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*Current Scenario in Languages, Social Sciences, and its  
Impact on Social Development*

March 2022

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## Painful Recount of Woman in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*

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### Introduction

Taking into account Dalit Literature, we find discrimination of Caste and Gender. Dalit literature speaks of inhumanities done to the marginalized community who suffered thousands of years due to caste system in India. After the arrival of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on the Indian scene, Dalit voices were raised against discrimination, inhuman and ill treatment, agonies, and miseries of those who were called as the untouchables by the varna system in India.

When the Negro movement took a grip and started black movement, similarly in India, especially in Maharashtra, the spirit of Dalit literature sprung in the holy land of People's Education Society's, Milind Mahavidyalaya, Aurangabad. The Dalit literary movement as well as socio-political movement began with full swing with upcoming poets such as Wamandada Kardak, Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Baby Pawar, Arjun Dangale, Malika Shaikh, Urmila Pawar and many more to mention. The Dalit women writers pen down their sacrifice and the discrimination given to them at all levels. Their social status, their honour and many more issues were discussed and highlighted. The entire Dalit literature is the saga of pain and revolt against the age old customs, traditions and the way of life.

This paper focuses on the painful recount of women highlighted by Urmila Pawar in her *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Women's Memoirs*. As we all know, Urmila Pawar is a prolific women writer who writes in her regional language that is Marathi. She actively participated in the Dalit Feminist Movement. Being a woman, she had to suffer doubly. First for being born in a Dalit family as a Dalit and second because of her gender that is woman.

Urmila Pawar in her autobiography creates Dalit feminist perspective. She also had a pain that being a Dalit women writer and activist, she was developed by the Dalit politics and Dalit men writes who spoke about Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Prof. Maya Pandit translated her autobiography *Aaydan* (2003), as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* (2008). In this autobiography, she reveals the truth of her family which belongs to the depressed class in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. She states her profession of weaving *Aaydans* that is objects made of Bamboo with the different connotations, 'weapons' and 'utensils'.

**Keywords:** Autobiography, caste, gender, discrimination, Dalit movement, *Aaydan*

### Materials and Methods

Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan* (2003) translated by Maya Pandit entitled *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* (2008) is the primary material studied with the analytical method.

### Discussion

Urmila Pawar is a well-known Dalit woman writer in Marathi and an activist in the Dalit and feminist movement. Maya Pandit translated her autobiography, *Aaydan* (2003), as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* (2008). Pawar belongs to the Mahar family weaving *Aaydans* in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. Pawar stated in her Preface to Pandit's translation of her autobiography that *Aaydan* is a generic name for all objects made of bamboo, with different connotations including 'weapon' and 'utensil'. Pawar has stated that there is a connection between her mother's bamboo weaving and the weaving of words with her writings where the memoir begins. She glorifies her mother also in this memoir by narrating her ideas, thought processes and habits. Pawar says-

**"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." (Pawar, 2008:9)**

The autobiography is a link between the reader and the painful recount of Pawar's life. It is an intimate memoir that throws light on the struggle of a woman against patriarchy and caste discrimination. The memoir is a self-expression and a bitter critique of the Hindu upper-class society.

Pawar has recognised her long-standing gratitude to the ladies of her community, who pampered her and held her in their arms despite terrible toil in travelling up and down the hills with enormous burden on their heads. Being educated, Pawar attempts to repay in small part the obligation she owes to these ladies and other members of her community by spinning her memoirs in terms that explain the



circumstances of her existence as a Dalit woman growing up during the Ambedkarite and post-Ambedkarite period.

Pawar recalls the caste and gender-based division of task, as well as the arduous work and hardship of the Dalit women who sold their items at the Ratnagiri market or walked through the river during the low tide to harvest oysters and clams. Pawar presents the pathetic and painful life of daughters-in-law in her memoir. She has a great concern for their helpless condition. The drunkard husbands used to beat their wives severely. Such beaten wives have no support from their families. While narrating the expressions of a beaten wife Pawar says-

**"Let his drinking mouth be burned off forever. Let his hands rot." (Pawar, 2008:22)**

Such distressful words reveal the agony of a Dalit woman who is overburdened due to domestic violence and has no way out. Pawar comes across many violent incidents in her memoir which makes us understand the vicious nature of patriarchy in the Dalit community. She, later on, stands by the side of such victims of domestic violence and supports them to re-establish their household by counseling the family members. Being an activist, she has tried to counsel her community on the issue of dowry, heavy expenses and other family problems.

While selling the bamboo objects walking by the streets of the village, if any upper-class woman happens to cross the Dalit women, at the time they say-

**"Look at them! See how they kept far from us! As if they are wearing the holy cloth like the Brahmin women!" (Pawar, 2008:25)**

These lines express the suppressed anger of a common Dalit woman who is treated unfavourably by the upper caste women. It is really surprising for Pawar when a woman comments on the attire of another woman and hates her.

Urmila is humiliated in all of her social interactions because of her caste. When people came to know about her caste, they either avoided her or mocked about her, displaying their fundamentalist and separatist attitudes. On Manini's birthday, Kishori and her brother are invited. They share the cake with all but after knowing Pawar's caste, Kishori's mother gets angry with Pawar and warns to keep distance from their children. This shows that even an upper-class woman is unable to accept a Dalit woman as her neighbour. But Manini's teacher comments-

**"Never mind! She spoke that way because that was what she felt; just forget it!" (Pawar, 2008:146)**

Pawar correlates it with Kishori's mother and realizes that even some progressive women in society follow the path of humanity. Pawar severely criticizes this act of inequality and disrespect and feels better when Kishori joins Manini again. She expects equal opportunity and status from society but gets mixed experiences that make her understand the vicious discrimination although they are converted to Buddhism. Such frequent experiences create a sense of revolt in Pawar's mind.

Having good academics, Pawar has a strong desire to get a higher education and earn the degree of M.A. in Marathi. She convinces Harishchandra despite his wish to allow his wife for further education. Pawar criticizes Harishchandra's patriarchal mindset and says-

**"He kept stating his philosophy that a man has the right to behave any way he likes. This angered me and led to fights that went on and on." (Pawar, 2008:146)**

Pawar states her doubly marginalized condition when her husband raptor in her progress. She overcomes all hurdles and continues her studies and earns the degree of M.A. Her degree helps her a lot in terms of freedom and empowerment of women. She gains fresh strength and bravery to tackle all of life's challenges, succeeds in establishing her individuality and obtains the pleasure she seeks. This refiguring is an example for the girls who cannot reach the doors of education.

After education again Pawar's husband objected her to participate in the Dalit movement. He could not imagine Urmila rebuilding her existence through movement. Describing her husband's mindset Pawar says-

**"He felt that he was losing control over his wife fast and had to establish his authority with an iron hand so as to keep her within bounds! But he did not know that my horizons had expanded hugely—that I had seen the outside world, and that he did not have the power to keep me confined to the narrow space of home anymore." (Pawar, 2008:149)**

These lines show her confidence to beat any condition and achieve the best. Commenting on her thinking Basavaraj Naikar says-

**"This shows how Urmila's frontiers of experience, knowledge and vision have been extended beyond the confines of narrow thinking and parochialism." (Naikar, B. 2010: 08)**

The widened attitude of a common woman is described by Pawar in her memoir. She expresses the act of liberating themselves with the help of education. Without education, women are crippled and



subjugated which is not a good sign for the feminist movements in India. She makes herself self-reliant and powerful and becomes a symbol of rejuvenation for other women.

The honesty and authenticity with which her pain is depicted in her Memoir are much appreciated. It illustrates her spiritual transformation from ignorance to knowledge, helplessness to bravery, uncertainty to conviction and multiple chains to liberation inside the patriarchal framework. It has helped Urmila Pawar unburden her feelings and restore her 'self.'

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