Chapter V: A Cultural Study of Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan*
5.1. Introduction:

Omprakash Valmiki is a leading Hindi Dalit writer and author of celebrated autobiography *Joothan*, published in Hindi in 1997 and translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Professor of English, York University, Toronto, with a foreword and Introduction that help the world readers to understand Dalit literature in 2003. It was originally published as an essay *Ex Dalit ki Atmakatha* in Marathi language in a book *Harijan se Dalit*. The Hindi word *Joothan*, explains Mukherjee, literally means ‘food left on an eater’s plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban home.’ [Mukherjee: 2003: XXXI] However, a story of narrator’s self-glorification or self-confession represents the predicament of his community. Therefore, the principle aim of this chapter is to focus on the cultural study of Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* as a Dalit text. It can be interpreted and analyzed under the following points:

- Cultural Study Of Valmiki’s *Joothan*:
- The Life Experiences of Pain i.e. Cultural Assertion:
- Self-Identity And Roots Of Dalit’s Humiliation And Injustice:
- Rejection To Traditional Hindu Culture And Acceptance To Buddhist Culture:
- Summing Up:
5.2. Cultural Study of Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan*:

The most oppressed of all *Dalits* in Uttar Pradesh- and indeed in India- are the Valmikis or *Bhangis*. The *Bhangi* was described by Manu as ‘descended from *Chandala*, said to be the off spring of the union of between *Shudra* male and a Brahmin woman.’ [Magdum: 2009: 11] This community, the victim of the worst social discrimination and injustice, has been immersed in ignorance and caught in the pernicious net of untouchability and rejected despite giving crucially important service to society. Therefore, a community of *Bhangi* mired in filth, poverty, and slavery, it is to be found in all over India. This kind of circumstances makes *Dalits* culture. As a result, the present chapter makes the Cultural Study of Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan*.

5.2.1. Living and Thinking:

Every community has made its culture on the basis of living and thinking, *Dalits*’ social thinking and writing emerged out of the authors' social stratifications. *Dalits* are displaced and remain as fugitives due to caste atrocities like burning huts. In observing these events, the *Dalit* writers felt to be of as well as for. Their creative writings documented their lives, social and political events which play a key role in the study of literature, and who are sample contemporary documenters of social crises or the social reality.

5.2.2. House Structure:

House Structure shows the status of their society. In relation to *Dalit* autobiography, *Joothan*, community of *Bhangi* haven’t a concrete house or home. They were lived outside the village, the place reserved by upper caste people. A high wall and a pond segregated their brick houses in the village from the *Chuhra basti*, or cluster of shanties. Upper caste men and women of all ages came out and used the edge of the pond as an
open-air lavatory, squatting across from the Chuhra homes in broad daylight with their private parts exposed. Regarding to this, Valmiki writes:

There was muck strewn everywhere, the stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment of my childhood.’ [Valmiki: 2006: 1]

In the rainy season, these narrow lanes of the basti filled up with muddy water mixed-in with pig’s excrement; flies and mosquitoes thrived. Everybody’s arms and legs became dirty and developed itchy sores. There was one drinking well in their basti for about thirty families, and despite a guard wall around it, it became full of long worms during the rainy season. They had no choice but to drink that water, as they were not permitted to use the well of the upper caste folks. Their homes were made of clay that sprang leaks all over. During heavy rains, the ceilings or walls often collapsed, as it did for Omprakash’s house more than once. One season most of their homes collapsed; as always, there was no outside help or insurance, and they had to rebuild on their own. In this circumstances Omprakash lived and grown up.

5.2.3. Education:

Education was free and opens for all in India including upper caste people and untouchables in post-independence. Each one was made equal by the constitution of India. In these circumstances, Omprakash Valmiki’s father begged admission for his son to Master Harphool Singh. After several days of begging, Omprakash got admission but he was not allowed to sit on chair or bench. He had to sit on bare floor; behind everybody. There was no fair treatment and security for a Dalit student in the government and non-government schools. Regarding to this, Arun Prabha Mukherjee said:

While the education system is indicted as death dealing for Dalits, Valmiki pays tribute to the Dalit organic intellectuals who help nurture the growth of a Dalit consciousness in him. While one of these is his
father who has the temerity to name the headmaster a Dronacharya, another is Chandrika Prasad Jigyusu (means ‘curious’ and is an acquired identity after shedding a caste-based one) whose rendering of Ambedkar’s life is put into Valmiki’s hands by his friend Hemlal. Like Valmiki’s Hemlal, too, has shed his stigmatized identity as a Chamar by changing to Jatav. [Opt. Cite, Mukherjee: XXXIV]

Giving education and influenced by R. Babasaheb Ambedkar Omprakash rejected old tradition of Hindu society and opened the door of Buddha religion. Omprakash was very particular on the education of his men and women. Yet, Dalits were still considered inferior either in education or in life style. Thus, every person is important in a society. But, Dalits were not given chances to think and work towards personal and national progress.

5.2.4. Food:

Across the country, different communities have widely varying food habits. It is also well known that food is closely linked to ideas of the sacred and the wicked, and must vary along the scale of social diversity. As far as Dalits food is concerned, in Joothan, Bhangi-Chuhras are far behind than other people in India. Omprakash gave a detailed description of collecting, preserving and eating Joothan which, food left on an eater’s plate, is the food of Bhangi community. It, according Martin Macwan, is divided into three types:

- a food that which is fresh and not half-eaten; second that which is fresh but spoilt by eating, especially children’s leftover; and third, stale food left from prepared earlier in the day. [Franco: 2004: 261]

This kind of Joothan collects from the upper caste society where Bhangis serve. Whenever there is a festival or marriage in an upper caste society, the Bhangis and Chamars expect to be given more food; so they go and collect it; alternatively, someone will ask them to come and collect the food. Regarding to this, Valmiki memorized the wedding of Tyagi’s daughter, where narrator’s mother works hard as a cleaner and
demands more than just leftover from the wedding feast for her children. The pieces of poories are one of the preferred foods which were collected from the wedding season. It was useful during rainy season. Pieces of poories soaked in water and then boiled. The boiled poories were delicious dish when it was mixed the chili powder and salt. In 1962, there was a flood and due to non-stop rain, Bhangi community suffered a lot. Their house began to leak, wall collapsed and roof began to slide. Therefore, there was no work and eating food for a long time. At such time the dish of Mar was favorite among the Chuhras. Mar means a liquid made by the mixture of salt, rice and water. Regarding o this, Valmiki said: ‘the taste of those salted gram, the feeling of content that they provided has not come my way again, even in five-star hotel food.’ [Valmiki: 2006: 22] This Mar or rice water was as good as milk to them. Whenever rice was cooked at home, the narrator got very excited. Because it gives energetic power while drinks the Mar. Especially, Bhangis are meat eaters and they ate some special dishes like Manda- oily piece of meat, and Bhatwa.

5.2.5. Occupation:

It is said that the work is the identity of its society. In relation to the Joothan autobiography, the work of Bhangi was mostly engaged to clean the latrines of upper class society. Traditionally, Chuhras were cursed to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose of dead animals, and work in the fields during harvests, carrying death-news and perform other physical labour for all upper caste people, including the Tyagi, and Brahmins. During Omprakash’s childhood, his entire family worked hard including cleaning, agricultural work and general wok, yet they did not manage to get two decent meals a day, not the least because they often didn't get paid for their labour and instead the labourers were abused. Most of the families of Bhangi worked at farm-harvest. The poor Dalits should work in the field of Tagas in the hot sunshine in order to earn food grains for survival. Most of the harvesters are the Chuhras and Chamars. They wore cloths scarcely and their daily wages were not given
properly; rather, they got whatever Tagas gave including leftovers. In addition to this, Dalit women were assigned to clean the cow-dung. It is more difficult in winters. During the rainy season there was no work for them, however, they were living in poverty a long time. They were doing anything which included harvesting lentils, cutting sheaves of wheat in the midday sun, and transporting them via bullock carts, each person got one out of 21 parts produced—about two pounds of wheat—as wages. For the rest of their labour in the cowshed, they got paid in grain and a leftover roti each day (made by mixing the flour with the husk since it was for the chuhras), and at times scraps of leftovers from their employer’s plates, or Joothan.

5.2.6. Superstitions:

In relation to the Superstition, a person who feels unwell in Bhangi basti, instead of treating him with medicine, people tried things like getting rid of the evil spirit that was deemed to be the cause by tying threads, talismans, spells, and on. If disease was prolonged or got serious, they called bhagat for pucha or exorcism. The pucha is a ceremony of bhagat or baba which makes a person free from the control of ghosts and spirits. Such ceremony edifies the god which is known as Paun. God Kalwa, Hari Sinh Nalwa and Others also worshiped in the Dalit society. Goddess Madaran is among the most important ones. Bhangi basti had strange ideas about ghosts and spirits. If there was someone feels sick, a bhagat or baba would be called instead of Doctor. The Bhangis were believes that bhagat or baba is the mediator of god and being influence of god he talks to the ghost. When he caught the insatiate soul he demands pigs, roosters, rams ad liquor for offering to the gods. Such hungry god and goddess worshiped in every house of Bhangi basti. They are different from Hindu deities and could not found in any Purana-epic like book. But these are worshiped in any family or clan where there is birth, festival, wedding, or funeral ceremony.
Due to the loss of Sukhbir, their family was disturbed. Therefore, Jasbir went to Adampur and works in the construction company. After some time this company moved to Bagdogra, Bengal. It was heard that Jasbir works at Bengal by mother who sinks in the ideas of Bengali myth, ‘…idea of Bengal was based on folk myths about black magic and casting of spells, about women who transformed a man into a ram with their magic and tied him up in their courtyard.’ [Ibid: 23] Thus, there was a firmly believes on the existence of ghost. Omprakash narrates, when he was at Dehradun, during summer holydays, he felt sick with dysentery, which took a longtime to get better. Therefore, he comes back to village before the school re-opened. His father tried to show a number of quacks but the physical condition of Omprakash did not improve. As a result he became awfully weak. Finally, is father called out the Bhagat from Kendki who examined and said to his pitaji: ‘Why do you bother about doctors and medicines…He has become possessed by a spirit.’ [Ibid: 42] Being observation all the Bhagat starts his puja and mantras o relieve Omprakash from the control of spirit. He makes frightening sound and to flashed the whip in the air and on his back. It was not tolerable to him, therefore, he shouted on the Bhagat and said to his father, ‘He will kill me if you don’t stop him. I don’t have any spirit sticking to me.’ [Ibid: 43] In this way, Omprakash saved his life from superstitious people.

5.2.8. Custom and Tradition:

Customs and traditions are attached to people and their culture. But the upper caste people imposed certain intolerable customs on Dalits. The tradition of Salam is one of the big celebrations among Bhangi community. It means the newly wedded bride and bridegroom should go to the upper caste people’s street and salute in order to get some gifts or money. Omprakash had a big argument with Hiram Singh for going to do the Salam. But he went with Hiram Singh to do the Salam. For Salam both of them walk on the street of upper caste people and Hiram Singh mother-in-law demands for something else which is given to the newly married couple. Another tradition of Bhangi community is that
whether it was a wedding or birth or death, it was essential to worship the God and Goddess. Third tradition of *Bhangi* community is that to offer piglet cocks and rams to the God and Goddess to be found in their village.

### 5.2.9. Ritual and Festival:

Religion forms an important role in the life of Omprakash Valmiki and his society. The most striking point about the religion of the narrator is that it does not adhere to the traditional brahminical system of worship, nor is it linked to brahminical God and Goddess (*Kul Devtas and Kul Devis*). Deep faith in their *Kul Devi* leads them to believe that a desired boon asked of her will be unfailingly fulfilled. Sometimes fulfillment of boon involves extended rituals to please the God or Goddess granting that boon; the life of *Bhangi* community revolves continuously around the rituals petitioning the Goddess and offering thanks giving for boons that have been granted.

Most of *Dalits* in India including *Bhangi*, Mochi-Chamars and Jatav worship the same deities as the Hindus do and observe more or less the same rituals. They honour all the saints and *sadhus* of the Hindu religion. Mochi-Chamars worship saint Raidas whereas *Bhangi* worship all deities of Hindu. Regarding to this, the *Antyoday Vikas Shikshan Centre*, Khambhat (Gujrat) described:

> There are differences between the God and Goddess of the upper castes and those of the Scheduled Castes. The Valmiki- *Bhangi* community has its own God and Goddess, namely, Zampdo and Zampdi, also called to by the name of Sikotar Mata-Goddess. In Addition, they worship Hadakai Mata-Goddess, Meladi Mata-Goddess, Khodiyar Mata-Goddess and Kalka Mata-Goddess. Some *Bhangi*-Valmikis community in Khambhat taluka worship Bhathiji Maharaj. Each God and Goddess is worshiped for special reasons. Within the entire group of deities, there is pure and impure Goddess. The Goddess
to whom they offer vegetarian offerings (like rice and ghee) are pure and those to whom they offer non-vegetarian offerings (like chicken and mutton) are impure. [Opp. Cite., Franco: 23]

This showing the extension of hierarchy even divinity relects the ideology of Varna, with its concept of purity and impurity that has permeated all aspects of thought and action, including even the world of spirituality and religion.

In Joothan, the Bhangi community worshiped God Kalwa, Hari Sinh Nalwa and others. Goddess Madaran is among the most important ones. Though Indian Dalit belongs to Hindu religion but they did not worship Hindu God or Goddess. At janmastami- birth ceremony of Lord Krishna, it is not Lord Krishna but God Jahirpir, another God, whom they worshiped. Dipawali- festival of light- is a Hindu festival where Hindu people worshiped the Goddess Laxmi. Instead of Goddess Laxmi, Bhangi people worshiped and offered piglet to the Goddess Madaran. Thus, the Bhangi community has its own God and Goddess. It shows that how Dalits are influenced by Hindu culture.

5.2.10. Jat Panchayat: Caste Council:

Valmiki narrates one such incident where the Chuhras had refused to work without wages when a high official was visiting the village. ‘As usual a government employee came to the Bhangi basti- settlement. The surveyors needed some people for cleanup work, for which they would not be paid. As always, it would be unpaid labor. For days on end hungry and thirsty people would work to clean the kothi- big house. In return they would be sworn at...’ [Valimiki: 2006: 44] When they refused this unpaid work, they were severely punished. Fifteen days after their refusal, two policemen came and arrested whoever they could lay their hands on and took them to the office of the village panchayat (council) where they were made to squat in a rooster position and beaten mercilessly. ‘The women and children of the basti were standing in the lane and crying loudly.... They could not think of what else they could do but cry... [Ibid: 45] The
narrator reflects that Why is it a crime to ask to be paid for one’s labor? Those who keep singing the glories of democracy use the government machinery to quell the blood flowing in our veins. Thus, all these factors are important to make the culture of society in India.

5.3. The Life Experiences of Pain i.e. Cultural Assertion:

_Joothan_ is considered as an epic of the Dalits sufferings- Life Experiences of Pain, which have been narrated with various experiences. The power of Dalit autobiography’s narrative agenda is its use of the author’s life-experiences of pain as a means of cultural assertion. By writing about his own experiences as a Dalit, Omprakash Valmiki reveal two objectives in his autobiography. One is to challenge the basis of caste discrimination. The other clear narrative agenda of this Dalit autobiography is to expose the reality behind the institutional narrative that caste functions as a significant force in the public sphere of modern India. Regarding to this, Surajpal Chauhan addresses this issue in his autobiography _Tirskrit_:

_In this country, the pain and insult of being born as a Dalit can only be known by a person who has experienced it. Today, everyone is crying out in the whole country that there is no racism and that things have changed in the towns and villages in these thirty-five years. I would really like to discuss with these people an incident which took place in 1987._

[http://www.sasnet.lu.se/]

Thus, Dalit autobiography composed a challenge to this institutional narrative by presenting what he claim is factual experiences of untouchability from the writer’s own life.

5.3.1. Depiction of Harvest:
During Omprakash’s childhood, his entire family worked hard, yet they did not manage to get two decent meals a day, not the least because they often didn't get paid for their labour and instead the labourers were abused. He narrates the incident of season of harvest. At such time, entire family and neighborhood used to go to the field of Tagas to reap the crop. It was very hard and painful task to cut the sheaves of wheat in the midday sun. It was agonizing to work in midday sunlight and warmth earth ground. Instead of such atmosphere, the roots of cropped wheat pierced their feet like spikes. The work at mustered and gram lentils was more difficult than the crop of wheat. The leaves were sour and stick all over the body during harvesting such work. Due to this the Chuhras were suffered through a lot. The harvesting would often lead to argument in the fields. Omprakash described: ‘Most of Tagas were exploited the Chuhras and Chamars at the time of giving money. Whatever they got, they took after protesting a bit. They kept fretting after coming back home, cursing the Tagas. But their protests died when confronted with hunger.’ [Valmiki:’ 2006: 8] Every year the Bhangis and others make criteria towards harvesting, but every criterion has been collapsed during the harvesting season. Finally, they got one sheaf- less than one kg grain- for cutting of twenty-one as wages. It means a day’s income wasn’t worth even a kilo-gram of wheat. How this pain-suffering works done by the Chuhras and Chamars.

5.3.2. Incident of Wild Boar:

Omprakash has an elder brother named Sukhbir who works at Suchet Taga, at such time Omprakash studied fifth class. Sukhbir was young fellow by dark complexioned, tall and muscular. Once, a wild boar was come inside the village. He had injured a lot of people with his sharp horns. He had entered the cowsheds of the Tagas and injured the oxen, buffaloes and cow. Being frightened all villagers had climbed on the house and to watch this spectacles. No one have the courage to fight with wild boar and throw him out of village. At last, ‘young Sukhbir drove that boar out of village with just a stick.’ [Ibid: 11] It makes an impression on entire village. One day, he suffered though a fever and goes to
bed for week. Suddenly, he was died. Omprakash doesn’t believe on this news. But it was true, lack of medicine he was died. At the time of Sukhbir’s death his wife was pregnant and he has a child named, Naredra. Though she was pregnant, Jasbir-younger brother of Sukhbir-married to widow pregnant. As a result of this, the total responsibility of whole family fallen on Jasbir’s shoulder. Due to this tragedy, the financial condition of his family was insecure.

5.3.3. Image of Pig:

Due to economical background, Omprakash dropped his school. During these days he suffered a lot. He becomes noisy having seen his schoolmates passing by with books in their hands. Omprakash and his elder brother, Janesar went to farm at early morning and collecting grass for his buffaloes. It was a work for them to beware of buffaloes during that time. The responsibility of pig has also given to them by their parents. Like Indian cow, pig was an important part of Bhangi lives. At any ways like in sickness, in life or death, in any feast or wedding ceremonies pig played a vital role in their lives. Even their religious ceremony could not fulfill without pig. Though it was symbol of dirty, but for them the existence of pig was a way of prosperity and a sign of richness. One day, Omprakash was coming home after grazing the pig. At the way of home, he met Sukkhan Singh who asked him, ‘why have you stopped coming to school? Aren’t you going to study further?’ [Ibid: 13-14] He just shook his head in refusal. Thus, he returned home with miserable feeling. As soon as he comes to home, he said to his mother, ‘Ma, I want to go to school.’ [Ibid: 14] By seeing tear his mother too cried. At last, because of his bhabhi he has started his education.

5.3.4. Depiction of Friendship:

Back in school, Omprakash got admission to the sixth class. Ram Singh and Sukkhan Singh were studying at a different section. Shravankumar was looking smart and
handsome like a girl. But his caste never makes a difficulty among them. Both of them met third friend named Chandrpal Sharma who was a Gujjar by caste. He has tried to make a fun towards the behaviour of Shravankumar. One day, as they were coming out of the classroom, Chandrpal Sharma holds Shravankumar tightly and bit him on his cheek. As seen this picture by entire class no one said a word but everyone laughing loudly. Sharankumar narrates that at that moment he don’t o what happened but how he has kept his neck tightly and fallen on ground. As a result of this, Chandrpal doesn’t angry on him but laughing loudly and finally begged a forgiveness to Shravankumar. The three of them had become good friends after this incident. The effect of this friendship with Chandrpal had become instantly visible. Omprakash and Chandrpal were released from the taunts and the harassments of Tyagi boys. They did not have to stand waiting near the tap for a drink of water. They all have lost their tongues when Chandrpal was around. When Omprakash comes first in his section in the half-yearly exam, he became the Monitor of his class. Though he increased his image but still the behaviour of some teachers hasn’t changed. They were unsympathetic and contemptuous towards him.

5.3.5. Portrayal of Teja Taga: Money Lender:

Teja Taga was money lender in Barla village who demands the pork and liquor before he would give loan. Most of the villagers took loans from him and fulfilled his all desire. Omprakash memorized the incident where his father had taken a loan from him. Teja Taga was having a liking for the food which was cooked in the house of Bhangi. Therefore, he preferred Bhangi for loan than others. Before taken the loan he was enjoyed pork and liquor at narrator’s house too. Omprakash said during such feast, ‘…his face had resembled a spotted dog’s. His eyes red from drinking, had looked satanic. [Ibid: 18] His interest rate was so high because of that one could spend an entire life paying the interest but the basic balance would remain untouched. Most of Bhangi basti was drowning in debt. Therefore, they were silent and no one can in demands to afford a complaint against any injustice done by Teja Taga.
5.3.6. Portrayal of Rainy Season:

The rainy season was miserable to the Dalits. In the rainy season, the narrow lanes of basti filled up with muddy water mixed-in with pigs’ excrement; flies and mosquitoes thrived. Everybody’s arms and legs became mangy and developed itchy sores. There was one drinking well in their basti for about thirty families, and despite a guard wall around it, it became full of long worms during the rainy season. They had no choice but to drink that water, as they were not permitted to use the well of the upper caste folks. Their homes were made of clay that sprang leaks all over. During heavy rains, the ceilings or walls often collapsed, as it did for Omprakash’s house more than once. One season most of their homes collapsed; as always, there was no outside help or insurance, and they had to rebuild on their own. One night, due to heavy rain the narrator’s has opened a big hole on the roof. Consequently, he climbed up on roof whereas his father guides him from below, ‘Careful, Munsiji…steady feet…don’t walk towards the middle…stay near the wall.’ [Ibid: 20] By lovely Pitaji celled him Munsiji. However, he tried to search the hole, but because of heavy rain and darkness he had failure. Finally, as he slowly climbing down, he heard his father’s voice and slipped but his father’s experienced eyes caught him in darkness too. That night most of the houses were collapsed. The voice of screaming and shouting was everywhere.

5.3.7. Depiction of Poverty:

Joothan is an account of pain, humiliation and poverty of Omprakash Valmiki and his community. Due to heavy rain and flood Bhangi community suffered a lot. The house began to leak, wall ruined and roof began to slide. Therefore, there was no work and eating food for a long time. During a wedding, when the guests and the baratis were eating their meals, the Chuhras would sit outside with huge baskets. After the baratis had eaten, the dirty pattals or leaf-plates were put in the Chuhras baskets, which they took
home, to save the *Joothan* sticking to them. The little pieces of *pooris*, bits of sweetmeats, and a little bit of vegetable were enough to make them happy. The *Joothan* was eaten with a lot of relish. The bridegroom’s guests who didn’t leave enough scraps on 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, the elders narrated, in thrilled voices, stories of the baratis that had left several months of *Joothan*. Omprakash has given a detailed description of preserving and eating the *Joothan* after reprocessing it, during the ‘hard days of the rainy season’. The memories of his childhood associated with *Joothan*, often come back to haunt him and cause him renewed pain and humiliation. It seems to be giving a glimpse of the scale of poverty and suffering due to hunger in Omprakash’s community. Each task in India is important and the pay scale is determined by where you are in the caste system. Over a hundred million people are degraded to manual scavenging, removing and carrying human excreta on their heads. This is the ultimate human tragedy that one can see and witness in India as well as in *Joothan*.

**5.3.8. Depiction of Salam:**

The Depiction of *Salam* refers the big celebrations among *Bhangi* community. It means the newly wedded bride and bride-groom should go to the upper caste people’s street and salute in order to get some gifts or money. Omprakash had a big argument with Hiram Singh for going to do the *Salam*. But he went with Hiram Singh to do the *Salam*. For *Salam* both of them walk on the street of upper caste people and Hiram Singh mother-in-low demands for something else which is given to the newly married couple. It was summer days and they wondered in the lanes until noon. The shouting of the children drowned the sound of the drum. The drummer would stop the drum in front of Tyagis house and loudly bang the drum. Whenever someone comes out the bride Hiram Singh would offer his respect in the form of *Salam* them. Once the crowd at house of Chaudharain, where bride’s mother said: ‘Chaudharain, do I have three or four other
daughters that any other son-in-law will come to your door? Please give something so that I can send my daughter away honourably…’ [Ibid: 31] It was unbearable for Omprakash. Another experience of Tyagi house was so bitter than first, Tyagi woman screamingly said, ‘The stomachs of These Chuhras are never filled.’ [Ibid] Thus, someone wants to take one rupees on the hands of Hiram Singh.

5.4.9. Experience at Bhangi Basti, Dehradoon:

Valmiki too left to pursue college education in the city of Dehradoon, where his brother and uncle worked. They all shared a single room in a Bhangi basti. It was here that he encountered the works of Ambedkar, which shook him up; he spent many days and nights in great turmoil. He grew more restless; his stone-like silence began to melt, and an anti-establishment consciousness became strong in him. Ambedkar’s books, he writes, had given voice to my muteness, and raised his self-confidence. His rage grew sharper and he became more active in college events, until his penury made him quit college and seek technical training in an ordnance factory, with its promise of a shop floor job that would judge him only for his work. But quitting college made no dent whatsoever in his love of reading. After a year of training, he got posted to the city of Jabalpur in 1968, moving in the ensuing years to Bombay and Chandrapur, Maharashtra.

5.4.10. Experience at Maharashtra:

After a year of training, he got posted to the city of Jabalpur in 1968, moving in the ensuing years to Bombay and Chandrapur, Maharashtra. The last third of his memoir is on this phase of his life. Now he really came into his own: he met a bunch of Marxists, read Chekov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Hemmingway, Zola, and other Western writers. He joined a local theater group, saw Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, read the entire works of Tagore
and Kalidasa, was drawn to the Buddha’s teachings, and discovered Marathi Dalit literature, the most sophisticated in all of India, which energized him and forged his literary consciousness.

*Dalit literature is an indispensable part of our lives. Dalit literature is not just literature but it is a genuine effort for social realism that is: equality, justice and fraternity.*

[http://apnaharf.blogspot.in/]

In his whole twelve year schooling never heard the name of constitution maker- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Teacher never mentioned him during their patriotic speeches and sermons. Dalit related books gave new direction to author. Omprakash said that these books had given voice to his muteness. It was during this time in his life when an anti-establishment consciousness became strong in him and soon he developed his views on literature and writes, ‘I was more attracted to social realism than to aestheticist and formalist type of writing.’ [Valimiki: 2006: 87] Therefore, He began to publish poems and write a column in a local weekly, later also plays and short stories. Almost two decades later, he published *Joothan*. In this way, *Joothan* is considered as an epic of the Dalits sufferings that have been narrated with various existing references.

5.4. Self Identity and Roots of Dalit’s Humiliation and Injustice:

There are a number of tear shedding incidents of humiliation and injustices faced by Omprakash Valmiki in village, school, and government offices. Omprakash, at the opening of *Joothan*, says that Chuhras were not considered as human. But upper caste people use Chuhra for domestic works like cleaning the toilets, cowshed, and labouring in agricultural farm lands, ‘Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one [a higher-caste person] happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhra were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away.’ [Joothan: 2006: 2] The Children of the Tyagis
would tease Omprakash by calling him *Chuhre ka*. Sometimes they would beat him for no reason. This was absurd and baseless atrocity.

### 5.4.1. Childhood Experience:

Depiction of Omprakash’s childhood has the significant memory of caste discrimination, poverty, injustices, and humiliations. Omprakash, the author, was born into the *Chuhra* caste (aka *Bhangi*), whose ordained job it was to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose of dead animals, work the fields during harvests, and perform other physical labour for upper caste people, including the Tyagi Brahmins. He was identified not by his name, but by his caste, like *Oe Chuhre or Abey Chuhre* in his village. This is a Hinduian Culture to identify everyone by his caste, but not his name. *Chuhra* is not a name but it is a community or caste in Utter Pradesh, which is branded as untouchables or *Dalit*. Omprakash Valmiki remembered his childhood in the village of Barla district of Uttar Pradesh.

### 5.4.2. Basic Primary School Experience:

Omprakash Valmiki was grown up in those days of the post-independent India, when people in general were not ready to accept the right even to primary education for the people of *Dalit* community. In these circumstances, the decision had taken by Valmiki’s father to send his son to the school. With encouragement of his father, Omprakash got admission. But he was not allowed to sit on the benches but on the floor, away from the upper caste boys, at the back by the door, from where he couldn’t see the blackboard well. Other boys hurled epithets and beat him casually, turning him into a cowering introverted kid. Even the teachers looked for excuses to punish him, he writes, ‘so that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born.’

*[Joothan: 2006: 3]* The children of the Tyagis would tease him by calling ‘*Chuhre Ka.*’

*[Ibid]* In spite of heart breaking ill-treatment by his classmates and teachers, he attended
the school. There are two more untouchable students, Ram Singh and Sukkhan Sing, along with Omprakash who are good in studies and their parents are government employees. Though they are good in studies but their lower caste background dogged at every step. If they ever went out wearing neat and clean clothes, they had to hear their taunts that pierced deep inside like poisoned arrows. If they went to the school in neat and clean clothes, then their class fellows said, ‘Abey Chuhre ka, he has come dressed in new clothes.’ [Ibid] If one went wearing old and shabby clothes, then the children of Tyagis said, ‘Abey Chuhre ke, get away from me, you stink.’ [Ibid] This is not their no-win situation, but they were humiliated whichever they weared.

5.4.3. Headmaster: Kaliram- Figure like Dronacharya

In fourth class, a new headmaster- Kaliram arrived, who thrashed Omprakash almost daily and one day asked him to take a broom and sweep all the rooms and the playground in school. The helpless boy spent two days sweeping, hoping it would soon be over. The third day he went to the class and sat down quietly. After a few minutes the headmaster’s loud voice was heard: ‘Abey Chuhre ke, mother-fucker, where are you hiding... your mother …’ [Ibid: 5] He had begun to vibrate wildly. A Tyagi boy shouted, ‘Master Saheb, there he is, sitting in the corner. The headmaster had pounced on his collar. The pressure of his fingers was increasing. As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged him out of the class and threw on the ground. He shouted at him, ‘Go sweep the whole playground … Otherwise I will shove chilies up your arise and throw you out of school.’[Ibid] As frightened, the narrator picks up the three-day-old broom- now only a cluster of thin sticks. Tears were falling from his eyes. Therefore, he started to sweep the compound while his tears fell. From the doors and windows of the school rooms, the eyes of the teachers and the boys saw this spectacle. Each pore of his body was submerged in an abyss of anguish.
As it turned out, narrator’s father was passing by that day and saw him sweeping the grounds. Sobbing and overcome by hiccups, the boy told him the story. Father snatched the broom and with eyes blazing, began to scream, ‘Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya, who forces my son to sweep?’ [Ibid: 6] Regarding to this, Arun Prabha Mukherjee said:

Valmiki places his and his Dalit friends’ encounters with upper caste teachers in the context of the 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 Kshtriya 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.

[http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/]

However, all the teachers stepped out, including the headmaster, who called his father names and roared back, ‘Take him away from here… The Chuhra wants him educated… Go, go… Otherwise I will have your bones broken.’ [Valmiki: 2003: 6] On his way out, his father declared in a loud voice, ‘I am leaving now… but this Chuhreka will study right here… in this school. And not just him, but there will be more coming after him.’[Ibid] His father’s courage and fortitude left a deep and decisive mark on the narrator’s personality. His father had faith that the Tyagis of the village would chastise master Kaliram for his behavior, but the response was the opposite. Thus, by the order of Chaudhari saheb Valmiki has dared to attend the class.
5.4.4. Incident of Wedding:

Omprakash Valmiki witnesses the humiliation of his mother at the hands of Shukhdev Singh Tyagi, a high caste person of his village. At the wedding of Tyagi’s daughter, narrator’s mother works hard as a cleaner and demands more than just leftover from the wedding feast for her children. This infuriates Shukhdev Singh Tyagi and insults her as, ‘You are taking a basket full of Joothan and on top of that you want food for your children. Don’t forget your place Chuhri. Pick up your basket and get going.’ [Ibid: 11] The words of Shukhdev Singh entered in his heart like a knife. It was first time to seen Valmiki his mother being as Durga: ‘That night the Mother Goddess Durga entered my mother’s eyes. It was the first time I saw my mother so angry. She emptied the basket right there. She said to Sukhdev Singh, ‘Pick it up and put it inside your house. Feed it to the baratis (marriage guests) tomorrow morning.’ She gathered me and my sister and left like an arrow.’ [Ibid] Sukhdev Singh had pounced on her to hit her, but his mother had confronted him like a lioness. Here, caste name Chuhri used as an abuse or a way of reducing the scavenger’s sense of self to her destined caste. Therefore, one of the most powerful moments in his autobiography Valmiki’s mother’s overturning of the basketful of Joothan after Tyagi humiliation her. Her act of defiance shows the seed of rebellion in the boy Valmiki. This incident makes the start of the narrator’s transformation from a title Chuhra boy, reconciled to assigning his hunger from upper caste’s leftover food to a Dalit, a battle of Dalit movement.

5.4.7. Experience at High School:

In these circumstances, Valmiki had finished fifth class but their deepening poverty, they didn’t even have enough food, meant that he could not continue with school. He dropped out and began tending buffaloes in the field, watching with a heavy heart his schoolmates going to school. His widow sister-in-law Bhabhi gave her silver anklet for the admission of Omprakash, and he continued his study. He writes: ‘I had stood first in my section in
the half-yearly examination. The behaviour of some teachers, however, was still unfriendly; they were indifferent and contemptuous of me.’ [Ibid: 16] Back in school, Valmiki continued to face severe discrimination. Though he consistently did well in his studies, his memories of school are suffused with pain and humiliation: from taunts and beatings by schoolmates and teachers in a terror-filled environment’, to his exclusion from extracurricular activities like school plays; during exams, he was not allowed to drink water from a glass when thirsty. He had to cup his hands, and ‘the peon would pour water from way high up, lest our hands touch the glass. At times, he writes, ‘I feel I have grown up in a cruel and barbaric civilization.’ [Ibid: 17] He does remember fondly a couple of boys who befriended him and didn’t let caste come between them.

5.4.6. Incident of Washer Man:

One day the scout teacher Rameshchand had to go to the city for a district level meeting. When Omprakash was asked by his scout teacher, he said come in a neat and well pressed uniform, he tried his level best to come up to his expectations. Up to this time he had never worn and ironed his clothes. Whenever he saw the starched and freshly washed clothes of the Tyagi boys, he has his own wish to wear such clothes. When he went to dhobi’s shop to get his, uniform ironed, the washer man saw him and shouted, ‘Abey, Chuhre ka, where do you think you are going? Omprakash said, ‘I need to have the uniformed ironed.’ [Ibid] Dhobi replies tormented his heart and said: ‘We don’t wash the cloths of the Chura-Chambhars. Nor do we iron them. If we iron your cloths, then the Tagas won’t get their cloths washed by us. We will lose our Roti.’ [Ibid] This reply of washer man has packed down the narrator. He becomes soundless. He felt that one can become free from the torture of poverty and physical punishment but one can never escape from one's caste.

5.4.7. Double Standard of the People:
Omprakash Valmiki while narrating bitter experiences of his life as a Dalit also comments on the double standard of the people of so called upper caste. The people of upper caste used to come secretly in the darkness of night to their Basti to enjoy the pork meat. He had realized the double standard of the people of upper caste that at night they can enjoy pork prepared by Chuhra but during the day time they observe untouchability. In relation to this he remembered the school teacher Yogendra who was a nice teacher fellow. He knew the father of narrator very well. Whenever he meets to the pitaji, he says, ‘Chotan, don’t prevent your son from studying.’ [Ibid: 18] It means he want o say that you’re on is studying well. Whenever he made mistake, instead of beating him, the teacher had grab his shirt and drag him towards his father. Though his intention was good but it makes anger on the teacher when he said, ‘How many pieces of pork did you eat? You must have eaten at least a pao.’ [Ibid] It would become his reason of cry. The entire class used to laugh at the narrator being heard as this comments. The classmate also tormented and said: ‘Abey Chuhre ke, you eat pork.’[Ibid] At such moments, the narrator think of all that Tyagi upper caste people those who are come in darkness to come Bhangi basti and enjoyed the pork meat. Therefore, Valmiki asserts that education is the only medium to escape the trap of Conspiracy. Being disgusted with blind Hindu orthodoxy, he denies his identity as a Hindu and interrogates: ‘I also wondered why one has to be a Hindu to be a good human being.’ [Ibid: 41] Such moments of helplessness in the life of someone are capable to stir his faith in the established principles of life and the same happened with Valmiki.

5.4.8. Lesson of Donacharya:

At the class of eight, once the teacher was teaching the lesson of Donacharya who describes the poverty faced by Donacharya and how he has feed flour dissolved in water to his hungry son Ashwathama. Being heard the story of Donacharya’s dire poverty; an entire class was emotionally felt badly. It was written by Vyasa in the epic Mahabharata
to emphasize the Dronacharya’s poverty. Suddenly, the narrator stands and asked a question to his teacher regarding to this episode, ‘So Ashwathama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who had to drink mar? How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn’t an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?’ [Ibid: 23] He means to say who our epic poet is to writes our pain and suffering in his book. It was first time to raise the question by Omprakash as a result of consciousness. It is not an emotion but attitude given only by education. Though he was educated but could not escape from the conspiracy of conventional society. When Omprakash raised issue of equality in class, master saheb shouted and said: ‘Darkest kaliyug has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back…Chuhre ke, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya…Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body.’ [Ibid] This kind of incident is permanently memorized by Omprakash. Omprakash’s social consciousness of poverty showed that he was really attached to the truth of his contemporary society. For the question, the Master wrote a new epic of brutal beating on his back. Regarding to this a well known critic said that:

*Dalit not only left out in society but in literature too. Their accounts find no narration and articulation.*

[http://apnahrarf.blogspot.in/]

Literature too left Dalits- literature claim itself pure, without boundary, region, religion, creed and caste but this so called literature could not see Dalit humiliation and hell-like life. Thus, the lives of Dalit people are a saga of discrimination, deprivation and exclusion.

5.4.9. Episode of Brajesh:

At the class of eight, Omprakash faced further experience of humiliation from classmate as well as from villagers. He has kept in mind that took place in 1962. One day Surajbhan Taga’s son Brajesh saw Omprakash near to the kothi, the canal inspection house, he said, *Abey Chuhre ke, stop.* [Valmiki: 2003: 28] He, out of jealousy, wants to get into trouble
and picked up his books at scattered into the bay-mud soil: In angry voice he said, ‘I hear you are clever in your studies.’ [Ibid] But do study what you want, you will remain a Chuhra. There a little argues had takes place in between the narrator and Brajesh. As result of this Brajesh takes his school bag and put on the stick and twirled it around. Finally, the school bag had fallen into the muddy ditch therefore books were to be getting wet. Being washed his hands and dried books n sunlight he goes to school. Because of this incident he could not concentrate on his study in whole day. But his father’s face and words, you have to improve the caste by studying, was inspired to him. By the time he reached eighth class, he began to think in broader perspective. It sharpened his sensibility.

5.4.10. Episode of Salam:

The tradition of Salam is one of the big celebrations among Bhangi community. It means the newly wedded bride and bride-groom should go to the upper caste people’s street and salute in order to get some gifts or money. Once, Omprakash goes with Hiram Singh to do the Salam. It was a time of summer and for Salam both of them walks on the door by door and demands for something else which is given to the newly married couple. Omprakash remember when they go to the Chaudhrain’s door, she gave a one rupee to Hiram Singh said to his mother-in-law: ‘Arri, your son-in-law is quite handsome. What kind of work does he do? [Ibid: 31] And after looking towards the narrator, she asked in the same tone you study too? When he replied ‘yes’, she said, ‘the Chuhras’ progeny also study in the school?...However much you study …you will still remain a Chuhra.’ [Ibid: 32] She means to say you learnt whatever but can’t change your caste which is your identity in society. This inferior treatment or inhuman attitude faced by Omprakash very badly. Thus, there are many such incidents of his childhood are covered inside him, bearing witness to the dark days of past.

5.4.11. Episode of Brijpal Singh Tyagi:
Indian culture has so called the great tradition of hospitality, which is summarized in *Atithi Deo Bhav*. However, the narrator’s experiences of life show that in the case of *Dalits* it fails. While studying in school, Brajpal Singh Tyagi was a science teacher who sent Bhikhuram and Omprakash to his village to bring wheat and vegetables. The family members of the teacher take them as high caste boys and give warm welcome. After knowing that these two are from Barla, Brajpal Singh Tyagi’s father asked question: ‘what is your caste?’ [Ibid: 51] Omprakash answered, ‘We are of the *Chuhra* caste.’ [Ibid] As soon as they came to know of their caste, both boys are beaten by the villagers from breaking the rules of caste by entering the house and eating from the plates of family members. His truth on telling the caste had resulted in humiliation—beating and insults. This kind of humiliation is in every village of India. However, this assumption has been proved false by the caste discrimination faced by *Dalits* in rural life in public and private society. Therefore, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar suggests and said, **let’s go to city, where the caste discrimination can be seen less than rural area.** [Ambedkar: 1945: 12] But it is not true; Omprakash gets same experience in Mumbai with his friend Mr. Kulkarni. The narrator experienced the practice of untouchability in city too. Regarding to this, Omprakash Valmiki writes:

> One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation but it is impossible to get past caste. [http://www.mouthshut.com/]

With this statement, Valmiki highlights the rigidity of the caste system in India that has resulted in the socio-economic oppression of thousands across India over centuries merely because of the lesser caste to which they belong.

**5.4.12. Episode of Fauz Singh Tyagi:**

When Omprakash was in the Tenth standard, he experienced a great humiliation. He was the first student of his caste, not just from his *basti* but from the entire region. Fauz Singh Tyagi came to *Dalit Vasti* and stood before him, a huge staff on his shoulder. He said, ‘*Abey, Chuhre,* what are you doing?’ [Valmiki: 2003: 57] He replied in a stumpy voice,
‘Tomorrow I have to do the math test.’ [Ibid] Eventually, Fauz Singh Tyagi held him by the elbow and dragged out to his field. Being threatened the narrator does the work and digested the vulgar abuses. It was not first time to bear but also he suffered a long time such tyagis inhuman treatment. During that day, he spent the whole morning sowing cane. With Omprakash there were about eight or ten others who had one the same work. At middle of the day, Fauza’s mother had brought lunch. All he members belong to Tyagi family sat down under the shelter of tree and Chuhras were sat down in the sun with taking two roties and a piece of pickle. It was seen by Omprakash and refused to eat with them. Fauz shouted at him and swearing: ‘Abey Chuhre ke…Just because he has learnt to read a little he has above himself… Abey, don’t forget who you are.’ [Ibid] This attitude makes as a result of education. The birth of revolt had taken place in the mind of Omprakash. Finally, Fauza’s mother called: Khajoriwali ke…come…eat your rotis, Omprakash accepted the food given by Fauza’s mother. She too dropped the roties into his hand from way above, lest her hand touch him. This symptom was become insult of the boy Omprakash, who throws it in the face of Fauza’s mother and run away towards his home.

5.4.13. Episode of Bhagavad Gita:

One day, Omprakash’s father gave him a copy of Bhagavad Gita. After reading the book, he found that Dalits were not given importance, but only the Hindu men and women. Of course, the Gita inspired Omprakash to ask questions, and made him a rationalist. It is unusual that upper caste people never ask questions to God that why Dalits were discriminated? However, Omprakash questioned, and for that he was punished by the upper caste teacher: ‘My discomfort with my reading was arousing a new consciousness in me. I began to get bored by the Gita. I wanted answers to the questions bobbing inside my head. Whenever I dared to ask my School teachers 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 Chuhre ka, pretending to be
Omprakash realized that he was given opportunity not only for study and also to change the society. Gradually, the study of Omprakash developed and began to concentrate on his dreams of emancipation.

5.4.14. Episode of Omdatta Tyagi:

By encouraged Chamanlal, Omprakash got admitted to the science faculty. Post-high school, he had gained considerable self-confidence. But a life experience doesn’t change. In relation to this, Omprakash narrates: Omdatta Tyagi was the English class teacher. He usually speaks at satirical. He has used a ‘that is’, additional word, at the end of every sentence which makes laughs in the class. Everyone laugh at Omdatta Tyagi and imitates his habit. Whenever Omprakash asked any question or problem, make him aware about his caste Bhangi. At such occasions, he felt that Omdatta Tyagi was not a teacher but an illiterate feudal lord, drunk on his caste arrogant. When Ram Singh and the narrator were felling upset, they wrote character sketch of Omdatta Tyagi, entitled as A Profile of That Is. One day, in the lecture of Omdatta Tyagi who has read A Profile of That Is. Subsequent to reading the paper, he throws the book on desk and look fiercely at Ram Singh. As recognized the handwriting of the paper, he concentrate on Ram Singh and called him to the staff room. He has welcomed with kicks and slaps as he entered. It was unbearable incident or him. As result of this, Omprakash was mortally afraid of physical punishment and lived in a state of permanent nervous tension.

5.4.15. Episode of Narendra Kumar Tyagi:

Omprakash was studied in the Eleventh standard; Narendra Kumar Tyagi was Lecturer of Mathematics. Omprakash narrates, it was a time of summer and Narendra Kumar Tyagi was going taught. By thirsty he said to me, ‘Go, bring me a glass of water from the pitcher.’ [Ibid: 64] He replied, ‘Master Sahib, I am not permitted even to touch those pitchers. Please send someone else.’ [Ibid] In confusion the Teacher asked him, why? Omprakash quietly said, ‘I belong to Chuhra caste.’ [Ibid] It was shock to him and to
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staff room enjoyed water by his own hand. Omprakash felt how he is coward. He could dare to drink water with untouchable’s hand. What’s the use of his education? If he has gives support to the Untouchability. Education is not a collection degrees but it is an attitude which understood human beings.

5.4.16. Experience at DAV College, Dehradoon:

Due to the conspiracy of Brajpal Singh Tyagi and the principal, Yashveer Tyagi Omprakash failed in the Intermediate examination despite securing good marks in all subject except Chemistry practical papers. It suggests that before the power of upper caste teachers, the poor Omprakash was unable to survive. These kinds of deliberate caste assaults have been scratching Omprakash from time to time. After experiencing such assaults, Omprakash’s older brother Jasbir, who was working in the Survey of India, took Omprakash to Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, Dehradoon. The atmosphere of DAV, College was different from Tyagi Inter College. In the village it didn’t matter which you have wore but in Dehradoon everybody wore shirt and pants. Due to lack of proper clothes, Jaisbir gave him one of his old pair of pants which was quite loose on him. As a result, other students used taunt and make fun on the clothes of the narrator. Once, Omprakash come out of the English class, a boy from another section who stopped him and make fun on his pants. One of them began to pull down his pants and said: ‘Which tailor did you go to? Give us his address too.’ [Ibid: 69] And others were laugh at him. He had said entreated piteously, ‘It will tear…please let go.’ [Ibid]But they could not control their laughing which is stressed his rural accent. This drama had gone for a long time. Finally, because of a teacher he escapes from the trap of boys but could not concentrate on his study. Omprakash experienced the same in the winter season. The first winter was extremely difficult for him due to lack of woolen clothes. It was easy to manage with bed-sit or a blanket in Tyagi Inter College, but that wasn’t an option in Dehradoon College. So ever, he bought a Khaki jersey from municipal employee. When he was went college wearing this jersey, the boys began to tease him by calling a
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Jamadar. Though it was protect him from the wintry, but the taunts of boys were even more piercing than the cold. Many time he determined not wear it. But finally he made up his mind and decides to see how long they would tease him. It means wherever you go your caste could not gone.

5.4.17. Experience at Ordinance Factory Training Institute:

During his college days, Omprakash got a job at the Ordinance Factory Training Institute, Khauaria and Jabalpur. After employment in the Ordnance Factory Tainting Institute (OFTI) in Khamaria, Omprakash was scolded with dirty word Sohare, father-in-law, by his higher-officer Mr. Gupta. The government officer assaulted Omprakash by the word Abey sohare, it pierce the heart of Omprakash: seeing Barla, Muzaffarnagar, as my permanent address, his anger and surprise had burst out together: ‘Abey, sohare, he has got this far! I felt that his way of speaking to me was unjust ... After we left Gupta’s office, he said, you are in training right now. These people want you to take a wrong step so that they can throw you out of the institute. Learn to recognize their traps.’ [Ibid: 82] Omprakash was trapped everywhere by his caste. He has been stung by uncounted upper caste scorpions. His suffering is greater than Macbeth’s innocence and King Lear’s disappointments in the storm because of the ungrateful daughters. No way inferior to those great characters, Omprakash had been facing all sorts of discrimination, injustices, atrocities, and humiliation. It was a time to developed self-hood and gain more knowledge and confidence. Here he attracted to wards Marxist Literature, because it rejects class and cast system.

5.4.18. Experience at O. F. T. Institute, Mumbai:

Omprakash came to Bombay in 1970 and lived at the hostel of Ordinance Factory Training Institute, Ambernath. Among the Ordinance Factories, this institute and its hostel old a special place. Along with gymnastics and indoor games facilities, the hostel
also had a swimming pool and a library. It was in this library that he read Pasternak, Hemmingway, Victor Hugo, Pierre Louis, Tolstoy, Pearl Buck, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Stevenson, Oscar Wild, Emile Zola, and other Western writers. He joined a local theater group, saw Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, read the entire works of Tagore and Kalidasa was drawn to the Buddha’s teachings, and discovered Marathi Dalit literature, the most sophisticated in all of India, which energized him and forged his literary consciousness.

He began to publish poems and write a column in a local weekly, later also plays and short stories. Almost two decades later, he published *Joothan*.

During the training at Bombay, Omprakash heard an incident of *Dalits* exploitation by the upper class people in Mumbai- Puna area. He had shocked by listened this news and wrote an article on the problems of *Dalit* which was published by *Navbharat Times Newspaper*, Mumbai. This essay aroused a lot of controversy. As a result, the government employees who were Shiv Sena supporters complained against his essay to the Principal of the institute. Once, the Principal asked him, ‘you have written this?’ Omprakash said, ‘yes.’ The Principal said: ‘you are in a government institution. There could be disciplinary action against you on the bass of this article…Don’t do all this during training… You will be thrown out. Go now. Be careful in the future’ [Ibid: 91]

However, this kind of writing gave him fame and sympathy of *Dalits* from Maharashtra. Therefore, he came in contact with Marathi- *Dalit* Literature which ‘pulls a spark in his veins.’ (91) He begins to change the definition of literature which should primarily have a social motive beyond its aesthetic sense.

At the hostel of Ambernath, the narrator meets Vinayak Sadashiv Kulkarni, a Maharastrian Brahmin, who used to come to the mess and ate meat in the mess account of Omprakash. Therefore, Mrs. Kulkarni and Savita also became friends to him. One day when Valmiki observed her behaviour with Prof. Kamble that she was served tea and snacks in a different kind of dishes owing to his lower caste. Valmiki asked her to the reason behind this behaviour. Shavita said, ‘SCs were uncultured, dirty.’ [Ibid] After this
incident, Omprakash realized that Dalit attain anything, but his cast will never change. However, Savita developed love affection for him without knowing his caste. She persuaded him on many occasions to go to the movies. But when he realized that she had fallen in love with him, he refused and maintained his respect. Later he acknowledged his caste to her, and consequently, Savita left him forever. In relation to this, Bhagwan Das, in his article Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits, provides a comprehensive picture of how untouchability affects the day-to-day lives of Dalits today. He says in addition to that:

A superior gives bad reports to a Dalit subordinate in order to obstruct his promotion. In every day talk in the canteens, buses, trains and airplanes, offices and establishments, aspersions are cast on the men and women of untouchable origin and derogatory remarks are passed.

[Das: 1996: xxiv]

While talking about his life in Mumbai, he mentions that he was invited and well-treated by the Deshpande family. Because of his surname Valmiki, that family was under the impression that Omprakash was a Brahmin but the moment they realize that Omprakash was not a Brahmin but a Dalit, there came a change in their attitude and it never remained the same as it was formerly.

5.4.19. Experience at O. F. T. Institute, Chandrapur:

Mr. Kureshi, a sub-inspector in Maharashtra police and friend of the narrator wants to introduce him to a new commandant of the DSC, who came to Chandrapur district of Maharashtra on transfer from the narrator’s village Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. Here, the narrator shows that the hesitation to meet a new DSC because he knew even after becoming a high official, for high caste people, he is only a Chuhra, a low caste person who cannot get equal status with them. However, Mr. Kureshi, it is narrow-mindedness about him. The new commandant of the DSC gives them warm well-come but as he learnt of the narrator’s hometown, he asked: ‘Barla is a Tyagi village. Which caste are
you from? I looked at Kureishi, whose faced had changed color. He had asked the question conversationally. The moment I said that my caste was Chuhra, the Commandant became uneasy… This was a new experience for Kureishi.’ [Valmiki: 2003: 115] By understood the caste of Omprakash Valmiki as a Chuhra, he feels uncomfortable. In an Indian society, most of the times the status person is decided by one’s caste. Omprakash by narrating the harsh experiences, of his life as a Dalit, wants to make one thing clear that untouchability needs to be removed, abolished from the psyche of an average Indian and then only equality can be experienced. The constitution has not much helped because untouchability is already removed on a piece of paper by the way of constitution. Yet, it is to be found everywhere in the attitude, relations and interactions. One has to drive it out of one’s mind then only untouchability would end in a real sense of term.

5.4.20. Experience at a Train Journey:

At a train journey, Omprakash and his wife faced the dreadful act of discrimination by a caste Hindu’s family when they were returning to Chandrapur via Delhi after a trip of Rajasthan. Being discussed the beauty of Rajasthan, the subject changed midstream. Suddenly, Hindu woman asked his wife: ‘Bahenji, are you people Bengali?’ [Ibid: 133] Chanda replied easily, ‘No, we are from Uttar Pradesh. My husband is posted at Ordinance Factory, Chandrapur.’ [Ibid] Then, the officer’s wife fired second question: What is your caste?’ Before Chanda say anything, Omprakash replied, Bhangi-Untouchable. As soon as they heard the word Bhangi, they lapsed into total silence. As result of this, there was no any discussion between the two families during the rest of the journey. Only the name Bhangi made a partition among two families. The atmosphere had turned oppressive; therefore, the journey had become painful. In this way, Omprakash was assaulted in every sphere of life. Moving from childhood to youth, when his personality was being shaped, he had to live in this terror-filled environment. Therefore, he said, ‘how those who have never suffered the needle will pricks of hatred
and jealousy feel my pain? Who have never endured humiliation? How will they know what it feels like? Dreams, like sand dunes, do not make a sound when shattered.’ [Ibid]

Thus, he has grown up in the vindictive and barbaric civilization.

Thus, it is not one but many such incidents, right from his childhood to youth, countless stings have stung not just his body but also his heart. Regarding to this it is said:

**Though Valmiki faced humiliation and insults from both upper caste teachers and students in school and college life, he never suppressed his desire to continue with his studies. Due to his hard work and determination, he became the first graduate in his community. He inspired his caste people to join their children in schools. Valmiki developed the Dalit consciousness among his people.**

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/]

It is said that if person is born, caste determines his destiny. If it is in our hands, why should Omprakash Valmiki born in Bhang community? On these questions, there is big argument but as a result of this we have suffered from poverty, illiteracy, narrow-mindedness, religious inertia and priestocracy, a social order embroiled in ritualism, which, fragmented, was defeated by number of eastern and western empire. Hence, Times have changed, but there is something somewhere that continues in trouble which is Dalits pain.

### 5.5. Rejection to traditional Hindu culture and acceptance to Buddhist culture:

Autobiography is viewed as a genre which makes use of imagination to search truth, to discover a truthful, honest metaphor of the self. Self is a multifocal word. It is argued that autobiography is an important part of the narration of the second manifestation of self called reflection, and that it is highly dependent on context. This is the dominating narrative feeling in most subaltern autobiographies; Omprakash’s sense of self and community were juxtaposed in his *Joothan* as heat and soul.

#### 5.5.1. Rejection of *Joothan*:
One of the most powerful experiences in *Joothan* is when his mother overturned a basketful of *Joothan* at a wedding after a high-caste Tyagi humiliated her. After this incident his mother never went back to his door. Not only this but also the family of Omprakash had stopped taking the *Joothan* as imposed on them by Hindu culture. It was the first rejection of Hindu tradition which was digested by little Omprakash. Being educated and giving inspiration from the incident of his mothers revolution, he started oppose the Hindu tradition.

5.5.2. Rejection of Salam:

On the occasion of Hiram Singh’ wedding, Omprakash had a big argument with Hiram Singh for going to do the *Salam*. Finally, he went with Hiram Singh to do the *Salam*. For *Salam* both of them walk on the street of upper caste people and Hiram Singh mother-in-law demands for something else which is given to the newly married couple. Whenever someone comes out, the bride Hiram Singh would offer his respect in the form of *Salam*. It was awful for Omprakash. Come back to home the narrator furiously asked his father, ‘Is it right to go for *Salam*? [Valmiki: 2003: 32] Pitaji look at him as saw him first and quietly said: Munshiji, sending you to school has been a success… I, too, have understood your point… We will now break this costuom.’ [Ibid] Not only saying but also done they have said and implemented in the marriage of Maya. They have stopped the tradition of *Salam*.

5.5.3. Rejection of old Tradition and Customs:

In *Joothan*, the *Bhangi* community worshiped God Kalwa, Hari Sinh Nalwa and others. Goddess Madaran is among the most important ones. Whatever it was a wedding or birth or death, it was en essential to worship the gods. There was a superstition that if someone forgot to worship the gods, there was something terrible might happen to them. Being grown up in such atmosphere, Omprakash never faith on these believes. Whenever his
family performed such ritual, Omprakash was sitting outside or wander around. As a result of this, his father was angry upon him due to his behaviour. Regarding to this, his father get annoyed on him and asked: ‘Munshiji… I hope youh haven’t a Christain.’ [Ibid: 41] But something came to a boil inside him n he wants to say, ‘Neither am I a Hindu. If I were really 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 does one have to be a Hindu in order to be a good human being… I have seen and suffered the cruelty of Hindus since childhood. Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are Hinds so cruel, so heartless against Dalits.’ [Ibid] In this way, Pitaji scolding him and to tart their *puja*- prayer. But the narrator doesn’t take company to them, whereas he avoids the *puja*. It is the rejection Hindu culture.

5.5.4. Rejection of Untouchability:

One day Omprakash had go to woks at the farm of Fauza Singh Tyagi. At middle of the day, Fauza’s mother had brought lunch. All the members belong to Tyagi family sat down under the shelter of tree and *Chuhras* were sat down in the sun with taking two *roties* and a piece of pickle. It was seen by Omprakash and refused to eat with them. Fauz shouted at him and swearing: ‘Abey Chuhre ke…Just because he has learnt to read a little he has above himself… Abey, don’t forget who you are.’ [Ibid: 57] This attitude makes as a result of education. The birth of revolt had taken place in the mind of Omprakash. Finally, Fauza’s mother called: ‘Khajoriwali ke…come…eat your *rotis*. [Ibid: 58] Omprakash accepted the food given by Fauza’s mother. She too dropped the *roties* into his hand from way above, lest her hand touch him. This symptom was become insult of the boy Omprakash, who throws it in the face of Fauza’s mother and run away towards his home. This incident had an impact on the entire Bhangi basti and, therefore, people were started to refuse wage less work.
At Chandrapur, Omprakash got many new friends which were connected with Dalit panthers. During that period of his creativity, Dalit consciousness was further sharpened by only because of Dalit Movements, run by Dalit panthers in almost Maharashtra. The idea of Dalit Consciousness is basically an issue that is related with the realization of human sensibility. Dalit Consciousness is a reformative thought of Dalits life. It includes optimistic point of view, sorrow and pain, and social relationship with society. Sharadchandra Muktibodh in his Essay entitled, What is Dalit Literature laid emphasis on the fact that the state of being Dalit is a state of revelation of the anguish of exploitation and humiliation. It is not a literature of caste but of a Consciousness. He, therefore, elaborates his views on Dalit Consciousness and states:

The nature of Dalit Consciousness is obviously not subjective. It is true that pains and pleasures are lived and experienced by individuals alone but the sufferings of Dalits are common reasons. Hence, there content is essentially social. [Muktibodh: 1994: 267]

It is true that Dalit Consciousness is a kind of power of oppressed and exploited people in India, which is given to them a freedom of speaking, writing and living. Concerning to Dalit Consciousness Daya Pawar said:

Dalit Consciousness is a revolutionary feeling which goes against middle class society. It is a system which makes sympathy about downtrodden people. [Ibid: 29]

Thus, Dalit Consciousness is not an attitude but feelings of Dalits in India. The reading of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Marxist literature changed his consciousness so much that he said, ‘I have no interest in religion.’ [Valmiki: 2003: 93] Humanity is greatest religion in his eyes and that’s why he turns towards Buddha’s Philosophy. There is no cast and class system, everyone has become equal as well as same. No one can poor, untouchables and rich.

5.6. Summing up:
Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* is originally written in Hindi and later translated into English. It is a vivid and sensitive portrayal of a *Dalit* youth’s struggle to survive with dignity in a world that humiliates and subverts his every attempt at emancipation and progress. Omprakash has witnessed many bitter practices which he had to face during his childhood and youth simply because of his being a boy from the *Chuhra* community. Reviewing, *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life*, Namit Arora says that, Valmiki’s narrative voice brims with a quiet sense of outrage at what he had to endure as a human… it attempts to shame them into introspection. This is the kind of book that becomes the axe for the frozen sea inside us. [www.shunya.net]

As Sarah Beth, in *Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: the Transformation of Pain into Resistance*, says, ‘*Dalit individual uses his narrative to raise his voice for those who are silenced by caste oppression.*’ [www.sasnet.lu.se] Omprakash points out that he grow up in those days of the post independent India when people in general were not ready to accept the right even to primary education for the people of *Dalit* community.

*Joothan* describes Omprakash’s experiences as he moved from his native village to Dehradun, Roorkee, Jabalpur, Bombay, and Chandrapur. Everywhere he was isolated, insulted, ill-treated, and ridiculed by the people of upper caste. As long as the people did not know to which caste he belongs, their attitude remained sympathetic, positive and mixing but the moment they realize that Omprakash belongs to *Chuhra* community, there came a change in their attitude. Thus, Omprakash Valmiki by narrating the bitter experiences, of his life as a *Dalit*, wants to make one thing clear that untouchability needs to be removed, abolished from the psyche of an average Indian and then only equality can be experienced. The constitution has not much helped because untouchability is already removed on a piece of paper by the way of constitution. Yet it is to be found everywhere in the attitude, relations and interactions. One has to drive it out of one’s mind then only untouchability would end in a real sense of term. However, reviewing by Sumit Guha, Professor of History, Brown University:
A searching memoir of the life of a sensitive and intelligent Dalit youth in Independent India. It tells us how he overcome contempt, humiliation and violence to gain and educations join slowly growing ranks of Dalit intellectuals in India… indispensable to those who would understand Modern South Asia. [www.indiaclub.com]
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