



## DEPICTING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES OF CULTURAL CATEGORIES IN THE WEAVES OF MY LIFE

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### 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. 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. 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. In this paper the researcher 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. Through this work the researcher is making an attempt to depict Depicting Social Inequalities of Cultural Categories in The Weaves of My Life

**Key Words:** Dalit Literature, Social Inequalities, Suffering and Humiliation and Autobiography.

Dalit Literature is one of the imperative literatures in India. It gives voice to dalit populace. The word Dalit is derived from the Sanskrit word Dalita which means crushed, broken to piece and suppressed. Dalit refers to a particular group of people or community who are economically and educationally backward, dominated and isolated by the upper caste people. During the Vedic period dalits were treated as slaves. Rig-Veda illustrates that all human beings have descended from God. Rig-Veda tells the Brahmanas were his mouth, the Kshatriyas becomes his arms, the Vaishyas were his thighs and the shudras were his feet. The interpretation and belief give space to caste system. These Shudras later came to be known as dalits.

Dalit literature came into sight during the period of writers like Madara Chennai, Kalavee and Santkabar. The Dalit modern movement emerged around 1960s in Maharashtra in Marathi language. Later Dalit literature has spread to other languages like Gujarati, Kannad, Punjabi, Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali. Chitkara commented:

"India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country-bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, downtrodden, ever starved, quarrelsome and envious" (Chitkara 54).

Dalit literature is not a literature of imagination rather it is a literature that ventures the exploitation and domination over Dalit by upper caste people. It is a voice against social injustice. It projects the life of dalits in reality. During the medieval period there were many Dalit writers who voiced against the social injustice. A. P. Nirmal said:

"The term Dalit Sahitya refers to the body of literature which gives expression to the feelings and experiences of the writers representing the people who are broken, downtrodden, crushed, etc. More narrowly the term represents the body of literature produced by the writers and poets belonging to the so-called outcaste communities, the untouchables".(Nirmal 79)

Urmila Pawar's *The Weaves of My Life* is an autobiographical novel that projects an empowered woman. The protagonist Urmila Pawar is the representation of modern dalit women. She was born in the village Conk near Ratnagiri in Maharashtra. She got good education, job and has created her own identity. When she studied in a school, she was isolated by her classmates and school teachers, because she was a Dalit by birth. One day she was forced to clean the cow dung in the school because she is a Dalit girl. She passed in her matriculation exam and finished B.A in Marathi literature. She had a love affair with Harish Chandra, an educated man. Later, Urmila Pawar married Harish Chandra. After the marriage she applied for M.A meanwhile she attended many public speeches and presentations about the Dalit movement. In her personal life, she was dominated by her husband. Urmila Pawar suffered the problems faced by every working woman in India. She is accused of being an irresponsible housewife and mother, because she involved herself with dalit welfare organization. But Urmila Pawar overcomes her courage and organized welfare organization for Dalit women. Later, Urmila Pawar started writing short stories. Through her short story she started to reveal her inner thoughts and anger in a frank and direct manner and was recognized as a good writer. Though her husband felt proud of his wife, he never showed it in front of her. This shows his male ego. She was never encouraged by her

husband. Her own sufferings and the discrimination she faced, being a dalit girl aroused her to protest against the social injustice.

In this novel she has also spoken about the challenges that she faced in life. Throughout her life, she suffered and was dominated by upper caste people. She describes about her childhood memories. She talks how the village women have to cross the two hills to sell their rice, firewood and so on. After the heavy day they have to work hard in the house. They have to give food to the children and serve to their husband. They were frequently beaten by their husbands. But Urmila Pawar was not like the village women though she was also born in that same village.

Urmila Pawar unfolded the worst condition of Dalit women of the Mahar community. The Mahar community is dominated by the respective male person of society. The entire society is under control of the panchayat run by the respective males of the society. The members of the panchayat solve the issues related to women's sexuality. She describes the cruelty of the panchayat on the women by narrating some anecdotes.

"One day some women from the village came, reporting that a widow was found to be pregnant. The whole village knew who the man was. The village ordered her to abort the baby. She did not listen to them. So she was judged before nine villages and punished in keeping with their verdict. She was made to stand leaning forward, and women kicked her from behind till the child was aborted. The villagers felt this was a valiant act of bravery. They felt proud that they had protected the village's honour." (Pawar 156)

Another cruel judgment of the panchayat narrated by Urmila:

"When an eight months' pregnant woman openly accused her husband of having illicit relations with another woman, the villagers gave her the same punishment. Women, mad with excitement, kicked her till the baby died inside her and the woman died in pain in a week's time." (Pawar 156)

The women of the Mahar community are publicly insulted and humiliated within their own community. They are utterly helpless and silent. Urmila reveals the harsh wretched lives of the Mahar community people. They struggle a lot to survive. She narrates how her days start:

"We crushed a tiny piece of coal between our teeth and brushed them with the dust. We stared at the yellow flames in the stove while drinking tea without milk; occasionally ate stale bread with tea. My elder sister would fetch water from the well in the backyard, a brother cut firewood for the stove, a cousin sister would go to the river with a bundle of clothes to wash." (Pawar 27).

She narrates the types of food they were consuming:

"Coarse rice grains, bought from the ration shop, would be cooked for lunch. We ate this rice with pithale, a cooked flour of pulses called kulith. Sometimes we had some leafy vegetables, from our own backyard. Sometimes we had bhakri made of milo, that is, red jowar, a kind of millet, or, sometimes even of husk. This husk bhakri was so rough that it was impossible to swallow it. We ate with the bhakri not any nice expensive fish but dried fish or small, inexpensive fish." (Pawar 91)

Urmila as a child was very conscious about her caste as well as her poverty. The surrounding environment in the society trained Dalit children that who they are and how to live in the upper caste dominated society. She understood from the childhood this phenomenon of society. As she writes:

"The upper caste girls always used words like 'ladu', 'modak', 'karaniya', 'puranpolya'. They brought such novel items in their tiffin boxes as well as at times when when we went on excursions. They would also bring such food when they played with dolls. But I never asked myself the stupid questions, 'Why don't we make 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." (Pawar 93)

Some Dalit Mahar community people left their villages because of the harassment of upper caste people and some for livelihood. They went to Mumbai city and struggle hard to settle there. They were doing labour work or filthy work as a sweeper. Urmila narrates how they struggle to adjust themselves in the small rented room:

"They got suffocated in their 8 by 10 feet one-room flats where two or three families stayed together. The room would be divided into two or three sections with partitions of hanging saris or covers, one section for each family. Men would sleep on footpaths or somewhere outside on the ground in dry months. But in the rains, they all had to cram themselves into the small room." (Pawar 151)

Harishchandra was transferred to Ratnagiri. He and her wife Urmila also faced problem to get a room for rent. They rented a room at the market place. There were many rooms but the landlady offered them the basement room because upper rooms were spared for upper caste people. Among the well-educated persons, she

was doing the job and promoted junior to a senior officer, though she was discriminated as a Dalit woman. She writes:

“The moment a man was promoted, he immediately became a ‘Bhauasaheb’ or ‘Raosaheb’. But women remained simply, ‘Bai’, without the ‘Saheb’ even after their promotion! Besides, I was a dalit! ‘Why should she expect to be addressed as Bai Saheb?’ ‘Why should we ask for her permission?’ some people grumbled.” (Pawar 235)

Harishchandra is a confused character for Urmila. He is a double-faced personality. This is the same person who encouraged his wife to do the job and granted permission for graduation. When Urmila secured B.A. degree, he felt so happy and proclaimed to all that his wife became a graduate. But when she proposed for further study - M.A. degree, Urmila writes: “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.” (Pawar 247) He rebuked her, “Why do you want to do M.A.? Now pay more attention to the children and the house.” (Pawar 240)

Harishchandra’s male ego had forbidden Urmila for further study. He gave the example of village women and said:

“Look at the village women. The husband’s wish is a law for her. She does not dare to sit down or get up without his permission. Tell me in that case, how is she able to run her home well? Was not the answer implicit in the question itself?” (Pawar 246)

In short, he expects that his wife should be behaving like an obedient slave to him. First time in her marital life, she realized that her husband’s ego is hurt. He could not tolerate the progress and success of his wife. She notes:

“Gradually, it becomes clear to me that everything that gave me an independent identity - my writing, which was getting published, my education, my participation in public programmes - irritated Mr. Pawar no end. Gradually he began to full of resentment.” (Pawar 246)

Urmila accepts the ground reality of household work done by her husband in the presence of the guests. She was not sure about her husband’s intention, whether he was doing in sympathy or just pretending. She narrates an incident:

“Once both of us went to a function. Mr. Pawar had been very reluctant to attend it and I had literally dragged him there. When it was time for his drinking session, he got up to go. A sensitive artist sitting there asked him Why you are leaving? Oh, yes, Mr. Pawar answered easily, we have to leave. This is the time when we get water in the house. So I have to go fill it up”. (Pawar 307)

I could not help laughing as his dramatics. After a few days, I heard this sensitive artist telling his friends, ‘The poor husband was going to store water at home and his shameless woman was laughing!’ How easily men appear ‘poor’ and women shameless.” (Pawar 307)

Urmila Pawar in this confessional memoir *The Weave of My Life* narrates three generations Dalit women’s story. Her mother, Laxmi Pawar belongs to the first generation who is an inspiration to Urmila. The mother-daughter relationship portrayed in this memoir is to win the heart of the reader. She compares the weaving of bamboo strips and weaving of words to make basket and text respectively is an interesting one. Urmila Pawar belongs to the second generation. She raised a strong voice for the emancipation of the Dalit women. Education enriched her to fight against the male centered society. Her two daughters, Malvika and Manini belong to the third generation. They already trained by her mother to live individually, bold and ready to make their decisions themselves. This auto biographical novel is entirely different from other dalit works. While all the other works deal with the negative aspects, the unbreakable suffering and exploitation and thereby project hopelessness and despair, this work projects the positive.

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