



कोल्हापूर

NAAC Reaccredited 'A'
with CGPA -3.24 (in 3rd cycle)

*"Dissemination of Education for Knowledge, Science and Culture."
- Shikshanmaharshi Dr. Bapuji Salunkhe*



VIVEK RESEARCH JOURNAL

A Biannual Peer Reviewed National Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research Articles

Vol.-I, Issue-I

JUNE 2017

URMILA PAWAR'S *THE WEAVE OF MY LIFE*: THE SAGA OF SUFFERING

Dr. Chhaya R. Dapke.
S B S Collge Karad.
chhayadapke7@yahoo.com

Abstract: Dalit literature is known as a literature of minority. It is the protest against cultural and social categories. As a protest literature, it voices out against the existing system and tries to find an alternative. The mainstream literature has a long history while minority literature is a recent. The voices of minority religions rose since Indian Independence. It is the literature which talks about the minority experience. It is the literature raises voices against the social inequalities of cultural categories like caste, creed, gender, sex and so on. The minority writers and their literature documents and chronicles their personal community experiences. Dalit Literature is primarily a social and human document, which deals with the people who had been socially and economically exploited in India for hundreds of years. Dalit literature is creative and intellectual literary expression which transforms the social realities into various literary genres. It is a recent offshoot of Indian literature and represents an emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. Autobiography has been a favorite genre of Dalit writers. Since autobiography is an asset and is matter of life study for other human beings, Dalits themselves merge with the autobiographies. The main purpose of the Dalit autobiographies is to record the suffering and humiliation of the Dalits as a whole. Dalit autobiographies differ from other types in expression and purpose. They portray Dalits' devaluations, and serve as an "intellectual propaganda" for creating socio-economic and political awareness. Dalit autobiographers are concerned with the pathetic condition of the Dalits. They help fellow Dalits to be alert and struggle for their rights, which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. As memories, Dalit autobiographies are sources of Dalits' social reality in contemporary India and deal with the socio-economic and political status of Dalits. These autobiographers picture contemporary authentic conditions of the underprivileged and offer dramatic accounts of poverty and survival in general. They are deprived of economic power and social welfare. These kind of social and legal injustices are also the themes of the autobiographies.

The present paper focuses on the autobiography of **Aaydan** written by Urmila Pawar which is translated into English as '**The Weaving of My Life**' by eminent writer Maya Pandit. It throws light on how Dalit life, narrates their life experiences, emotions in relation with their

family and community. The plight of Dalit women and their depiction through autobiography reveals their experience of double exploitation than Dalit male. The Weave of My life' written in a realistic fictional mode, it is characterized by an honest, frank, and bold articulation of a Dalit woman's experiences

Keywords: Autobiography, Literature of Minority, Dalit autobiography, Caste, gender, pains and sufferings of life.

Introduction: An Autobiography as a genre is rarely practiced by Indians as compared to that of poetry and fiction. It problematized the major issues of class, caste, and gender in the Indian context. Apart from recording a woman's discovery of selfhood and assertion of identity, it also offers a background picture of the Indian culture. The Dalit women are placed at the absolute bottom of the social caste hierarchy. Their suffering is triple fold – society discriminates against them because they are women, then they are discriminated against because they belong to the Dalit community, and within their own community they suffer all over again for being women. Dalit woman often suffered from verbal and physical abuse at the hands of their fathers and forcefully subjugated to fulfill the pleasures of their husbands, domestic and sexual violence. They simultaneously dishonoured outside in public realm forced, and often compounded by sexual harassment. Dalit women are at the bottom of the caste and gender hierarchy. The issues relating to Dalit women most of the time remain voiceless and unheard but the narratives provided by the educated Dalit writers give us the glimpse of the subjugation inflicted upon them.

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave Of My Life: The Saga Of Suffering*: As a dalit writer, Urmila Pawar has established herself as the prominent voice of Dalit literature. She is a literary personality, known for her short story writings in Marathi literature. She was born and brought up in Kokan region of Maharashtra state. She was born in the year May 1945 at Adgaon village of Ratnagiri District. Urmila Pawar's an autobiography AAYADAN was published in the year 2003 and translated by Dr. Maya Pandit as *The Weave of my life: A Dalit woman's Memoir*'. Urmila Pawar has focused on her own life story in the context of the Mahar community of Maharashtra and their struggle during the post Mahatma Phule- Ambedkar period.

'Aaydan' means weaving of cane baskets which was the main economic activity of the mahar community whom she belongs. The another meaning to the word Aaydan; it is utensils used by them. Weaving of bamboo baskets, the main profession of the UrmilaPawar's mother,

indicate their low caste as well as their dire economic poverty "My mother used to weave aaydans, the Marathi generic term for all things made from bamboo. Pawar writes,

‘My mother used to weave Aaydan and I was writing this book, both were activities of creation of thought and practical reality of life.’ I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering, and agony that links us." 1(TWML p.1)

UrmilaPawar grew up on the rugged Konkan coast, near Mumbai, where the Mahar Dalits were housed in the center of the village so the upper castes could summon them at any time for their sanitation related works. They were forbidden from performing anything but the most undesirable and unsanitary duties for years. Their community grew up with a sense of perpetual insecurity, fearing that they could be attacked from all four sides in times of conflict. The Mahar community was always under the fear of atrocity by upper class society.

Therefore she thinks that there has always been a tendency in our people to shrink within ourselves like a tortoise and proceed at a snail's pace. She was much sensitive about her caste as well as her poverty so during school period onwards her conscious mind was aware of the limitations of person of lower caste and meaning of poverty in reality. Pawar refers to her school life and sharing of lunch boxes experience, She writes,

“The upper caste girls always used words like ‘Ladu’, ‘Modak’, ‘karanjya’, ‘Puranpolya’. They brought such novel items in their tiffin boxes as well as at times we went on excursions. However, I never asked myself the stupid question, why we do not prepare such dishes at home? We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in a particular caste and in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly.” 2(Ibid p.93)

She has specifically mentioned the items prepared by the upper class students and the variety of items attracted her but considering her economic condition at home, she never imagined even to talk about them at home. This is clearly evident in her struggle for basic needs like food or water.

Another important reference about the community living and exploitation of the women is seen in their food preparations at home. It is very evident from the memoir that separate food preparations were done for men and women and particularly the daughter-in-law is exploited up to maximum level. Urmila Pawar feels that for outsiders and society, her father was a reformist but for his own daughters he had patriarchal approach. Her father has never taken care of Sushi,

her elder sister after her marriage; she died with her own agony and pain. She was living a hopeless life. She has narrated her experiences of sexual exploitation at her early adulthood and about her schoolmates. This narration and incidents of sexual exploitation are evident in her memoir, “My maternal uncle plays dolls with me and pretends to be my husband drags me into an alcove and presses me hard.”³(Ibid p.125) It’s the harsh reality of being woman exploited both the ways from upper class people as well as the **male counterparts of their own community.**

Urmila Pawar has given very minute details of oppression and exploitations of girl child and women. Pawar describes in this following quotation both the insult and hunger of the girl child. Whenever they get good dish or complete food, it is difficult for them to control. She narrates this incident,

“Once, I went to attend wedding at my sister-in-law’s place, along with two of my nieces. However, when we three spout girls set down to eat and begun asking rice repeatedly, the cook got angry, ‘Whose daughters are these anyway? ‘He burst out. ‘They are eating like monsters’ then someone answered ‘they are from our’” Sushi’s family! Daughters of Arjun master!’ On hearing this, the host came forward. ‘Oh! Are they? All right, all right let them eat as much as they want! Serve them well!’ The cook returned with more rice but being called monster was not easy to digest and we politely declined.”⁴ (Ibid p.117)

Dalits were barred from community activities. The higher castes don’t eat the food touched by members of the Dalit community or even use the same community that Dalits use for water. And women are the worst affected. Pawar recollects the school days memory. One day her classmates at school had decided to cook a meal at girl’s house called Tarlatan Savant as her parents were away. They had discussed what everyone should bring; rice, lentils, and so on. Pawar remembers the incident, “What should I bring? Nothing, they said.’ You must bring some money “⁵(Ibid p.107)

It was a very painful experience for little Urmila, as they did not allow her to touch anything. She recalls this incident:

“They did not allow me to touch anything. However, we all ate together. I really enjoyed the meal. The next day I was horrified to hear that my eating had become

the hottest topic for juicy gossip. Girls were whispering in groups about ‘how much I had eaten.’’⁶ (Ibid p.110)

It was very humiliating for Urmila that even children show signs of caste distinctions and Untouchability as well as, poor people is humiliated for their hunger. This incident shows how caste is imbibed in the minds of school going children of our upper class society. Urmila remembers her first salary she has received after her marriage and it indicates her happiness at one point but at the same time, she was aware that she has to give it to Harishchandra her husband. Therefore, the characters are only changed but the dependence has remained the same. Urmila notes,

“When I got my first salary, I could not believe that all that money was mine; that I could spend it the way I liked. Before my marriage, I used to hand over my salary to my mother; now I started handling it over to my husband. If this is not like deliberately offering head for the butcher’s knife, what else is it?’’⁷. (Ibid p.208)

Being a earning woman also she is not able to enjoy her rights. She remembers the incident of her admission to M.A., course where her husband Harishchandra took strong objections. He was a traditional husband and was expecting that she should spare more time in household things like the other community women. She should nurture children's health, their education and to look after the house keeping business as a typical wife. Pawar realizes that her husband's ego is hurt and he could not seem to tolerate higher qualified wife than him. His traditional patriarchal dictate started peeping in and straight away, he denied her and instructed not to go ahead for M.A. course. There was not encouragement from the home front also. The family conflict also increased due to her higher education. She has narrated an incident of daughter's property rights. With natural expectations when all sisters were fighting with their brother. her mother scolded the daughters as ‘Why should they expect something from the brother since they are well versed and happily settled’. It means ones married the daughters have no natural right to obtain any material advantage from their parents.

Conclusions: Dalit women for centuries have been subjected to alienation and loneliness, created by the patriarchal and upper caste values at all levels of the society. The paper is the study of how a Dalit woman is suppressed in the traditional patriarchal mindset of Indian caste system. When she refers to her Autobiography writing, she constantly remembers her mother and

her attempts to weave the basket. Urmila looked upon her writing as an escape to forget the pain of lost son and so there was no connectivity of analysis of her writing but to forget the sad incident and involve her in write-ups. Urmila Pawar's Aaydan describes her. The weave of memories thus documents a detailed narrative of her long journey from Kokan to Mumbai. She has mentioned conflicting situation of her life being a Dalit woman

References:

Ahuja, R. Violence Against Women, Rawat Publication, New Delhi.1998.

Chatterjee, Devi. Dalit Women and Human Rights Concerns, “Dalit Rights/Human Rights”.
Rawat, Jaipur.2011.

Jogdand, P.“Dalit women, Issues and perspectives”, Gyan Publication, New Delhi.1995

Pawar Urmila Aaydan tran. by Dr. Maya Pandit as *The weave of my life: a Dalit Woman's Memoir*, pub. Katha, 2007.