

## GENDER, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND DOUBLY EXPLOITATION DEPICTED IN THE NOVEL OF URMILA PAWAR: “THE WEAVE OF MY LIFE” (AYDAAN)

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**Abstract:**

*In India we see caste based discrimination is deeply rooted in the mind of the people although many people have tried to uprooted caste system from the mind of the people. The caste-based discrimination began with the establishment of verna system in four varnas classified as – Brahmins, Kshtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras in Indian Society. This quadruple division is a form of social stratification not to be confused with the much more nuanced “Jati” or European term “Caste”. Dalit literature is the literature by Dalit for Dalit and of Dalit tells the stories of their insult of human dignity and human esteem through their autobiographies. Autobiography has been a favourite genre of Dalit Writers. In India women are considered second class citizen, for Dalit women the problem is grave. Their identity gives them a different set of problems. Urmila Pawar through her autobiographical novel “The weave of my Life” (Aydaan) depicts the pathetic condition which she had faced in her life as a woman as well as a Dalit also. This research paper seeks to explore the complexities and dilemma of the mind of the women, by focusing upon gender, social inequality and double consciousness of Dalit Women.*

**Keywords:** *discrimination, rooted, uprooted, quadruple, stratification, dilemma*

**Introduction:**

Urmila Pawar is a distinguished Indian dalit writer of fiction in Marathi and her collections of short stories. She is prominent figure in dalit and feminist movement in India. Pawar’s autobiography Aydaan (Weave), which was one of the first of its kind account by a dalit woman, won her acclaim and numerous accolades. The book was later translated into English by Maya Pandit and reissued under the title “The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs. Wandana Sonalkar writes that the title of the book The weave is a metaphor of the writing technique employed by Pawar,” the lives of different members of her family, her husband’s family, her

neighbors and classmates, are woven together in a narrative that gradually reveals different aspects of the everyday life of Dalits, the manifold ways in which caste asserts itself and grinds them down Urmila Pawar’s autobiographical narrative which are potential enough to scratch and debunk the ruthless stories of Indian women’s plight in the society and their struggle to liberate themselves from shackles of slavery and claiming the victorious trophy; establishing a position of their own. Dalit people are oppressed on all social ground, they are subjected to caste, class and gender discrimination. The intersection of caste, class and gender inequality has worse in case of dalit women. Through this autobiographical writing Urmila Pawar has portrayed the real state of Mahar women, their sufferings, torture, and their struggles to shape their identity.

**Gender inequality:**

Urmila pawar’s life experience illustrate that woman have marginal identity and occupy marginal space within the family and the community. Urmil pawar was an unwanted child because she was a girl. When she was born, her cousin Govind dada wanted to through her away onto the dung heap. Urmila Pawar Says,” When I grew a little older, many would beat me” (WML 64). The caste and gender identity of Dalit women writers makes it difficult for them to have space in the literary arena and the traditional notions that Dalit women have less IQ complicate the situation further. Tulsidas in Ramcharitmanas states.

*“Dhor,gavaar, pashu, aur nari “  
 Yeh sab tadan ke adhikari”*

According to Tulsidas Animals, illiterate, lower castes and women should be subjected to beating, He emphasizes Dalit and Women are fit for beating under such perception, the space for Dalit women in society as well as in literary sphere becomes twice shrunk due to caste and gender inequality.

Pawar had got new way for shaping her identity, through her writing she got new opportunity to improve her creative writing skill. Her writing enabled to present herself as a prolific writer along

with different genres such as: short stories, autobiography, poems etc. through her writing she depicts all the social and gender problems faced by the people of Mahar community. Urmila played a crucial role for her community.

Urmila Pawar narrates the layers of inculcate discrimination against Dalit women. When she became the branch manager in her office, the suffix Saheb(235) was not used after her name “The moment a man was promoted, he immediately became a Bhausahab Raosaheb .But women simply ‘Bai’ without the ‘Saheb’ even after promotions! She remembered the tetchy of her juniors “Why should she expect to be addressed as Bai Saheb?” Why should we ask for her permission n (235). As she was woman, the employees in her office refused to address her with respect. Moreover, she was Dalit, so it became hard for them to accept her status above them.

### **Social Inequality:**

In the novel, “The Weave of my Life” Urmila Pawar has depicted the social inequality of that time. She narrates the pathetic incidents of her life. At the very young age she lost her son. Instead of giving him consolation and condolence her on the sad demise of her son the office colleague started fighting with her. Coincidentally her friends’ daughter was a friend of Urmila’s son. Being a friend her friend was suspicious about Urmila’s behavior. She had ignored the suffering of one mother and she was cursing her. This incident indicates that although Urmila is an educated woman sometimes she failed to understand the problems of their counterparts. And the people misbehave when any individual really wants sympathy from the society.

The another incident related to social inequality Urmila Pawar depicts through her novel is that the pathetic rituals of death ceremony in Maharashtra, where a widow has break her ‘Mangalsutra’ and her bangles and with the left toe of the husband she has removed her wifehood i.e. kumkum tilak. Urmila Opposed this rituals and for Ramakant Buddha Panchayatan on 14 April 2002 about the breaking of Mangalsutra by the widow.

Dalit women had no liberty to roam around the village. The Jat panchayat wondered in the village. The male members of the panchayat would punish such women who were unaware with the unwritten laws of Jat panchayat. Women are closely observed by the male members of their own Mahar community when the mahar women went to collect firewood in the forest. At the outside of the village the males kept eye on them. If any extra marital relation of mahar woman was suspected, she was

subjected to torture, humiliation and perhaps death penalty. There were no such a rules for men. If men had extra- marital affair or did not fullfil his family duties no one questioned him nor punished him.

Urmila Pawar was Suffered marginalization when she had emerged as a writer. When she started writing at that time she was a writer of lower quality because her identity as Mahar woman. There was always burden on her mind, and it becomes compulsory to her to prove her merits. Once a time she was quarrel with her friend Vikas Kaleskar who underestimated her creative skill.

‘You will never understand it; you need an IQ for that!’... “suppose you were given the same opportunities that these scientists got, would you be a Newton, an Einstein a Jayant Narikar?” I was so angry; I wanted to crack a coconut on his head.(233)

Here Urmila Pawar questions why the Upper class people’s writing is considered refined and civilized whereas Dalit writings are taken to be as uncivilized.

She has narrated one wife beating incident in her novel. The narration of pathetic incident, of beating a pregnant woman only based on blind faith.

### **Double Exploitation:**

Dalit men are the victims of caste oppression. Dalit women are the victims of caste and class oppression. Dalit women find themselves as the victims of double oppression by upper class people or society as well as by the men of their own community. There is a biggest handicap of mahar women is their lack of education, poverty. This double exploitation is seen in the novel when the women are prepared food at home for family members. It is very obvious from the memoir of Urmila Pawar that the women had prepared separate food for men and women and particularly the daughter-in-law was exploited up to maximum level. Pawar as a dalit women and feminist writer has highlighted as issue as She writes –

“When the men folk went out and women and girls remained at home, they dined at kata. A small quantity poured in water and cooked as a soup, with chilli powder, salt and a piece of mango or moul. This was called sagar! Women ate their rice with the watery dish. Urmila Pawar says that the song we used to sing, “Hey what is that funny” dug noise, what is the foul smell spreading all over?

*Well, what they cooked was fish water!*

*Someone has had a bellyful and how!*

*She wears a short saree, down to the feet now*

*To hide what 'tricking down from her butt'<sup>4</sup>  
 This Sagar used to be the regular diet for daughter-in-laws.*

Pawar has given very minute details of oppression and exploitation of girl child and women. Sometimes this humiliation becomes very severe. Pawar describes in her writing the insult and hunger of the girl child whenever they got good dish or complete food, it is difficult for them to control. As Pawar narrates the incident.

“Once, I went to attend wedding of 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 monster’ 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”<sup>6</sup>

If the dalit woman belongs to dalit community they suffered two types: first being a woman; second belongs to the lowest community, therefore it could be said they are “Doubly marginalized”. Every woman in dalit society live under the double power of caste and patriarchy. They are doubly oppressed.

Urmila Pawar has narrated her experiences of sexual exploitation at her early adulthood and about her schoolmates. In her memoir some incident of sexual exploitation she has explained like-

“My maternal Uncle plays dolls with me and pretends to be my husband drags me into an alcove and presses me hard”.<sup>11</sup>

Urmila Pawar through this autobiography celebrates womanhood. It speaks about self-awareness. She has portrayed realistically the various phases of her life. That experiences makes reader to think about the social realities of that time. We see women are always more oppressed and are victim’s male domination, humiliation. The plight of dalit women in Indian society is horrible as they are oppressed on the basis of class, gender and caste.

The writing of Urmila Pawar in Dalit literature has provided a new angle of perception to the history, women’s issues, literature and problems in the social caste system. Urmila Pawar, one of the first Dalit women writers, she has written in the autobiographical style describes how the female narrator comes to understand the various dimensions of her mahar identity.

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