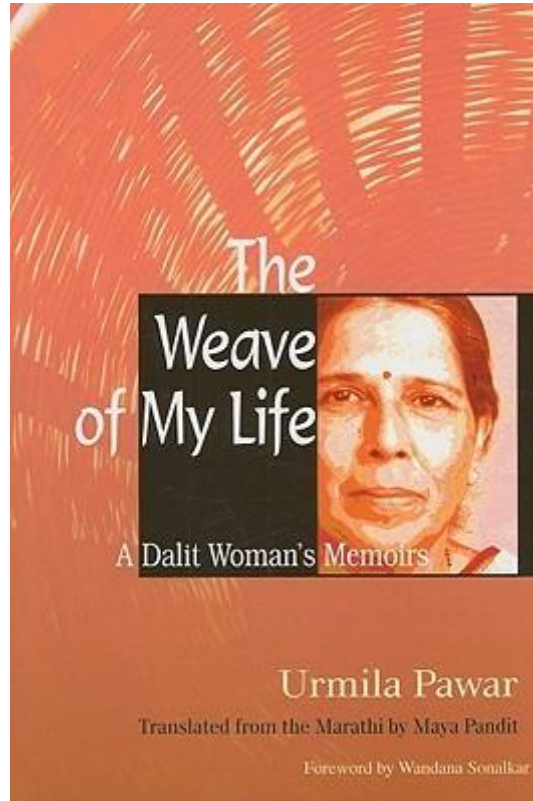


**Portrayal of a Dalit Woman –
A Study of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life***

N. Pavithra



Introduction

Literature is one of the important literatures in India. Dalit literature gives voice to dalit people. The word Dalit is derived from the Sanskrit word " Dalita " which means crushed, broken to piece and suppressed. The word Dalit refers to a particular group of people or community who are economically and educationally backward. Dalit people are dominated and isolated by the upper caste people. During the Vedic period dalits were treated as slaves. Rig-Veda describes that all human beings have descended from God. Rig-Veda tells the Brahmanas were his mouth, the Kshatriyas becomes his arms, the Vishay's 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 Movement

Dalit literature emerged during the period of writers like Madara Chennai, Kalavee and Santkabir have raised their voice for Dalits. The Dalit modern movement emerged around 1960s in Maharashtra in Marathi language. During 1960's Dalite Sahitya Sangh was established and Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar actively participated in it. They are the inspiration for other writers and activists. Later Dalit literature has spread to other languages like Gujarati, Kannad, Punjabi, Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali. Chitkara said, "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).

A Literature of Reality

Dalit literature is not a literature of imagination rather it is a literature that projects the domination, exploitation and atrocities over Dalit by upper caste people. Dalit literature is a voice against social injustice. Dalit literature projects the life of dalits as it is. Dalit people suffered under caste people for centuries. During the medieval period there were many Dalit writers who came forward to voice 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. (Prabhakar 79)

During the 1960's there was a movement called Dalit Modern Movement in Maharashtra from which emerged activists like Dr. Ambedkar. He and his followers started to protest against the atrocities of upper caste people.

Urmila Pawar's *The Weaves of My Life*

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 got good education, job and has created her own identity. 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. The portrayal of dalit women in Urmila Pawar's *The Weaves of life* which is an autobiographical novel can be compared to the autobiographical works of other Writers like Baby Kamble and Bama. Bama in her autobiographical novel *Karuku* has pictured the dalit community and its troubles. She has also spoken about the challenges that she faced in life. Throughout her life, she suffered and was dominated by upper caste people.

Expression of Multi Dominations

In Bama's novel *Karuku*, we find expression of multi dominations. When Bama stayed in the missionary, she was discriminated by the nuns because Bama is a dalit women. Bama was frustrated and never uttered a word against them. Bama strongly believed that education will improve the life of the dalit someday. Bama believed in education. Bama expected that dalit people will educate themselves and improve their life. Bama's desire is to achieve equality between boy and girl. They should be given proper education, freedom and respect. In *Karuku*, Bama depicts her childhood and womanhood. She described about the sufferings of herself and

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other women in the community. She had a strong desire and hope on the development of her community.

Baby Kamle's *The Prisons We Broke*

Baby Kamle's *The Prisons We Broke* talks about the Mahars. In this autobiographical novel, she portrays the dalit women facing exploitation by upper caste men and dalit men. The *Prison We Broke* portrays the dalit women who all suffered from their superstition, hunger and poverty. There is no hope of education in a dalit women's life. Baby Kamble described the poor condition of the dalit women and their anger against the upper caste the upper caste and Brahmanica patriarchy. Baby Kamble's ambition is to get freedom for dalit women.

The Weaves of My Life

The Weaves of My Life is an autobiographical novel of Urmila Pawar. She is the protagonist of the novel. She was born in the village Conk near Ratnagiri in Maharashtra. As an autobiographical novel, it focus on Urmila Pawar's childhood and her growth Urmila Pawar has undergone many difficulties throughout her life. 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. She organized a literary conference to bring dalit writers forward. Throughout her life she voiced for dalit people and especially for dalit women. The Laxmibai Tilak Award was given to Urmila Pawar by Maharashtra Sahitya parishad for Aiden. In Urmila Pawar's *The Weaves of My Life* 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 had an education. She got M.A degree in Marathi literature. She actively participated in public speeches. Though her husband dislikes his wife's public engagements, she managed to come out and work for dalit women. She later started writing 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 4 sufferings and the discrimination she faced, being a dalit girl aroused her to protest against the social injustice. Urmila celebrated 25th December Manusmriti Burning Day as Women's Liberation Day and she organized a women welfare organization. Later she arranged a literary conference to bring dalit writers forward. All these activities proved that Urmila Pawar is a feminist and activist. She not only writes and imagines about the community development. she worked hard in the field to achieve women's empowerment.

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A Comparison with Other Dalit Novels by Dalit Women

A comparison of Bama's *Karuku*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weaves of Life* reveals the difference in projection by these women writers. Though all the three are autobiographical novels, they lend different perspectives to the problems inherent in the life of the dalit women. While Bama and Baby Kamble had concentrated on hiding a mirror at their problems, Urmila has shown the situation to those problems. Her work can be considered as the next step, a positive move towards true liberation and justice for the dalit women. Bama and Kamble show their own success which can serve on a good role model but Urmila leads the way to the success of every one of the community through her community endeavors like organizing conferences and running welfare organizations. Thus, Urmila's novel is a feather in the lap of dalit writing.

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