in 2003. It is a narrative about growing up as a 'untouchable' outside of a normal hamlet in Uttar Pradesh in the 1950s. Joothan is a remarkable record of a rare Indian journey, one that took a boy from extremely wretched socioeconomic conditions to prominence as an author and social critic. Told as a series of piercing vignettes, Joothan is also a remarkable record of a rare Indian journey, one that took a boy from extremely wretched socioeconomic conditions to prominence as an author and social critic. Valmiki highlighted the prejudice they faced at school at several stages in his book 'Joothan.' "We were not allowed to sip water from the glass during the tests," he claims. We had to cup our hands to sip water. The peon would pour water from a great height, so that our hands didn't come into contact with the glass" (J16).

In the newly independent India in the 1950s, Om Prakash Valmiki narrates his life as an untouchable, or Dalit. "Joothan" refers to food crumbs left on a plate that are meant for the trash or animals. For decades, India's untouchables have been compelled to accept and consume joothan, a name that symbolises the suffering, humiliation, and poverty of a group condemned to dwell at the bottom of the social pyramid. Despite the repeal of untouchability in 1949, Dalits continued to experience discrimination, economic hardship, violence, and mockery.

"Dalit existence is brutally unpleasant, burned by events," Om Prakash Valmiki opens his memoirs. Experiences that were not able to find a place in literary works. We grew up in a society that was really brutal and inhumane. "As well as sympathy for Dalits." (Jvii) Valmiki tells how his whole tribe relies on the higher castes' leftover food in exchange for their hard but unpaid labour. The whole population had to rely on the compassion of the higher castes, who exploited them instead of paying them. 'Joothan,' the title of the book, literally means food left on an eater's plate, which is normally headed for the trash pail in a middle-class, metropolitan household. However, such meal would only be classified as 'joothan' if it was consumed by someone other than the original consumer. Valmiki describes how to gather, preserve, and consume joothan in great detail. He was given the task of keeping crows and hens away from the drying joothan. They used to love joothan that had been dried

and reprocessed. In the present, these recollections of the past sting him with fresh sorrow and shame.

Valmiki describes his feelings of agony as exclusion as a result of the continuing practise of untouchability throughout the book. "I was kept out of extracurricular activities," he writes. On such times, I sat on the periphery like a bystander. During the school's annual events, while the play was in rehearsal, I hoped for a part as well. However, I was always required to stand outside the door. The so-called gods' descendants are unable to comprehend the agony of standing outside the threshold." (J16)

In another incident, he claims that he was kept out of the chemical lab "on some pretence or another." He attempted to speak with the principal and express his dissatisfaction with the situation. However, no action was taken against the instructor, and he was barred from doing any experiments for the remainder of the year. "Not only did I perform badly in the lab tests on the board exam, but I also received low scores in the oral, despite answering the examiner's questions properly," he adds. (J65)

### Joothan: Metaphor of Poverty, Pollution and Humiliation

When the guests and bariats, the bridge-party, grooms were eating their meals at a wedding, the chuhrus (the author's caste) would sit outside with large baskets. To keep the Joothan from clinging to them after the baratis had eaten, the filthy pattals or leaf plates were placed in the chuhras baskets, which they brought home. Little pieces of pooris, bits of sweetmeats, and a smidgeon of vegetable were enough to make them happy. The Joothan was enthusiastically devoured. Those who didn't leave enough scrap on their pattals were called gluttons by the bridegroom's guests. They had never been to a wedding feast before. So they'd lapped everything up. During the wedding season, our elder recited stanzas of the baratis that had leafed for numerous months in Joothan in ecstatic voices.

Valmiki goes on to offer a comprehensive deceit and consuming the joothan after reprocessing it through the difficult days of the rainy season via this clip. His childhood memories of Joothan often return to haunt him, causing him further embarrassment and shame. At first glance, the paragraph seems to be describing the extent of poverty and misery caused by hunger in Valmiki's society. However, a deeper examination reveals another facet of this deprivation: the sentence emphasises the Dalits' relationship with the concept of 'pollution.' Consider the following words from Limbale's book *Akkarmashi*.

*The instructor instructed the boys and girls of the upper caste to gather the leftovers on a piece of paper and hand it over to us. On the way back, the upper caste guys and girls were laughing and joking, but we were completely focused on the bundle. We, the Mahar (the author's caste) guys, followed Mallya*

*like ravenous vultures, carrying a bundle of Bhakari on our heads. Finally, we met at Girmalya's farm and unwrapped the gift. It was full with crumbs from various foods, and their spicy odour filled the air. We sat in a circle and ate as much as we could. That was the first time we'd ever eaten meals like that. We were all really chubby. Our tummies were as famished as a beggar's pile. When I returned home and informed my mother about it, she said, "Why didn't you obtain at least a little bit of it for me?" Food that has been left over is nectar. (10)*

The concepts in the two passages are quite similar. The teacher's naturalness in requesting the 'height caste' student to gather the remaining food and distribute it to the Mahar pupils is the most remarkable and crucial of these comparisons. The verse, in addition to implying poverty and famine, also implies that the Mahars are filthy. Although the writers' class identities and communities appear in all of these pieces, particularly in Akkarmashi, which may be taken as a witness to rural poverty. In the context of accepting leftover food, it is caste identity and the cultural consequences that are foregrounded. When used in regard to anybody other than the stigma and prejudice those results from it, Joothan or leftover food bears the idea of ritual contamination, which distinguishes the Dalits from the other underprivileged categories of 'have-nots' in Indian culture. And it is the Dalits' affiliation with ritual defilement that is used to explain and justify the caste system's inhumane treatment of them.

Another facet of the Dalit's connection to pollution is their participation in the so-called 'unclean' occupation. As a result, some jobs are usually associated with persons who are believed to be beyond the pale of humanity. Indeed, the connection between the Dalit as a symbol of pollution and the polluting vocation is cyclical. What is the source of work pollution? Because Dalits are the ones who perform them why are the Dalits damaging the environment? Because they work in polluted environments.

It is important to note that the term "pollution" does not relate to a lack of cleanliness. Announcing the news of a death or epidemic, as well as the pounding of wedding, burial, and celebration drums, are all considered polluting since they entail unlucky occurrences such as death and touch with animal skin. Along with Limbale, one encounters this irony in the logic of pollution in the following lines:

*I used to clean clothes, bathed every day and washed myself clean with soap and brushed my teeth with tooth paste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable? A high caste who is dirty was still considered touchable. (11)*

These lines include a variety of topics and emotions. One, there is misery in being bound by a set of laws that contradict all logic and reason. Sarcasm comprises a criticism of religion, rituals, and caste on

one level, but it also reflects a feeling of helplessness in understanding one's powerlessness to change the vicious cycle of pollution and caste despite poor sanitation on another. The following epigraph expresses certain feelings:

*All I knew was that I didn't want to follow in the footsteps of my forefathers, who had been in the same line of work for thousands of years. Pitaji had received a letter from me advising him of my plan to drop out of college and study this technical job at a government firm. He was overjoyed. He kept repeating himself. At the very least, you've avoided "caste." But, until the day he died, he had no idea that "caste" followed him all the way to the grave. (12)*

And, as Pawde so eloquently observes: "As a consequence, despite my best efforts, I am unable to forget my caste. It's difficult to forget about it. Then I recall a phrase I overheard someplace. Caste is something that is given to you at birth but cannot be taken away by death." (13)

What is it about caste that makes it so tough to be expelled? The explanation is that caste is justified by the logic of pollution, and the question of power is disguised inside the ideology of pollution. The way caste is expressed in the public realm is via the use of neutral, benign phrases like "rituals" and "custom." The power dynamics that caste entails are obscured by this sanitised portrayal. And it is here that Dalit life narratives play a crucial role in presenting a counter-narrative. This component is effectively revealed in Valmiki's life storey. The act of offering leftover food to the Dalits, known as Joothan, is an exercise of power by the higher castes. When all of the guests have dined at the wedding of the landlord's daughter.

## CONCLUSION

The novel's chamar protagonists, Omprakash, battle for life in a cruel environment, yet they sometimes find solace in sentiments of connection and unity. The society has harmed these Dalits. The painful and difficult experiences, on the other hand, do not suffocate the humanity in the hearts of the oppressed. Mistry highlights the contrast between two communities: Dalits' human side and upper castes' brutal side. He emphasises that the atrocities and injustices perpetrated on Dalits are unjustified and undeserved. He reveals the terrifying aspects of the Emergency and the ramifications for his characters. Mistry scathingly critiques India's current social pattern—as a country that purports to have reached unprecedented heights. To accomplish meaningful growth for the population, he believes the country must abolish its caste structure. He works tirelessly to expose the Dalits' tragedies, prejudice, persecution, and unending suffering in India after Independence. He also illustrates that political authority, whether at the local or national level, seeks to continue authoritarian systems of

government under the pretext of democracy. Even this pretence of democracy has been shattered by the declaration of emergency, exposing the authoritarianism at the core of Indian politics.

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