



An excerpt from Urmila Pawar's Autobiography

Ms. R. Rabiya¹, Mr. M. Muthumanikandan², Ms. B.S. Renuka³, Mr. S. Muthuvel⁴

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Languages, Hindustan Institute of Science and Technology Padur, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

^{2,3}Assistant Professor of English, Rajalakshmi Engineering College, Thandalam, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

⁴Assistant Professor of English, SRM Arts and Science College, Kattankulathur, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

{rafiyarahath, muthuwinmail, renuanu9, pearls1973}@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 12 July 2023
Revised: 10 September 2023
Accepted: 15 Oct 2023

CC License
CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

Abstract. The term "Dalit literature" is used to describe works written by authors from the Dalit ethnic minority. The hardships and triumphs of the Dalit people were mirrored in this body of writing. It also revealed their uphill battle in life to the outside world. They are victims of centuries of discrimination and oppression at the hands of those in power in their own nation. Social transformation in this society owes a great deal to the efforts of notable individuals like B.R. Ambedkar. Dalit writings have emphasized the rights and agency of the Dalit community. Many authors of Dalit descent have written on the difficulties inherent in their language and culture. They questioned the privilege of the higher caste and advocated for the adoption of vernacular speech. Several Dalit authors have achieved widespread acclaim for their works. There are several famous authors from India, like Bama (K.R. Meera), Om Prakash Valmiki, Chetan Divate, Urmila Pawar, and Daya Pawar. Urmila Pawar is a well-known Marathi author and activist. She has achieved widespread renown as a writer due to the autobiographical nature of her books. Her works are impacted by both her time as a student and her time as an educator.

Keywords: Pawar, Dalit, Caste, Emancipation, Freedom.

1 Introduction

The term "Dalit literature" is used to describe works written by authors from the Dalit ethnic minority. They used to be referred to as "Untouchables" in traditional Indian culture. The writing of the Dalits mirrored the hopes, fears, and triumphs of its readers. They are the historically downtrodden and disenfranchised members of their

own country and community. This literature appeared at a pivotal time, and it dealt head-on with issues of caste-based prejudice and societal stratification.

It was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that the Dalit social reform movement gained momentum. B.R. Ambedkar and other prominent personalities were instrumental in bringing about this change. The citizens took to the pen in order to assert their rights. Topics of freedom and agency were central to this body of writing. As a result, it encourages people to speak up against the social and political injustices they have experienced in the past. It also served as a forum for them to talk about what they'd been through. These stories often emphasized the resilience and adaptability of the Dalit people even in the face of hardship. The degrading impacts of caste-based oppression on people and communities were emphasized in Dalit writings. The writings of Dalits were effective in their pursuit of equality and social reform. It was essential in bringing attention to the plight of the Dalits and facilitating social change that eventually improved their living conditions.

Dalit authors often examine issues of language and cultural identity in their writing. They questioned the privilege of the higher caste and advocated for the adoption of vernacular speech. Several Dalit authors have achieved widespread acclaim for their works. There are several famous authors from India, like Bama (K.R. Meera), Om Prakash Valmiki, Chetan Divate, Urmila Pawar, and Daya Pawar. Novels, short tales, poetry, essays, plays, and memoirs were all mediums through which they expressed their thoughts and perspectives. Many authors from the Dalit community have been honored with major literary prizes.

2 About the Author

Urmila Pawar is a prominent Marathi writer and a social activist. She is known for her literary works, which often reflect her own life experiences. She also engages with issues related to caste, gender and social justice. Her autobiographical elements are often interwoven throughout her writings. This article explores her autobiographical elements and their significance in her literary works. It also focuses on her personal experiences and shows her commitment to social justice as a Dalit woman.

On March 10, 1945, Urmila Pawar was born in a rural area of Maharashtra, India. To the Mahar caste, by birth. This group of people has been excluded from society and treated poorly for a long time. Her upbringing as a Dalit lady in rural India had a profound effect on her psyche and spirit. This showed up in her work and her advocacy as a result. Through a synthesis of personal narrative and sociopolitical issues, she highlights the struggles of Dalit women in traditionally underprivileged areas.

She was born into a Mahar household, therefore she experienced caste prejudice from an early age. She had to deal with bias in many different spheres of her life, including her academic and social pursuits. Her family had a hard time making ends meet because of caste prejudice. Caste discrimination in the workplace was the root of their economic problems. The major barrier she had to overcome was her level of schooling. The education of Dalit girls and women was forbidden. Pawar faced many challenges on her way to become a teacher, but she persevered and eventually earned her degree. By doing so, she challenged the long-held stereotypes about Dalit women held by the higher caste members of her society. Her works are impacted by both her time as a student and her time as an educator. She came up with the concept and has pondered education's role in bringing about personal and societal transformation on several occasions.

Dalit people, particularly women, experienced both social exclusion and caste and gender-based discrimination. The personal details she shares reveal the systematic injustice and brutality she faced as a Dalit woman in India. She highlights the hardships, resilience, and ambitions of the Dalit women by bringing out the truth of their lives and experiences.

3 Related Work

In her work "The Village and the City: Dalit feminism in the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar" (Sen, 2019), the author discusses the lives of two women who are both activists and authors: Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar. Both their biography and their works of art are vivid expansions on this theme. A look at how Dalit autobiographies place the person squarely inside the community, challenging traditional concepts of autobiography from the post-industrial West.

Several Dalit women writers, including Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, Gogu Shyamala, and others, have begun making their literary mark through autobiographies, memoirs, narratives, etc., as described by Mishra, P. (2021) in his article "Contextualising Dalit women's voices: a study of Urmila Pawar and Bama's autobiographies." Daringly, Dalit women authors take on a culture that has objectified, mistreated, and erased their identities while maintaining a patronizing position. They make an effort to highlight the plight of Dalit women in upper-caste, patriarchal societies.

In their own book, 'The Story that was my life,' Pawar, U., Kesharshivam, & Pandit, M. (2006) talk on how the Indian caste system dehumanizes its untouchables. Two Dalit members in particular share their experiences in this book. They go into great depth about their struggles and their experiences with those of the higher caste.

In their article "Resisting Culinary Nationalism: Dalit Counter-Cuisines in the Life Narratives of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble," C. James and R. G. Mathew (2023) discuss the everyday lifestyle and practices of Dalit women, particularly those concerning food, as a struggle to ethno-religious nationalism. These women's books, "The Weave of My Life" and "The Prisons We Broke," respectively, are set in India. Everyday behaviors of Dalit women are discussed in this article as techniques that counter Hindu/cultural nationalist ideology.

4 The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs

Her own experiences inspire much of her work. In particular, her memoir "The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs," in which she weaves together her own story with her views and sentiments regarding caste and gender. Using her own life as an example, the author discusses the oppressive caste system and the influence of patriarchy on the lives of many Dalit women from birth through her professional career in an autobiographical narrative. In addition, her dedication to social justice was clear in the art she produced. It's true that the challenges she's faced in life have inspired her to take action. She used her writing as a tool to advocate for the rights of underrepresented groups, particularly those in her own Dalit community. She has spent her whole life involved in groups and causes that work to liberate the downtrodden. Her writing is both an artistic expression and a rallying cry. She wrote extensively on the oppression of Dalit women and the need for society to recognize this issue. She tirelessly advocated for a more egalitarian and just society. Many influential people have been moved to action by her speeches and writings and have joined the fight for social justice as a result.

Her autobiography, "The Weave of My Life" (Mhais: The Autobiography of a Dalit), is an intriguing read that provides insight into her life. She gives a detailed account of her upbringing, the prejudice she encountered, and her battle and path to self-realization in this book. Autobiographical details and her dedication to addressing the challenges of life as a Dalit woman are central to the work. Her personal experiences serve as inspiration for the tales and articles she has written. It covers a wide range of topics, including the struggles of Dalit women, gender inequality, and cultural expectations.

Pawar never fails to highlight the special difficulties that Dalit women have in today's patriarchal culture. She advocates for Dalit women, who face discrimination

on both the basis of their gender and their caste, in her literature. Whether her stories are real or fictitious, she consistently uses them to bring attention to the plight of underrepresented women. Her call for social justice in the face of the plight of these women was heard. Because of this, she has been recognized with several accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award for her autobiography "The Weave of My Life" in 1998.

An intimate and moving autobiography, "The Weave of My Life" gives readers a glimpse into the daily struggles of a Dalit woman in India. Critical to any understanding of social justice, this book illuminates how prejudice based on caste and gender play out in contemporary Indian culture. This task requires an understanding of the system, which is ingrained in the very fabric of society. The Dalits, previously known as Untouchables, were at the very bottom of the social ladder. The people had been subjected to unimaginable levels of injustice, marginalization, and brutality, and they had finally had enough. The situation of Dalit women was rendered even more precarious by gender discrimination, making them the most defenseless members of Indian society. The book is an important historical document since it describes the terrible reality that Dalit women face on a daily basis. This autobiography by Pawar explores her quest for identity and the courage to embrace it. Her essays delve into the ways in which her identity as a Dalit woman colored her life and the arduous path she took to realize her own value. The novel depicts the fortitude and perseverance of Dalit women in the face of incredible adversity. Every day, she and her ladies find ways to push back against the oppression they experience.

The author's biography is described by Basavaraj Naikar (2010) in her work "The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs: A Study in Subaltern Vision." In his most recent memoir, he uses the metaphor of weaving to great effect. The protagonist's mother makes a living by weaving bamboo baskets. This job or career choice is indicative of the extreme poverty in the region. Urmila is born into a low-income Mahar family in a rural area not far from Ratnagiri. The author expresses sympathy for the disadvantaged ladies who go into the woods for a little income by collecting and selling faggots.

Urmila Pawar's life and the details in her autobiography make it clear that her status as a Dalit contributes to her financial struggles. She has had a tough time of it for much of her life. She details her meager diet and her family's dire financial situation.

The little amount of rice they could afford was cooked in a large mud pot and served with a thin soup. The males got their share first, sharing a single serving dish. At the table, they sat hunched over as if they were about to squat. It's true that Dalits traditionally share plates, but it's mainly due to a lack of serving utensils. (p.17)

Pawar defines her experience of oppression in terms of her gender and her social class. She was subjected to sex, race, and class bias throughout her life. Not only did her, but everyone in her untouchable caste, suffer from a lack of social skills. The author discusses how the upper-caste Hindus treated the Mahar people cruelly. When others in higher social classes learned of her caste, they either shied away from her or made plans to relocate. She gets humiliated by the mother of a friend of her daughter's during a birthday party.

We had no idea you were member of this specific caste! That's why I entrusted you with my offspring. Please don't feed my daughter any more when she visits from now on. Simply put, we are Marathas. Can't have dinner with you! (p.202)

Pawar emphasizes her upper-caste social standing by using these terms. Pawar also thinks that education is the key to emancipating both men and women from oppression. She has gone to great lengths to further her education and get a Master of Arts from Mumbai University. Her education has given her new confidence, which

has contributed to her liberation and empowerment. She finds her inner fortitude and strength, giving her the confidence to take on the world and its challenges head-on.

5 Conclusions

There will be lasting effects on literature and culture from this study. Urmila Pawar's rise from social outcast to acclaimed author is an inspiration to those who want to effect positive change in the world. Her dedication to tackling social issues and championing social justice has had a profound impression on Indian literature and culture. Many aspiring authors might look forward to her as a role model.

References

1. James, C., & Mathew, R. G. Resisting Culinary Nationalism: Dalit Counter-Cuisines in the Life Narratives of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble. *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English*, 60(1), 2023.
2. Mishra, P. Contextualising dalit women's voices: a study of Urmila Pawar and Bama's autobiographies. *International Journal of Applied Research*, pp.389-392, 2021.
3. Naikar, B. S. The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs by Urmila Pawar, Maya Pandit. *World Literature Today*, 84(4), pp.77-78, 2010.
4. Pawar, U., Kesharshivam, & Pandit, M. The story that was my life. *Index on Censorship*, 35(4), pp.85-91, 2006.
5. Sen, S. The village and the city: Dalit feminism in the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 54(1), pp.38-51, 2019.