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AN APPRAISAL OF PREDICAMENT OF UNTOUCHABLES IN BALMIKI'S "JOOZHAN"

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the plight of lower caste people so called Chuhras whose touch were considered to be polluting or contaminated. However the paper narrates many incidents related to Omprakash Balmiki lived in Birla Village, Muzaffarnagar District, but it shows or reflects how people of high class humiliated the low class people. Life of lower class people was made captivated, heinous and hell like due to inhuman behavior of the people higher in hierarchical order to the people lower in rank. Untouchables were not allowed to demand for any wages instead they were provided leftover food (Joozhan) as a gift to content. There were different barriers before them at every step. There was no hope, no joy in their lives. To humiliate the untouchables , people of upper class did not called the lower ones by their names, but by broken forms of their castes names as Chamra , Chuhre Ke , Chuhri , Abey! motherfucker and what not . To these untouchables, not only illiterate villagers, but also teachers (masters) were great source of humiliation. There was no value of their hard labour. All the incentives and rewards to these untouchable were disregards, disgust, hatred and humiliation to their hit and hard work. Omprakash Balmiki left no place to describe where untouchable were not degraded by telling his own sufferings. He maintains that untouchables who studying in schools had no rights to raise any questions even before school teachers. If they do so, a bad beating was given to them as Balmiki himself faced . Their homes were in disgustful or in contaminated area where people of higher cast hardly stood due to stink of hide (dead animal leather) or human excrete. Due to getting no wages, they hardly get both ends meet. The thing that Balmiki depicts emphatically is the self pride of untouchables. He narrates an incident of his life when at one occasion on the marriage of Sukhdev's daughter, he did not give sweets on the request of Balmiki's mother for her children, his mother threw all pattls before Sukhdev and from that day, she left collecting Joozhan. To a father, his son, his life, is self pride . The same thing happened to Balmiki's father. As he saw Balmiki sweeping in school assigned by the teacher instead of studding, his pitaji left self control, and got angry to master sahib. What Balmiki felt or experienced was written in words is really heart rendering. It can make even a stony heart person to shed tears listening or reading the plight full condition of untouchables how bitterly and inhumanly they were treated by upper caste Tyagys Balmiki maintains that untouchables are not lacking in reasoning narrating a story of Dronacharya an Ashwathana told by Master Sahib to the students in his school days.

Key words: Untouchables, Predicament, Appraisal, Contaminated, Joozhan, Humiliated, Plight, Rendering.

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Indian Society is made up of diverse cultures, creeds, religions and traditions. Untouchables are the people who have been deprived of their rights, humiliated, disgraced for centuries as prevented for from drinking water from lakes and wells, entering in temples, receiving education in schools and celebration of Upnayana Sanskars. "Untouchables were either mostly absent from literary representations or shown as victims in needs of saviours, as objects without voice and agency" (Joothan ,Xi). They were also named as Achut , Panchamas , Atishudras , Avarnas , Antyajas , Asparshyas and Pariahs , and Scheduled Caste. Their touch was considered contaminated that needed purification from Ganga Jal . They were also forced to strictly follow Hindu Codes prescribed by Vedas, Puranas and Smiritis.

Joothan is a narration of untouchables depicts self painful and unbearable experience Of Omprakash Valimiki. He himself is the main protagonist in Joothan . He reveals his experience, and tendencies of Savarnayas of village towards the untouchables here called Chuhra. He emphatically says that only he or she who has suffered this anguish knows its sting. There is no doubt in the fact that only a Dalit can write and express painful and unbearable condition and suffering of miserable lives well, as he has seen or experienced what has happened unlawfully to him and to his caste . Balmiki has succeeded in expressing his terrible grief and oppression what he suffered. He narrates his life story living in Virla Village in Muzaffarnagar District in Uttar Pradesh, India, "On the edge of the pond were the homes of the Chuhra.... There was much strewn everywhere .... The pigs wandering in narrow lanes ...." (Joothan,1). Balmiki in his family was brought up with love and affection. He was not called by his father by his name Omprakash . " Munshi ji was the pet name . My father had given me" (Joothan , 5). From his childhood, he had interest in Indian scriptures. "This was the beginning of my literary sensibility. Starting from Alha, the Ramayan and the Mahabharata to Sur Sagar, Prem Sagar, Sukh Sagar, Prem Chand's stories, kissa Tota Maina...." (Joothan,16).

Balmiki maintains the records of his relatives and family members in very systematic manner .It is clear from the fact that in spite of being taken birth in Chuhra family, he used to maintain dairy, on that base he has been successful in narrating all the incidents of his life with the people involved in his surroundings. "My great grandfather's name was Zaharia. He had two sons. The elder son's name was Budha, but everybody called him Budhu . The younger one was called Kundan, Budha also had two sons; the elder was Sugan Chand, and the younger one, my father was Chotan Lal.... Chotan Lal had two sons and two daughters. The younger daughter; somti.... Sukbir was the eldest sons. After him came Jagdish.... Younger to him was Jasbir, then came Janesar and then Omprakash, this is me the younger among the brothers. My sister Maya was younger than me. Kundan had three sons; Molhar , Solhar and Shyamal . He had two daughters. The elder one was named Choti and the younger one was called Syamo" (Joothan, 24-25).

Omprakash Balmiki has been very courageous. He does not hide his identity. "This surname does not lift him up from his childhood and the attendant untouchability" (Joothan, xxi). His father whom he called Pitaji was also pride of his son as he put a mark of identity- 'Balmiki' as a title of his name. "Balmiki's father finds out that his son had to use Balmiki as his surname, a sign of his self-pride" (Joothan,xxi).

In spite of facing ill treatment by the upper Hindus whom Balmiki called Tyagis , he loved his religion and never wanted to convert to Christianity . On those days, Christians had no feeling of cast and untouchability. Sewak Ram Masihi comes to his neighbour to teach the children of Chuhara the alphabet. "He would sit with the children of Chuhra around him. He used to teach them a reading and writing. His father did not want his son to be converted to Christianity like Sewak Ram Masihi. "Balmiki growing estrangement from Chuhra rituals makes his father worry that he may have converted to Christianity" (Joothan , xxi).

One borne in upper caste according to chaturvarnya system, higher in hierarchy never wants the lower in hierarchy to rise from his standard as Balmiki shows in his writing. Gandhi Ji , a great social worker ,writing on Harijans on 6 March 1937, said, " what I mean is , one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and he then do what even he like" (Joothan , xx), but an intellectual person born in lower class will never favour untouchables to do traditional work. Ambedkar again and again makes people of higher caste aware of their rights. One should not be in the tight grip of Hindu Code of Smiritis. In an address at

solapur . He says, "Untouchables, awake from your slumber. Don't do dirty work of village, send your children to school, don't encourage illiteracy" (Rege , 244).

In India society, worthiness of a person is decided not by his work but by birth. A person born in lower hierarchy order is considered and behaved worse than animals. Balmiki felt this evil while living in the village. "Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted" (Joothan,2). In the preface to Mulraj Anand's *Untouchable* E.M. Forster says. "The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape" (*Untouchable*,vi). But Dr. Ambedkar being born in untouchable family spoke about the profession differently. "The reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is harmful because the effect of the Varnavayvastha is to degrade the masses by denying them opportunity acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying the rights to be armed" (Ambedkar, 184).

Balmiki has openly expressed his suppressed feeling how the people of upper cast humiliated the untouchables living in the village. Whether untouchables were in schools on the way to schools, or in the villages, they were not called by their names. A person superior in caste whether he is elder in age, or younger or of same group, degrades and humiliates untouchables while calling. Balmiki narrates how he was called. "If person was older, he was called 'Oe Chuhre'. If person was younger or of the same age, 'Abey Chuhre' was used (Joothan,2)." He also maintains miserable condition of Dalits in schools. " The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me ' Chure Ka ....If we went to school in neat and clean clothes our class fellows said, ' Abey Chuhre Ka' , he has come dressed in new clothes'. If one went wearing old and shabby clothes, they said, 'Abey, Chuhre Ke', get away from me, you stink" (Joothan,3). There was none to stop, even to fellow students to treat the untouchables like that manner. He depicts that not only the fellow students, but also the teachers of school were also involved treating untouchables in the same disgraceful way. He continues an incident of his school days when Head Master Kaliram, one day called him in his room and asked him his name. The Head mMaster was not satisfied on telling him his name Omprakash as no description or humiliated remark yet was presented to him (Balmiki) as a gift. "Chuhre Ka? Head master threw his second question at me" (Joothan, 4).He continues how the people were terrified of high caste people . People nearly same in hierarchical order also kept sweepers away from their profession or business lest the higher in hierarchy should stop dealing with them. He maintains an incident of his school days. He had his one friend of school from washer man family. His father ironed the clothes. Balmiki got a new khaki uniform. He also wanted to go to school after getting it ironed like other Tyagis' boys who daily came in ironed clothes. One evening, he went to his friend's house where his father ironed. "As soon as his father saw me, he screamed, ' Abey, Chuhre Ka! Where do you think you are going?... We don't wash the clothes of the Chuhra-Chamar . Nor do we iron them" (Joothan, 17). How humiliated and disgraceful lives of these untouchables were those days! While presenting his expressions and feelings into printing form, Balmiki narrates all the humiliated and disgraceful life he lived. He further maintains that there was the chance of humiliation at each and every step. Schools, ways were also not safe those days for them not to be humiliated.

He narrates another incident of his school days. It was July or August 1962, after getting passed seventh standard, he was admitted in eighth class. One day, he made his way to school early. On the way, Surajbhan Tyagi's son Brijesh was behind him. He called him, "Abey, Chuhre Ke, stop" (Joothan,28). As I turned him back, he swiftly followed me and said," Chuhre Ke, you really have sprouted horns" (Joothan, 28). He maintains that he was badly disgraced by Brijesh pricking one end of his stick in his stomach and his beg was also thrown away by him after spinning it all around mounting on his stick . Such was behavior of upper cast people to lower ones. It pricked the conscience of Balmiki. His suppressed feelings continue coming out. He maintains another incident of humiliation further that took place in his school days. One day Master Saheb was narrating the story of Dronacharya related to dire poverty penned down by author of Mahabharat, Vyasa. Master Saheb ji told the students that due to dire poverty, Ashwathama , the son of Dronacharya was fed flour dissolved in water . Other students in the class astonished, but Balmiki being very curious responded the

teacher, "but what about us who had to drink mar ! How were not never mentioned in any epic?" (Joothan, 23). As a teacher Master Saheb should have calmed the curiosity of the child. Instead of doing so, Master screamed, "Darkest Kaliyug has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back.... 'Chuhre Ke', you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya ...." (Jootan, 23). Balmiki mentions further that teacher made him Murga and he was repeatedly scolded about his being 'Chauhra' with long stick, the teacher gave him bad beating saying that he was going to write an epic on his body. Balmiki emphasizes that the epic that Master wrote on his body is still inscribed on his back. One can soon shed tears from one's eyes if emotionally considers what in human treatment was done to untouchables.

Balmiki maintains pouring out his suppressed or humiliated feelings narrating another incident of his school days. Neither the teacher nor the students wanted any untouchable to study in schools. But his father whom he called Pitaji forcefully got him admitted in school. So many efforts were made by the teacher (Master Saheb) and students to get him left his study. But he continues still then. He further narrates that questions were raised on what we poor people eat, to get us humiliated. He had a teacher named Yogendra Tyagi from Kutubpur. Although he was a nice teacher but feelings of superiority of cast hierarchy could not prevent him distressing him (Balmiki). Balmiki maintains that at any mistakes in the class, the teacher Yogendra Tyagi used to grab his shirt and drag him. "Pulling me by the shirt, he would asked, 'How many pieces of pork did you eat? You must have eaten at least a pao'" (Joothan, 18). Such kind remarks of teacher were unbearable to Balmiki. Tears filled in his eyes and he used to begin cry. Other students of the class also tormented him. "Abey, Chubre ke, you eat pork (Joothan, 18)." In spite of the fact that even Tyagis used to come Balmiki Basti to eat pork in dark shadow of night. But eating pork to them was not a matter of humiliation. It is caste that soon comes forward in every matter as Hindu Society is bounded by the codes of Smities and Purans. Dalit scholar Bhagwan Das maintains how untouchability is rampant in Hindu society even to this very day as given in ' The introduction to Joothan by English translator Arun Prabha Murkherjee , "Land holding upper class people in village don't allow Dalits to wear decent clothes, cast vote freely, ride on a horse in marriage procession, draw water from a public well, sit on a cot while the upper caste man is standing.... A professor, a lawyer, a doctor, a architect, born in an untouchable family is considered inefficient and inferior without even seeing his or her performance. A patient refuses to be treated by a scheduled caste doctor.... A superior gives bad report to Dalit subordinate in order to obstruct his promotion" (Joothan, xxv).

Woeful plight of untouchables is depicted in every stake that Balmiki has taken out. Balmiki does not forget in maintaining how unlawful and disgraceful behaviors were dealt with the untouchables. Hard and heinous work was taken from untouchables at no wages. "In those days, it was Chuhra's responsibility to dispose off dead cattle in the village. Whenever one worked, the disposal of the employer's dead cattle was a part of his job. No wages was paid for doing this work" (Joothan, 33). That was why; in spite of many members in the family working the whole day labour to upper class Tyagis, financial position of the families was very critical "Everyone in the family did some or other work. Even then, we did not manage to get two decent meals a day" (Joothan, 2). Balmiki maintains that the exploitation of untouchables was at every step. If there was any wedding going to take place in higher class family, Untouchables had to work day and night. "After working day and night, the price of our sweat was Just Joothan" (Juuthan,10). He narrates an incident of his village. Sukhdeve Singh Tyagi's grandson daughter was getting married. It means the whole family of untouchables had to indulge in the work assigned by Hindu Codes of Smirits. "My mother used to clean their plates. Starting ten to twelve days before the wedding, my parents had to do all sorts of work at Sukhdev Tyagi's home" (Joothan, 10). Wedding of daughter meant that prestige of family was at stake. Hence everyone had to do his or her work in perfect manner. "My father had to go from Village to village to collect charpais for guests"(Joothan,10).

Balmiki further maintains that these untouchables were given leftover food as a gift. When at the marriage of Sukhdev's daughter, the guests left no sweets on pattals. My mother requested Sukhdev, "Chowdhri Ji... Please put something on the pattals for my children. They too have waited for this day" (Joothan, 10). But all was in vein. The mentality of upper class people was to use and discard. The same

happened. On the request of Balmiki's mother, Sukhdev said, "You are taking a basket full of Joothan and on top of that you want food for your children. Don't forget your place, Chuhari, pick up your basket and get going" (Joothan, 11). At every point, untouchables were humiliated. They had no money to buy things as no wages was provided to them. They were helpless at every step.

Balmiki does not forget to mention that untouchables were not paid a single pie in spite of perspiring during cutting and thrashing of the harvest of landlords. Once "young men of the basti had refused to work without wages" (Joothan, 37). But they (people of high caste) did not want to pay. "They were looking for a way to maintain their domination without changing anything" (Joothan, 37). He further maintains that they (Upper class people) wanted to terrorize the untouchables. They with the help of constable begin to harass the people of Chuhara Basti. "Two constables came to basti and took ten people with them" (Joothan, 38). They were beaten badly. At every below one of them screamed. All the people of chuhara basti were groaning with pain. Such was the miserable position of low caste people.

Dipiction of Balmiki about this incident reveals that untouchables were forced to do work without any demand of wages. If they did not follow what high caste people demanded from them, they were physically tortured. Such were the circumstances that compelled the sufferers to change their religion. " But sometime came to a boil inside me, and I want to say, ' Neither am I Hindu, if I were really Hindu, would the Hindu hate me so much or discriminate against me?... Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are the Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits?" (Joothan, 41). Seeing this miserable condition, many social workers commented over Hindu religion. Even the founder of constitution Ambedkar was compelled to think about Hindu religion. "I may be born as a Hindu but I will not die a Hindu" (Rege,156).

In a nut shell it can be said that Omprakash Balmiki has really depicted what unbearable, humiliated and disgraceful behavior was done to untouchables in the past. What he wrote is really a glimpse of caste discrimination. He is successful portraying the real picture of past society that was so heinous to untouchables. But now this is the age of globalization and computer era and fast competitive age, people higher in caste hierarchy should equally behave with the lower ones. The people lower in hierarchy order should maintain their decorum leaving the past profession and should send their children to schools that are qualitative in providing education. It is the duty of Dalit Intellectuals who are on higher position should try to make the untouchables understand living in the villages to change their professions and tend to work either in semi govt. or in a factories or in fully govt. sectors sifting to industrial areas. People higher in hierarchical order should change their past mentality and behave the untouchables as their own class people as they too flowing same blood in their veins. Govt. Central and State have issued strict laws based on Indian Constitution not to make any discrimination against untouchables (now called Scheduled Caste). If someone found indulged in such a heinous work, he or she would be treated by teeth and nails. Sufferer may lodge a complaint in the nearby Police Station. Instant action would be taken against the guilty.

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#### **A Brief Bio of corresponding Author**

Dr. Deen Dayal, Asst. Professor of English working in Govt. P.G. Collage Mant , Mathura , U.P., India. He has 13 years experience of Teaching English at different levels. He has his credit in many Papers published in different reputed, refereed and peer reviewed Journals. He has participated and presented Papers in different National and International Seminars, Workshops and Symposium. He has done his master degree and Ph. D. from Dr. B R Amedkar University Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.