



DALIT HUMANITY AND SELF-CONSTRUCTIVE WOMEN: A STUDY OF URMILA PAWER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY - THE WEAVE OF MY LIFE

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Abstract:

The issues of caste, class and gender discrimination is an incessant discourse and has been raised seriously recurrently everywhere in the world. The underprivileged lower classes invariably record multiple atrocities and humiliations from their upper privileged class for ages. It arises from various factors like race, caste, and gender. Besides, there are communal, inter-communal, educational, economical, political, and cultural issues which accelerate such discrimination from frying pan to fire. It is a crucial problem still controlling over the lives of so many innocent people around the world and such nefarious and insidious motifs are still whetting in the heads. The present paper attempts to study Urmila Pauer's most acclaimed autobiography *The Weave of My Life* throughout feminist lens.

Key Words: Caste, Gender, Discrimination, Underprivileged

Introduction:

Urmila Pauer is one of the foremost literary figures in Marathi and a major dalit woman writer in Indian dalit literature. She is also a Buddhist and a feminist besides being a prominent Dalit woman writer. She was born to a dalit community named Mahars of Maharashtra and has a down-to earth experiences to the grimmest dalit life of her community especially of the women folk. Winner of so many awards for her literary works such as Priyadarshini Award, Padmashri Vikhepatil Award, Maharashtra Foundation Award in 2004, Urmila Pauer is a distinguished writer of fiction, short stories and credited her highest literary renown for her major award winning autobiography *Aaydan*, called *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* in English translation. She was recipient of Laxmibai Tilak Award for her autobiography *Aaydan*.

Urmila Pauer is a powerful Dalit feminist writer who gives voice to a community which belongs to the Konkan region of Maharashtra in India. She is very outspoken in upholding her community throughout her literary works and candidly presented all untold and unspoken sagas of pains and sufferings of the community. She presents all

shades and states of her community that is labelled as Dalit with all its literary terms called underdogs, underprivileged and pariah.

Justification of the Study:

Here, in this research paper, on the basis of historical, real, theoretical and fictional frameworks, an attempt is made to analyse the various issues of caste, class and gender discrimination and various strands of sufferings and oppression. The caste and gender discrimination in the context of Indian society and the socio-historical reality as reflected in the autobiography and short stories of Urmila Pawar and its expected solutions that could give a clue to build up a progressive society which could boost to build up a prosperous, unified and harmonious nation.

Aims and Objectives:

The aim and objective of the study is to reveal how a feminist Marathi writer, various awards winner Urmila Pawar traces the dalit Mahar communities of Maharashtra throughout her auto-biography and short stories and how the different strands of sufferings and humiliations that the community as a whole or individual borne up in the patriarchal and Brahminical ridden of her society.

Another objective of this study is to reveal how the cumulative efforts of the dalit women as well as individual efforts could become successful in reconstructing their selves or self against the humongous burden of caste discrimination and atrocities engendered by patriarchal and brahminical upper class that is baleful to the dalit and ill-fated Mahar community women in large.

Review of Literature:

Generally one of the important steps in the planning of any research study is a careful review of research journals, books, dissertations and other sources of information on the problem to be investigated. In this research paper, I have mentioned here on the current topic the following relevant research works by different research scholars. Joshi Archana, Ph D research scholar, Pacific Academy of Higher Education and Research University, Udaipur, Rajasthan has studied on *A Comparative study of Racism and Casteism in Gloria Naylor's 'The women of Brewster Place' and Pawar's 'Mother Wit' and 'The Weave of My Life : A Dalit Woman's Memoris'*, in the year 2016-17. Rani Somnath Sarode, Ph D research scholar, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune has studied on *A Study of Selected Autobiographies in Dalit Literature*, in the year 2015. Praveshika Mishra, Asst. Professor, Department of English, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi has written a research article in International Journal in 2021. She has studied on *Contextualizing Dalit Women's Voices: A Study of Urmila Pawar and Bama's Autobiographies*. Shoma Sen, Department of English, RTM Nagpur University has written an article in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature in 2019 on *The Village and City: Dalit Feminism in the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar*. Dr. Jyoti Syal and Mrs. Kamlesh Kumari have jointly written an article in Journal of Critical Review, ISSN-2394-5125, Vol-7, Issue-16, 2020. Both the research scholars have studied on *From Oppression to Expression: A Study of Urmila Pawar's The Weave of My Life*.

Research Methodology:

Methodology is an important part for any kind of research. It implies to the systematic and logical procedure of the principles which lead to scientific investigation. The title and the content of this project show that the nature of the study is analytical. An interpretive discourse method based on analysis and comparison has been also adopted for putting things in proper perspective. The neo-critical devices of close text reading will be followed up for analysis of her works. Previous criticism of her works will be collected and followed for befitting analysis. The study will concentrate on a matter based, informative, and systematic analysis.

Analysis:

Feminist literature is marked as a literature of protest and resistance all over the world. Urmila Pawar is not exceptional in this respect and raises her protest in response to the discrimination suffered by her dalit community against patriarchal system, social injustice, powerful and unruly privileged classes of the society. The women of her Mahars community are the worst victims of these socio-political evils and experience the darkest and cruelest realities being fated their birth as female. Pawar invariably attempts throughout her literary works that women oppression is not only an exclusive subject confined to her dalit community but a world- wide phenomena woven with varied colours and threads. She brings into notice the ground reality of casteism and gender discrimination that many times inspired by her own men and women folks.

Caste system has been vogue in India for thousands of years and still has not reached into an amenable as well as propitious stage. Protest writing against caste system could be marked in different regional languages in India and in this respect, Marathi protest literature has been seen setting a step ahead. The emergence of some radical social reformers such as Mahatma Phule and Shau Maharaj had made tremendous contribution to this protest movement who had raised their voice against the oppression and subjugation on Dalit classes enjoyed by the Brahmin –dominated caste system.

Pawar attempts to count her experiences being a dalit woman and thus relates through her own experiences in the form of her autobiography, *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*. Throughout her autobiography she tries to discover her selfhood and identity throughout different strands of oppression such as poverty, caste barriers and patriarchy. The dalit women trace multiple oppression in her autobiography. Dalit-hood is a curse written in the foreheads of every woman her community which has been closely knitted with poverty. They are not only the part of economic disability but also social disability which makes them untouchable from upper class. Pawar was a victim of Brahmanical regulations which made her reject Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. The Dalit women have to fight under the shadow of patriarchy in a region with geographical hazards for their livelihood which was also once chosen by their ancestors. Urmila Pawar, throughout her autobiography, depicts the conditions of Mahars who experienced their existence utterly to be called subhuman. They were exploited by the upper castes and recognized by them as non-human beings like beasts to be treated for carrying burden.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (Jina Amucha) was the first fully fledged dalit woman's autobiography which was published in 1985. It was written at least twenty years before its actual date of publication. It is probably the first autobiography by a Dalit woman, not only in Marathi but in any Indian language. Baby Kamble's book was more of a socio-biography than an autobiography of a single individual, as it recorded the travails and transformation of the Mahar community on the threshold of an epistemic transformation under leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, also a Mahar, in the 1950's.

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* is both a continuation of –and more importantly, a significant departure from –these dalit autobiographical narratives. It is a complex narrative of a *gendered* individual who looks at the world initially from her location within the caste but who also goes on to transcend the caste identity from feminist perspective.

Dalit writing has manifested recently in many parts of India such as Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab for last few decades. But this trend in Maharashtra as well as in Marathi language could be traced out very early in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. There have been definitely some historical, political and cultural issues that triggered this movement successfully. Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule(1827-1890) and Dr. B.R.Ambedkar (1891-1956) –two epoch-making figures sparked this movement throughout their legendary leaderships and their individual as well as institutional efforts and struggles could be seen enormously

in the context of social reformation, economic and social discrimination against the untouchables and likewise, eradication of untouchability and caste system and imparting education to the women and lower caste people. The Hindu Brahminical hegemony that crippled the human relationship was a sharp contrast against their ideology and they fought vehemently to uproot such evil influences of caste hierarchies of upper caste. They attempted to empower women as well as the dalit communities by means of education and literacy which they thought to be the invincible weapons to eradicate all kinds of social injustices. They involved the downtrodden women in their great battle for social reformation and human rights.

The emergence of Dalit women writers in the regional literatures of India is not old enough though they have been venting to their voices through oral forms such as songs and dances in their day –to-day life. A number of Dalit women writers in Marathi literature have attempted to raise their voices through different literary genres and among them writing autobiographical narratives is a very conspicuous trend.

This trend of Dalit autobiographical narratives after Baby Kamble has been followed by several other writers both men and women such as Daya Pawar, Laxman Mane, Laxman Gaikwad, Kumud Pawde, Shantabai Dani and so on. Dalit writers are basically from different Dalit communities representing the lowest of the social orders formulated by brahminical theory known as atishudra or dalit. Urmila Pawar's womanist outlook has sought for a cohesive relationship among her community and she tries her best to sustain such relationships in her marginalized community. She has tried to reveal the veiled pitiable plight of her pariahs and liked to celebrate the growing self-realisation and confidence and process of empowerment of the marginalized that of she herself becomes a part.

Conclusion:

Urmila Pawar has attempted to find out a new way of progressive journey for her oppressed community and thus tried to make out a breach from the dungeon of exploitation, victimization, as well as superstition that her community has been under entanglement for many generations as well as ages. She has tried to label a new identity to her women out of the rigid convention framed by the patriarchal and upper class society. The lower caste women in India are the worst oppressed section who survives terribly being discriminated from all social privileges. They are exploited physically, mentally, economically, religiously and sexually within the multilayered oppressive cocoon made of varied oppressive elements in the male dominated society.

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