

**THREADS OF RESILIENCE: DALIT LITERATURE AND  
FEMINISM IN URMILA PAWAR'S *THE WEAVE OF MY LIFE***

*Dissertation*

*Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the  
award of Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature*

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled **Threads of Resilience: Dalit Literature and Feminism in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*** is a bonafide record of research done by **Amritha M V** (Register Number AIAWMEG003), has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other similar title.

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

Literature enables us to see how society is reflected. It is beneficial for us to understand the real issues that members of society face. It is a form of artistic expression that uses language to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences. Also it has the power to transform the readers to different worlds, evoke emotions and spark imagination. Literature has the ability to challenge norms, provoke critical thinking, and promote empathy and understanding.

Literature has been recognized as a powerful tool for giving voice to marginalized dalit individuals to express their struggles, aspirations, and perspectives, which have historically been silenced and ignored. Through literature, Dalit writers can challenge the oppressive caste system and highlight the injustices they face on a daily basis. By sharing their stories, they aim to create awareness about Dalit issues, promote social equality, and challenge the deeply entrenched caste-based discrimination in Indian society.

Urmila Pawar, born in 1945 in Adgaon village within the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, is a renowned Dalit female author who has consistently advocated for the rights of Dalit women. Hailing from the Mahar community, which faced discrimination from higher castes, her family embraced Buddhism when she was 12 years old due to caste-related challenges. Her father served as a teacher at a school for the untouchables and also functioned as a religious priest for their community's rituals. While her mother managed the household, she was a resilient woman. Urmila encountered numerous challenges due to her caste and gender during her upbringing. She endured frequent humiliation from peers and teachers alike due to her caste

background. Additionally, she has a background as a radical Marathi theater actress and a playwright.

Despite facing disappointment, she persisted in pursuing her dreams and eventually rose to prominence as a distinguished writer within the Dalit community. Holding a Master of Arts degree in Marathi literature, she also held a position in the public works department in Maharashtra. Her literary works encompass numerous short stories, with one of her notable pieces, 'Kavach,' being integrated into university curricula.

Pawar's fame escalated with the publication of *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* in 2008. Originally titled *Aaydan* in Marathi and translated into English by Dr. Maya Pandit, this memoir solidified her reputation as a significant literary figure. Maya Pandit serves as the pro-vice chancellor at the English and Foreign Language University in Hyderabad. With expertise in translating women's literature from Marathi, she is actively involved in the women's movement and alternative theater as an advocate. Later Pawar wrote many other works like *We Also Made History* (2008) and *Motherwit* (2013) which were originally written in Marathi.

TWML, in this autobiographical novel portrays an empowered female figure. This memoir goes beyond mere storytelling; it depicts a woman who harbored the belief in her ability to instigate change. Urmila, the central character, embodies the essence of contemporary Dalit women. She pursued a career, got a top-notch education, and developed her own unique identity. This novel diverges significantly from other Dalit literature. While many works focus on adversity, enduring suffering, and exploitation, this narrative emphasizes positivity and resilience. It narrates her life as an untouchable and the prejudice she had to endure.

Dalit literature authored by Dalits delves into their lived experiences and narratives. Dalit feminism centers on deconstructing the delineations of caste and gender, highlighting their interconnection and mutual influence. It critiques mainstream Indian feminism, which tends to generalize and universalize experiences of marginalization and subordination without adequately addressing caste-based discrimination. Similar to Black women's perspectives, Dalit women challenge the monolithic portrayal of 'women' within feminist discourse, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging differences in caste, class, race, and sexuality. This approach aims to foster a more inclusive and intersectional understanding of gender-based struggles and inequalities.

Dalit feminist literature upholds the principle that all women deserve respect and possess equal rights. The literary works penned by Dalit women delve into the discriminatory practices that serve as testimony to the trauma endured by generations of marginalized women due to years of suppression. Within the women's movement, they actively question the caste and gender roles prevalent within the Dalit community. Actually they were not educated, and also marginalised. Dalit movement protest against equal rights for women and children.

These people face so many difficulties and also they have so many dreams. They have to educate their children. Dalit women are segregated group of people so that they are untouchables. but they have equal rights that of others. Sometimes Dalit women were forced for prostitution. In old times, devadasi system existed in India. The Devadasi system, historically found in specific areas of India, is a nuanced cultural practice. Dalit women, belonging to marginalized communities, offer valuable insights into this system. They may perceive it as exploitative and oppressive due to its ties to caste-based discrimination and the commodification of women's

bodies. To grasp the full scope of the Devadasi system's impact, it's crucial to heed their voices and experiences.

In TWML she describes her childhood memories. Throughout her lifetime, Urmila Pawar advocated for Dalit rights, particularly focusing on the issues confronted by Dalit women. In recognition of her contributions, she was honored with the Laxmibai Tilak Award by the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad for her work *Aaydan*. Her personal experiences of suffering and discrimination as a Dalit girl fueled her determination to speak out against social injustices. She marked December 25th as Manusmriti Burning Day, symbolizing Women's Liberation Day, and established a women's welfare organization. Furthermore, she organized a literary conference to elevate Dalit writers, showcasing her commitment to promoting Dalit voices. These endeavors exemplify Pawar's identity as both a feminist and an activist. She doesn't merely write and envision community development; she actively engages in the field, striving for women's empowerment.

The novel faces the prospect of being diminished to a portrayal of the 'challenges' encountered by Dalit women. It's beneficial to contextualize the text historically within the interplay between Dalit academia and mainstream scholarly circles. Pawar contests perspectives portraying caste as an immutable social structure, reaffirms the intellectual input and autonomy of Dalit women, and integrates personal lived experiences with the public endeavors of anti-caste movements.

This project proposes a study of the novel *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* based on the theories of Dalit literature and Dalit feminism. It consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction about the author, theory and novel. The second chapter is the meticulous study of Dalit Literature and Dalit Feminism. Likewise it provides an extensive description of the Indian caste system.

Moreover a brief note on some major figures in Dalit literature and their works. The third chapter is an in-depth study of the novel based on the themes of pain, suffering and resilience depicted by the author and the humiliation faced by Dalits and the portrayal of patriarchy. The fourth chapter is centered on the significance of education as a means for empowerment among Dalit women, exploring challenges, successes on the impact of educational opportunities in their lives. The fifth and the final chapter contains the findings and conclusion of the study.

The objective of this research is to examine how education serves as a central factor in empowering Dalit women as depicted in Urmila Pawar's book *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*.

## Chapter II

### Studies from Dalit Literature: A Background Overview

Literary portrayals of oppressed communities are extremely relevant at this time when human rights concerns are dominating public conversation. Literature by and for Dalits seeks to expose the bigotry, violence, and marginalization that the Dalits face in India.

There are caste divisions in India. Some are treated as kings, while others are treated as slaves. The inequalities and privileges inherent in the caste system are unjust. The caste system divides society into hierarchical segments. The Chaturvarna, which means “four castes,” is the traditional Indian caste system. The superior caste is Brahmin, followed by Kshatriya, Vaisya, and finally Sudra. Dalits are the lowest caste in the caste system. The ‘Purusha Sukta’ of Rigveda explains the creation of people. According to this myth, all humans are descended from the monstrous body of Purusha.

It is said that Purusha is a gigantic man with a thousand heads and thousand eyes. He has a thousand feet as well. He is referred to as the immortal ruler. The legend goes on to say that his arms transformed into warriors, his mouth became Brahmin, and his thighs turned into the businesspeople, and his feet gave birth to servants. This indicates that Brahmins originated from his head. Vaisyas developed from his stomach, and Kshatriyas were born from his shoulders. Ultimately, it was from his feet that the Sudras emerged. The four varnas were thus formed. The chaturvarnas are further subdivided into smaller castes, so this is not the only caste division.

Caste discrimination exists because of the way the caste system was created. There are a lot of theories on how the caste system came to be. Sociologist and

activist Gail Omvedt explained how the caste system came to be. She looks at pre-Hindu civilizations such as the Indus Valley first, then tribes or groups of fishermen, farmers, and hunters who exchanged excess goods. With time, these groups evolved into “jatis”. However, these jatis were primarily found among Dravidians, who are believed to be the subcontinent’s original inhabitants, as the Dravidians were not divided along caste lines, unlike the Central Asians who initially landed on the subcontinent. Aryans and Dravidians combined to form a single culture. The Aryans asserted their superiority over the Dravidians. The concepts of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra were created.

The Aryan Invasion theory served as the foundation for British thinking. According to their beliefs, Aryans were seen to be superior to white men, and Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Brahmins descended from these superior and pure Aryans. Conversely, the earliest inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent were the Shudras and Dalits. Clan members of the upper caste asserted their equality and superiority over those of the lower caste and white men. Jyotirao Phule disagreed with this theory, claiming that the original occupants, the Shudras and Dalits, were conquered and exploited by the Aryans.

Current evidence suggests that the “Indo-European language speakers” came to the subcontinent around 2,000–1,500 BCE rather than conquering it. Around the same period, the first known Hindu text, the Rig Veda, was composed.

The Manusmriti, or code of conduct, is attributed to Manu, who some consider to be the first person, approximately 1,800 years ago when the religion was emerging. In this article, each person’s place in society is defined. The scriptures of the Manusmriti and Vedas regarded Dalits as contaminants.

They lived in wadas or bastis outside of towns or other populated regions and were forbidden from interacting directly with the outside world. They used other routes and waterways as well. It seems that the unjust ranking system known as the caste system, which confines people to specific professions, was instituted to protect the richest people. The upper castes were able to avoid hard manual labour, secure recognized locations and the corresponding material prosperity for themselves and future generations.

But in order for this to work, the lower castes and untouchables had to fully accept their existence of forced labour and abject poverty. The concept of karma—the belief that transgressions from past incarnations will be made up for in present ones—was one way to achieve this. It convinced those who were born into lower castes that their situation was a result of decisions they had made in past lives. They had to cope with shame about possible transgressions from a previous existence as well as unfairness in this one. The Dalits were karmically contaminated, which meant they had to perform the most unpleasant duties. They feared that if their shadows were cast on someone from a higher caste, it would pollute them, therefore they bowed, knelt, and prostrated themselves to prevent polluting others.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar also developed a theory regarding the genesis of untouchability. During the Gupta era, which lasted from the third to the sixth century, Hindus stopped eating beef and became vegetarians. Buddhism, which was a nonviolent religion at the time, was looking for more adherents. As a result of changes in Hinduism, many spiritual leaders started advocating for vegetarianism. It was easy for upper-caste people to adopt this lifestyle. However, the underprivileged Dalits could only obtain cheap beef and could not afford this kind of lifestyle. As a result, they eventually developed unclean and lower caste status.



Ambedkar deduced that practices such as Sati, the harsh seclusion of widows, and child marriage—even between children as young as five or six and men as old as thirty or forty—were necessary to uphold endogamy and handle the problem of excess male and female members of the caste. Ambedkar argued that these three traditions prevented men from the upper caste from being married to those from lower castes. These behaviors harmed women from higher castes as well as Dalit women. The Dalit people's rights to education, land, clean clothes, jewellery, and temple admission have all been restricted through the caste system. They were severely punished if they broke any of these norms, which were deemed to be demeaning to those of the upper caste.

In the eighteenth century, the British developed their own views regarding Indian culture and the caste structure. They were aware of the toxic nature of the current caste system, yet they did nothing to alter it; instead, they left it in place. Since the caste system was what divided the colonial subjects, they really took advantage of it for their personal gain. It would be challenging to rule a united populace if there was no caste structure. They can become stronger via unity, which is bad for the colonizer. Thus, they took advantage of the caste system in India and never attempted to have it abolished. Ambedkar and Phule both criticize the British for their cowardly behaviour of defending the caste system.

The British kept quiet about the caste system even when it came to the education of Dalits as well. The caste structure prevented Dalits from receiving an education, and the British never coerced or provided for their education. Separate schools were set up for Bahujans and Dalits, but the Brahmin teachers were unwilling to instruct the members of lower caste. They were also opposed to the development of

Dalit teachers because they thought that training Dalits to become teachers would offend God.

Phule disagreed with this ludicrous concept and asked why Dalits had served in the British army if God would be angry if they become teachers. Dalits were abused in the British-run schools that were favoured by Brahmins. They only paid attention to the voices and grievances of Brahmins; as a result, they deleted the textbook that Brahmin pupils had used to critique the caste system. They didn't believe in Dalits and didn't want to hear about them. The higher caste benefited in some way from the British invasion by gaining more authority over Dalits.

British colonists gave upper-caste people control over agriculture and land as well as administration. The source of income in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was agriculture and land, upper-caste people gained greatest advantage. Taxes piqued the curiosity of British citizens more than the management. As a result, the higher caste abused the law and had more administrative power. Dalits were deprived of justice because no one was interested in listening to their side of the story. They couldn't be close to judges because Dalits would contaminate the Brahmins. They were compelled to yell from outside the courtroom as a result, and occasionally crucial information was overlooked, depriving them of justice.

After colonialism ended, upper caste people gained control over the judiciary, media, agriculture, and bureaucracy. Throughout the period of independence, while Dalits were having trouble reading and writing, persons from higher castes advanced and went on to become judges, journalists, lawyers, and business owners for many generations. However, Dalits continue to face a number of challenges both now and in the past. They remained untouchable even after they were denied the opportunity to

succeed. They were dominated by the colonizers throughout the colonial era, and after independence, they were ruled by the higher caste.

Christian missionaries from all over the world travelled to India prior to colonization with the intention of bringing education and Christianity to the country. When Christian missionaries arrived, they desired the release of Dalit slaves as well as wished for them to understand how important equality is. Some Anglican missionaries focused on Dalit slaves who had recently been emancipated after slavery was abolished. Opening slave schools allowed the missionaries to teach the enslaved people. Both Dalit men and women received instruction in basic reading and writing. Missionaries' influence resulted in the conversion of many Dalits to Christianity. Among the largest conversions was this one.

Rather than educating the upper class Christians to treat Dalits fairly, they instructed the Dalits to change their behaviour. They encouraged Dalits to give up meat consumption. This had to be done because, despite the abolition of slavery, prejudice Society did not evolve. Dalits were still viewed as “untouchable” and “polluting” by them. The upper-caste continued to discriminate against and mistreat them even after they converted to Christianity. There was a caste structure even in Christianity. Christians from the upper caste in Syria denigrated Dalit Christians. Because they believed Dalits to be filthy, they opposed the concept of sitting with Dalit Christians in the church. They even had to build them their own churches. Dalits sought to assimilate into society and concentrated on their education during their treatment as outcasts.

Dalits spearheaded numerous campaigns against caste-based discrimination in order to achieve equality. Ayyankali, who was born into a Dalit Pulaya family, was a pivotal figure individual in the Dalit struggles. It was forbidden for Dalits to traverse

the roads because Dalits were prohibited from walk on them since upper-caste people thought they were dirty and that walking on the same routes would only make them dirtier. Ayyankali disobeyed the prohibition on Dalits being in public areas by boarding a bullock cart with paint that was reserved for members of the upper caste. In addition, he called for all pupils to have an equal education regardless of their caste. He organized an army known as Ayyankali's army to aid the Dalits.

It was crucial to ascertain the identity of Dalits during the drafting of the Indian Constitution in order to implement reservation measures that would benefit them. Sadly, Christian Dalits were barred from that group of Dalits. In law, they weren't Tribal Dalit Christians are an exception, however they were not granted any reservations because they were regarded as Dalits. The parties disregarded their petition because they believed their votes to be meaningless. They chose to convert to a different faith in order to relieve the unending misery brought on by caste-based prejudice because their concerns about it were not being heard by others in their immediate vicinity.

There are many different castes and religions in India. This is also the rationale behind India's classification as a diverse nation. Those who come from the final category of separation are referred to as untouchables. They're also referred to as "despicable" and "impure." The term used today to refer a group of people is Dalit. The first of the four varnas, known as Brahmins, are the learned men or priests. The Kshatriyas, or strong men or warriors, come next, followed by the Vaisyas, or businessmen, and the Sudras, or humble toilers, who come last.

In India, Dalit literature first appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Because Dalits were subjected to injustices and inequalities, the Dalit movement was born. The Hindu caste system pushed them to the periphery. A conference was held in

1958. Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society organized it. During the conference, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule also made use of the term “Dalit literature” for the first time.

The Dalit community members’ life experiences have been marginalized and disregarded by the majority. It has been said that their experiences are not worthy of publication. Many significant changes in Indian society were brought about by British colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries. Numerous movements, such as the struggle for liberation occurred. There have been movements to abolish the caste system.

Through shedding light on the nuances of Dalit culture, the rise of Dalit literature—which consists of poetry, novels, memoirs, and other works of a similar kind—is gradually improving the situation. Among the most important literary movements of the Dalit literature from post-independence India seeks to restore the proper place in society for a long-victimized group of people. At last, the difficulties they face due to their status as “untouchables” are being acknowledged. Dalit literature has developed to reflect the individual and community Dalit awareness. The writings of B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, and Periyar constitute the cornerstone of Dalit literary works and sociopolitical activities.

Many laws were created for equality and a caste-free society when India gained its independence. Sadly, though, the laws were unable to end the cycle of violence and caste prejudice. Discrimination based on caste still exists in modern India. Nobody was able to completely abolish India’s caste system of discrimination. People’s understanding of the hardships faced by Dalits was greatly aided by certain movements and literary works created by Dalits. Numerous authors have provided support for them through their works. Mahatma Phule and Jyotirao Phule can be considered as the ancestors of Dalit movement. These authors were brilliant, and their

works criticized the caste system that pushed down the underprivileged, primarily the Dalits.

One significant character in Dalit literature is Mahatma Jyotirao Phule. He belongs to a low caste community. He began writing in the 19th century, and his works advocated for Dalits and members of lower castes. He defended their rights. His compositions were primarily in Marathi, and they had a big impact on people. "Gulamgiri," his most well-known composition, was released in 1873. This book depicts the caste system and the oppression that lower caste individuals endure at the hands of upper caste individuals. Many were motivated to write more autobiographical works inspired from his works. Because he was born into a lower caste, he writes primarily about his personal experiences. The three main themes of his work are exploitation, oppression, and inequality. He advocated social reform as well.

Moreover, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was instrumental in providing Dalits a voice. He opposed the system of caste division and the Dalit movement was led by him. He is also known as Babasaheb Ambedkar. His contribution to the growth of Dalit literature was significant. In addition to his writings, his speeches greatly influenced Dalit literature in India. His writings and speeches throughout the 20th century had the power to impact a large number of individuals. His writings on autobiography, speeches, and sociopolitical treaties were among his main subjects. He authored numerous books, articles, and essays. He wrote on a variety of topics, such as politics, economics, philosophy, and history. Through his writings, he raised awareness of the value of education and self-respect. He gave Dalit communities lessons on dignity and self-assurance. In addition to advocating for equal opportunities he wrote primarily

about the experiences of Dalits in real life. His writings influenced a generation of Dalit writers. Political activities are still motivated by his works.

Omprakash Valmiki, a poet and writer from the Dalit community, is another man who, like Ambedkar, advocated for the Dalits. He was a vital contributor to the growth of Dalit literature. The novel named *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* was his most well-known and influential work in Dalit literature. This book is autobiographical. It demonstrates his struggles as a young child. He was subjected to oppression by uppercaste residents of Uttar Pradesh, India, where he resided. It depicts the actuality of violence and prejudice based on caste. He had a strong belief in the power of education to provide equal opportunities and to break the cycle of poverty. Numerous people all across the world are still motivated to fight for their fundamental rights by his book *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*.

The most read autobiography in Tamil written by a Dalit woman is Bama's *Karukku*, which was released in 2000. This is the autobiographical account of a Dalit woman, or as the author puts it, *Karukku*. The Dalit mass narrative. The founder and trustee of the South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive, Lashmi Holmstron, provided a thorough introduction of Dalit literature and culture in addition to translating *Karukku* into English. After becoming a converted Catholic, Bama discovered that, although she faces discrimination in Catholic schools and society, her birth as a Dalit woman is the root of her problems.

Dalit women work alongside their families as labourers or sweepers since it is essential for them to work jointly for survival. They have to live in appalling conditions while performing their assigned duties. They are often the targets of injustice. Bama writes "To this day, in my village, both men and women can survive only through hard and incessant labour" (Bama 87).

Sujatha Gidla's book *Ants Among Elephants* is a fantastic addition to Dalit literature. This book eloquently demonstrates the difficulties a Dalit faces in adjusting to caste-based prejudice in Indian society. A Dalit wrote this book about the Dalit community in India. Sujatha Gidla, a Dalit, also known as an untouchable.

A memoir comprises the author's own information, expressed from their own point of view, concerning an important period in their life. This book details the origins of the Indian caste system as well as the struggles the higher caste's subjugation caused them to endure. Families also face problems in addition to those faced by society. Being persecuted by the uppercaste landlords, government officials and the police also victimized the lower caste population. The experiences of Dalits in India portrayed in her novel.

Sujatha Gidla, the writer, rips off the mask that the society wears when it treats people unfairly. Many people were unaware of the hardships that come with being a Dalit at the time. However, she did a good job of portraying it in her book, *Ants Among Elephants*. The narrative in this book is based on a true family history. This opens people's eyes, whether Indian and non-Indian, by revealing the real struggles against caste-based prejudice, which are fought with true fortitude.

Another book that provides a thorough description of a Dalit's daily struggles is Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir*. This is written by a Dalit who was raised in the community and provides a thorough account of the caste-based oppression that Dalits have to deal with. She was raised to believe that she was a member of the upper caste, but as life unfolded, she came to understand that she is truly a Dalit. This book is about her journey of self-discovery and acceptance of who she is. She relocated, living both overseas and in India. Her caste presented numerous obstacles for her to overcome when she was traveling.



Her identify as a Dalit woman forced her to deal with discrimination. Discrimination on the basis of gender and caste was one of the many issues she had to deal with at once.

Dalit empowerment is a difficult endeavor. It's an intricate process that takes a great deal of focus. While there are many strategies to empower Dalits, education is the most fundamental and crucial one. Giving them the highest caliber. Basic life skills and education can improve employability and open up more opportunities, just like they do for people from higher castes. Through the introduction of new policies, the government can also aid in their empowerment. Contributing financially is another crucial step toward their empowerment. Their lives will be significantly better if they receive financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, and subsidies. The provision of financial aid is crucial to ending poverty. They will live much better lives if they receive financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, and subsidies. In order to eradicate poverty, financial assistance is crucial. Raising public awareness of the plight of the oppressed in society is essential to the empowerment of Dalits and is necessary to win over the public. The best media to portray their caste discrimination struggles are social media platforms.

Feminism in India encompasses a range of movements dedicated to defining, establishing, and defending the political, economic, and social rights and opportunities of women. In India, efforts towards gender equality are evident across various domains. Women have the right to equal wages and the right to vote, demonstrating progress in addressing gender disparities. Within patriarchal societies, feminists have actively campaigned against culturally specific issues that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality.

The term “feminism” first appeared in the West as a potent challenge to the gender equation and the established power structure at the levels of the home, the economy, and the polity. But in India, there is no such positive connotation associated with the word feminism. This isn't because women's rights and dignity are unthinkable in our culture. Most Dalit women are not completely cognizant of their newfound rights and prospects. More precisely, women's low political awareness and sense of political efficacy are the main causes of their poor use of their right to vote. This developed as a result of women's self-awareness and their battles against systems of power that denied them equal access to the political, social, and economic spheres of society.

Feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities for everyone. Feminists speak out against issues faced by women, emphasizing that feminism is not anti-men but about ensuring equal rights for all. It serves as a platform to address women's problems and challenges. With women and girls constituting half of the global population, feminist criticism focuses on the struggles experienced by women, such as marital rape and sexual harassment in public spaces.

From a Dalit feminist perspective, activists have contended that the Dalit movement has overlooked the severe patriarchy within Dalit communities, while the feminist movement has neglected to prioritize the issue of caste, which dictates the specific violence experienced solely by Dalit women. Numerous Dalit women writers are advocates within the movement. Their literary works convey a Dalit feminist viewpoint by exposing and scrutinizing the intersection of caste, socioeconomic status, and gender, shedding light on the challenging circumstances faced by Dalit women, and advocating for societal and political transformation.

In contrast to the writings by males, the life narratives of Dalit women exhibit a heightened awareness of shared experiences. Numerous accounts by Marathi Dalit women serve to unearth previously overlooked facets of Dalit women's involvement as dynamic catalysts for transformation within the Ambedkarite movement, effectively reshaping historical narratives.

In women's studies, dalit feminism is a novel idea that hasn't been thoroughly explored and expressed as a feminist theory yet. The term "Dalit feminist" was coined by feminist analysts after realizing that mainstream feminists had disregarded caste and mainstream Ambedkarites had, in effect, disregarded gender. Dalit activists who are part of the Ambedkarite movement have not agreed to refer to their struggles as such.

In general, Dalit writing contributes significantly to India's literary and cultural environment. Brahminical views of Indian society have been questioned by Dalit literature, which has placed a greater emphasis on the experiences of the Dalits. This genre has expanded and gained momentum. Through Dalit literature, a community that had been silenced by its oppressors was given voice. It is an excellent tool for empowering people and changing society. It gave courage to fight for a future free from caste discrimination and inspired a lot of people. Support for Dalits is growing over time and is becoming more widespread.

## Chapter III

### Unraveling the Threads of Transformation

Aaydan refers to cane basket weaving. It served as the Mahar community's primary source of income. The word "Aaydan" also refers to the utensils that they use. The Mahar group settled in the middle of the hamlet so that they could help the upper caste members with tasks connected to sanitation and shield themselves from outsider threats. Before plastic became a part of their lives, even the Mahar people were occupied with making baskets.

In her autobiography, Pawar describes how the upper castes treat the Dalits in the towns and countryside with disdain. On the one hand, she became aware of the caste system and untouchability that pervade society as a result of the humiliation she experienced in a variety of social settings, including the school and her neighborhood. However, it caused her great humiliation throughout her life.

Pawar writes, "My mother used to weave Aaydans. and 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" (1).

Pawar's statement reflects a deep connection she sees between her mother's traditional craft of weaving Aaydans (bamboo objects) and her own creative act of writing. The "weave" mentioned here symbolizes not just the physical act of weaving or writing but also the emotional and cultural threads that intertwine their experiences.

The mention of "pain, suffering, and agony" suggests that both Pawar's mother and herself have experienced hardships, and these experiences are reflected in their respective creative endeavors. The weaving process, with its intricate patterns and interlacing threads, becomes a metaphor for the complexities of life, including its difficulties and challenges. In this way, Pawar sees a direct connection between her

mother's weaving and her writing, as both are expressions of their shared experiences and struggles. Overall, Pawar's comparison highlights the interconnectedness of different forms of creative expression and the way they can serve as outlets for personal experiences and emotions.

Pawar's memoir intricately unfolds the journey of her life from early memories to recent adversities. Set against the backdrop of Ratnagiri in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, her childhood unfolds amidst the lush natural beauty, with mangoes, jackfruits, and seafood being the primary affordable food items. She initiates the narrative by delving into her innocent recollections of childhood, dreams of girlhood, friendships, schooling, classmates, and educators who subjected her to discrimination based on her caste. At that juncture, she possessed minimal understanding of caste dynamics and untouchability. Her childhood anecdotes, though seemingly personal, are deeply intertwined with the caste experiences of a Dalit girl. The enduring image of Pawar's mother tirelessly weaving bamboo baskets to make ends meet echoes throughout her youth, adulthood, and amidst the pains, hardships, and personal setbacks, serving as a poignant backdrop to her narrative. The title *The Weave of My Life* consistently evokes this poignant image throughout her narrative.

Pawar belongs to a Dalit family, and she is the youngest among her siblings. Her father, an educated and industrious man, values education greatly for Dalits, emphasizing its importance even for his daughters. He possesses a deep understanding and awareness of caste dynamics and discrimination prevalent in their society during his time. Upon relocating to Ratnagiri, he consistently extends support to fellow Dalits arriving from villages, providing assistance whenever possible. Aware that Dalits are often denied water in caste Hindu households, he had a well dug in front of their residence, complete with a bucket and rope for Dalit women vendors from

nearby villages to access drinking water while in town. He is also keen on ensuring that all his nephews receive a good education.

Pawar's attempt to understand this dichotomy reflects a deeper exploration of the conflicting ideologies and practices within her family and community, illuminating the complexities of navigating social issues and familial dynamics within a caste-conscious society. She acquaints us with numerous men who torment their spouses at the smallest excuse, including her brother-in-law (husband of her elder sister). Some individuals among them are active in the Dalit Movement.

The first chapter explains Dalit women's primary source of income was selling handmade goods in the market, which required them to travel great distances. They walked through the mountains in the sweltering heat. They left in the morning and arrived back in the evening, worn out and depleted. Even though they were exhausted when they got back, they still had to finish all the housework.

“The day began very early for women, at four o'clock in the morning[they] had to fetch water from the well for everybody in the house to bathe in, drink ... then they cleaned the pots and plates used the previous night and cooked for the whole house. They breakfasted with the men folk and went with them to work in the fields. They planted paddy till their backs broke ... they returned home just half an hour earlier than their men. They lit the stove under an earthen pot which they had filled up in the morning to keep the hot bath water ready for their men ... they began preparations for the evening meals.. the men arrived, bathed and sat smoking leisurely in the verandah; some of them drinking liquor. Women would again go to the well to fetch water, wash the muddied clothes ... light the lamps and serve food to the men first. ... After the children went to sleep, they sat down and massaged the heads and feet of their

husbands with oil. By the time they lay down in bed, their backs would be bent like a bow ...This was not an isolated picture... In addition, the woman had to behave as if she were a deaf and dumb creature". (Pawar 246-47)

Dalit women bore the heavy burden of early marriage, thrust into the responsibilities of a household at a young age. From caring for children to tending to the needs of the elderly, their duties knew no bounds. While the men toiled away from home, the women juggled domestic chores with back-breaking field work, their days stretching endlessly with no respite in sight. Unlike their male counterparts who could unwind after work, Dalit women carried the weight of their households alone, their labor unacknowledged and their struggles overlooked. Their existence was marked by ceaseless toil, a stark contrast to the leisure enjoyed by Dalit men. Despite their indispensable contributions, they remained trapped in a cycle of exploitation and marginalization, denied the basic freedoms and opportunities afforded to others.

She narrates numerous tales of fellow women from her society along with several occurrences from her own family. She recounts many such events to illustrate that women were also oppressed by their spouses, relatives, and fathers.

Pawar's father possesses a strong awareness of caste dynamics, yet he does not endorse the notion of married women seeking refuge at their parental homes in response to violence within their in-laws' families. Pawar grapples with comprehending this apparent contradiction. This situation highlights a complex interplay of beliefs and societal norms. On one hand, Pawar's father recognizes the injustices and discrimination faced by individuals based on caste, showing a level of understanding and empathy. However, his reluctance to support married women seeking refuge at their parental homes could stem from various factors such as

societal expectations, family honor, or traditional values that prioritize the stability of marriages despite challenges.

Her relative Susheela is wedded to an alcoholic man, and her mother-in-law along with her spouse physically assault her over minor issues. She returns to her parental home during nights, bearing bruises and bleeding wounds (Pawar 33). Pawar's father never stood up for her against such cruel treatment. Even though he staunchly believes that women must reside in their marital homes regardless of the circumstances. Although he is a learned individual advocating Dalit education, he lacks gender sensitivity concerning Dalit women.

The passage describes a woman named Susheela, who is enduring a difficult journey with her young children, likely fleeing from a challenging or abusive situation at her in-laws' house. Despite her suffering, when she reaches her mother's house seeking refuge, the response she receives from "Baba" is dismissive and unsympathetic, indicating a lack of empathy or concern for her well-being. Instead of offering support or assistance, Baba insists she should return to her in-laws' house, reinforcing the expectation that she should endure the hardships there rather than seek sanctuary elsewhere. It highlights the societal pressures and lack of support faced by women in certain cultural contexts.

Another Dalit woman featured in her memoir is Bhikiakka. Bhikiakka is wedded to a man and gave birth to two children. However, her husband remarried and brought his second wife into their home. Bhikiakka had to endure regular torment from her husband for trivial reasons, enduring beatings, kicks, and even whippings. The other wife also subjected her to verbal abuse. Many women in the maharwada flee to other homes when their husbands' abuse becomes unbearable. Her older sister, an educated Dalit woman, was married to an educated Dalit man who held a B.A.



degree. Despite his education, he subjected his wife to daily torture. Even he kicked her stomach when she was carrying.

The moment a man was promoted, he immediately became a 'Bhausahab' or 'Raosahab'. But women remained simply, Bai, without the 'Saheb' even after their promotions! 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 215)

Not only Dalit women all the working women suffers discrimination in one way or another. She also gives instances of women being the victims of sexual assault.

I would remember what the girls told me when we discussed things in school. A girl had said, 'My stepbrother sits on my sister's stomach and has threatened to do the same thing to me if I told anyone? Another one said, 'My maternal uncle plays dolls with me and pretends to be my husband, drags me into an alcove and presses me hard.' Recently one of my friends told me that their neighbour comes to play with her daughter and pinches the young child in particular parts of her anatomy. Every girl, I think, goes through this experience. (Pawar 125)

The excerpt highlights instances of sexual abuse and harassment experienced by young girls as shared in a discussion at school. Each girl recounts disturbing encounters involving family members or neighbors, indicating a prevalent but often unspoken reality. These experiences shed light on the vulnerability of children and the importance of addressing and preventing such abuse within communities.

Pawar herself experienced sexual harassment from a farmer who came to till their land. She escaped from him and she feared to disclose this incident to others (Pawar 125-126).

Soon she had a love affair with Harischandra, whom she married later. But at first her family members didn't agree for their marriage and she suffered a lot from her family. This also shows that the existing patriarchal system didn't allow a woman to choose her partner. But as an educated woman she stuck on to her decision.

When she married off to Harischandra the very day itself her mother in law was eager to know if she is virgin or not. Through this Pawar tries to point out the attitude of society towards a new bride or their way of judging a woman's morality.

“When I got my first salary, I could not believe that all that money was mine; that I could spend it the way I liked. Before my marriage, I used to hand over my salary to my mother. Now I started handing it over to my husband. If this is not like deliberately offering your head for the butcher's knife, what else is it?”. (Pawar 208)

The metaphor "deliberately offering your head for the butcher's knife" conveys a feeling of willingly putting oneself in a vulnerable or disadvantaged position. In this context, it suggests a loss of financial independence and control, where you feel like you're sacrificing your autonomy by giving up your earnings to someone else, whether it's your husband or previously your mother.

This statement may reflect broader societal expectations or personal experiences related to financial dynamics within marriages or family structures, where one partner may take on a dominant role in managing finances. It highlights the importance of financial independence, communication, and mutual decision-making within relationships to ensure both parties feel empowered and respected. These occurrences indicate that women consistently face exploitation and mistreatment.

Another incident which shows Pawar decided to walk away from the existing age old belief is that after her husband's death she refused to act like what others told her.

After the death of Harishchandra, there is a ritual that exists in that village. The wife of the dead person removes their mangalsutra. They should wear green bangles which are broken. She has to wear flower in her hair, and finally the kumkum of her head is wiped out. It is a rare custom but actually it is an insult to women. (Pawar 318)

She rejected their custom because of that village people became angry. Also she didn't allow them to remove her mangalsutra.

Pawar writes, "Dalit men fight for humanity, but what is humanity, even they do not know because they do not have humanity towards their wives" (Pawar 13).

Pawar's statement reflects a critical perspective within Dalit feminism, highlighting the contradiction between Dalit men's advocacy for humanity and their treatment of their wives. Dalit feminism focuses on the intersection of caste and gender discrimination faced by Dalit women within both the larger society and their own communities. In this context, Dalit men often engage in social and political struggles for human rights and equality, yet fail to extend these principles to their own households. The lack of humanity towards their wives underscores a broader issue of patriarchy and gender inequality within Dalit communities. Despite facing oppression and discrimination themselves, some Dalit men perpetuate similar power dynamics within their families, thereby replicating forms of oppression they aim to challenge in the wider society. This critique from a Dalit feminist perspective emphasizes the need for introspection and transformation within Dalit movements to address not just caste-based injustices but also gender-based inequalities. It calls for Dalit men to recognize and confront their own privileges and biases, and to actively work towards creating more equitable and inclusive spaces for Dalit women within their communities and movements.

Pawar vividly recalls the challenging conditions her community faced during her childhood. Poverty was pervasive among Dalit families due to limited access to property, wages, and education. Living near the sea provided some access to seafood, but the amount of staple food like rice or rotis was minimal.

“Holi was also a season for mangoes, corinda berries, cashew bulbs and many other local fruits. There would be nothing in the house except rice and bhakri” (Pawar 52).

Besides economic struggles, Dalits also grappled with social marginalization through superstitions and rituals that further alienated them. During festivals like Holi, upper-caste groups would perform rituals that symbolically shifted misfortunes on to the Dalit community. Young Dalit boys sought solace in alcohol to momentarily escape the hardships of labor, poverty, and hunger. The stark inequality was evident in religious practices, where upper-caste men carried the deity's palanquin while Dalit boys were forbidden from even touching it.

Food disparity was glaring during festivals. Dalit women often resorting to begging for festival meals from upper-caste households. Their luck determined whether they received any food or were denied entirely. Some Dalit women were fortunate to receive leftovers mixed with various food items from upper-caste households, sustaining their families for days. However, the desperate situation sometimes led to the consumption of meat from dead animals in some households. Pawar's father's stance against Dalit women begging for food from upper-caste homes reflects a broader struggle against social and economic discrimination endured by Dalit communities.

Dalits purchase items from shopkeepers standing at a distance from their doorways. They are prohibited from making contact with anything within their

premises. However, Pawar was willing to challenge and undermine the notion of ritual cleanliness. Pawar narrates this with a sarcastic undertone. When Pawar visits the 'Pandit' family to buy pickle, she loudly calls out for a small portion of pickle to be sold to her. The lady inside takes a few minutes to come out because she never handles the pickle without first bathing and changing into a specific sari designated for such tasks, like handling pickles. Pawar's brother always advised her to contaminate the pickle by touching the jar beforehand, so that she would receive the entire jar of pickle from her (Pawar 77-78).

This scenario described highlights the deep-rooted discrimination faced by Dalits in India, particularly concerning social and religious norms that enforce caste-based segregation and purity. The practice of Dalits standing away from the thresholds of their houses and refraining from touching anything in their courtyards stems from the caste-based hierarchy where Dalits are considered "impure" and untouchable by higher-caste individuals.

The Incident of buying pickle from the 'Pandit' family sheds light on how these discriminatory beliefs manifest in everyday interactions. The woman from the higher caste family refuses to touch the pickle without first undergoing a ritualistic purification process, showcasing the extreme measures taken to maintain caste-based purity. Pawar's brother's suggestion to deliberately "pollute" the pickle by touching the jar reflects a form of resistance against this discrimination.

In the autobiography set against the backdrop of the Phule and Ambedkarite movements, there are accounts of Dalits experiencing profound humiliation when the priest refuses to officiate the Dalit marriage, instead opting to stand at a distance to avoid "pollution."

Then the priest would climb down, sprinkle holy water from his panchpatra- a vessel with five compartments – with a pali, a small ritual spoon, on the coins kept as his dakshina to wash away the Pollution and make them clean, and push it into his waistband. He would also make it a point to take away all the offerings: rice, coconuts, and so on, as part his dakshina. He never carried these himself, of course! He had his servant for that task. (Pawar 13)

Moreover, Dalits were marginalized from wells and water tanks to prevent perceived pollution of the water sources.

Pawar highlights the deep-rooted caste discrimination prevalent in the community where she resides. It delineates the stark disparity in treatment based on caste, where Marathas and Brahmins, belonging to higher castes, live at a distance from the narrator's house. Despite this physical proximity, the privileges afforded to them, such as access to well water, are denied to the untouchable women from the Bhandari and Kulwadi communities. This denial of access to a basic necessity like water solely based on caste status underscores the pervasive discrimination ingrained in society. However, amidst this backdrop of inequality, the narrator's father emerges as a beacon of compassion and empathy. Despite societal norms dictating otherwise, he takes a stand against this injustice by instructing the narrator's mother to allow untouchable women to draw water from their well. This act symbolizes a rebellion against the entrenched caste hierarchy and serves as a small but significant gesture towards fostering equality and dignity for all individuals, regardless of their caste background. The permanent installation of the rope and bucket to the well signifies a commitment to this cause, ensuring that access to water remains a right accessible to all, irrespective of caste. (Pawar 23)

Pawar's father, an educated Ambedkarite Dalit, took action by having a well constructed in front of their home specifically for Dalit women who traveled to town to sell fruits or vegetables. These women had no other source of drinking water. Pawar became acquainted with these women through her mother, who would chat with them in the shade after their work in town. In her youth, unaware of the plight of Dalits, Pawar felt embarrassed to acknowledge them as friends or relatives due to their disadvantaged circumstances.

I remember an incident well. The savarnas in the Konkan were very resentful of dalits leaving the Hindu religion to become Buddhists. They deliberately tried provoking the dalits in many ways. The dalits were supposed to collect drinking water from a particular part of the river. One day, early in the morning, people from the Maratha community deliberately took their buffaloes and bullocks to the designated part of the river to wash them. The dalit women from the wadi had to wait for a long, long time before the muddied water settled down and they could collect some clean drinking water. (Pawar 85)

The incident mentioned reflects the systemic prejudice faced by Dalits in the Konkan region. The deliberate act by the Maratha community to taint the water source designated for Dalits highlights the deeply rooted caste-based oppression experienced by Dalits. This action was intended to diminish and humiliate Dalits by denying them access to clean drinking water, a basic necessity. Such provocations were part of a broader pattern of discrimination and societal exclusion faced by Dalits, exposing the power imbalances and prejudices prevalent in society.

This event emphasizes the challenges Dalits faced in asserting their rights and dignity within a caste-based social structure that perpetuated inequality and injustice.

It illustrates the daily hardships and humiliations endured by Dalits, highlighting the urgent need to address caste-based bias and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their caste identity.

Pawar's family's experience reflects a broader issue concerning healthcare access for Dalits in India. Dalits, historically marginalized and discriminated against, often face significant barriers when it comes to accessing quality healthcare services. The death of Pawar's father due to severe abdominal pain highlights the lack of timely and adequate medical attention available to Dalit communities. One major factor contributing to this disparity is the uneven distribution of healthcare facilities and resources. Many Dalit-inhabited areas lack proper hospitals, clinics, and qualified medical professionals. This geographical neglect leads to delayed diagnoses, inadequate treatment, and ultimately, preventable deaths, as seen in the case of Pawar's father.



## Chapter IV

### **Breaking Barriers: The Transformative Role of Education**

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering Dalit women, offering avenues to overcome societal constraints and attain upward mobility. This empowerment emanates from diverse facets of education, fostering personal development, socio-economic progress, and the capacity to confront oppressive structures.

Since education equips Dalit women with the skills, information, and self-assurance to challenge oppressive systems and fight for their rights, it plays a crucial part in their empowerment. Even though Dalit women face obstacles such as social marginalization, economic instability, and discrimination based on caste, education provides a way out of cycles of oppression and poverty.

Dalit women can become independent, raise their socioeconomic status, and contribute significantly to society through education. Success stories of educated Dalit women demonstrate how leadership, self-assurance, and resilience can be developed via education within underprivileged communities. In addition to empowering individuals, educational initiatives aimed toward Dalit women also have a greater social impact since they dispel misconceptions, promote gender equality, and accelerate social transformation.

Urmila Pawar's autobiography *The Weave of My Life* vividly illustrates the influence of educational prospects on the experiences of Dalit women. Through her storytelling, Pawar demonstrates how education acts as a catalyzing instrument, granting Dalit women the ability to confront oppressive systems and pursue personal development. The memoir underscores the importance of education in empowering Dalit women to acquire knowledge, capabilities, and self-assurance to navigate societal obstacles and advocate for their rights.

Pawar's portrayal reveals how educational opportunities empower Dalit women to break away from cycles of poverty, prejudice, and subjugation. Through education, these women improve their socio-economic standing, assert their autonomy, and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Success anecdotes within the autobiography illustrate how education provides Dalit women with the tools to surmount challenges, assert their control, and cultivate resilience amidst adversity.

She talks about the challenges faced within the ancient Brahmanical educational structure. Pawar describes how her caste identification has led to her receiving inferior treatment. Pawar's father was an educated man who values education. He is so keen on ensuring that his children must receive good education. After his death her mother takes over the responsibility of educating them Pawar explains how Dalit kids are treated in schools and also how they are left out by other kids many times. However, she swiftly becomes highly engaged in academics and additional activities shortly after completing the fourth grade.

Education was highly valued in Dalit households due to the impact of Ambedkarite and post-Ambedkarite Dalit movements. Pawar's siblings were enrolled in school, but Dalit children in the same institution were relegated to sitting outside the classroom. Educators exhibited disdainful behavior towards them, constantly examining their work from afar and resorting to harsh punishments like hurling stones (to avoid physical contact with Dalit children). This treatment caused many of Pawar's relatives to discontinue their education, thus depriving them of its benefits. When Dalit education and access to schools faced obstacles due to caste prejudices among teachers, educating Dalit girls posed an even greater challenge.

In most Dalit families, there were often more than three children, placing additional responsibilities on women who had to manage household chores and childcare alongside other tasks. They had to wake up early to prepare meals for the entire family and also contribute to agricultural work alongside men in the fields. Despite being in their prime education years, young Dalit women were expected to shoulder these responsibilities without complaint.

This starkly contrasted with higher caste women who enjoyed freedom and access to quality education. Dalit women, on the other hand, had to dedicate themselves tirelessly to family duties and manual labor, limiting their opportunities for personal growth and education.

“That god forsaken village of ours did not have even a proper school! Just one ‘Pantoji’ used to teach only brahmin kids, on the verandah of a brahmin house”(Pawar 15).

It shows how the upper caste people denied education to Dalit children because of their caste. Pawar's elder sister named Shantikka enrolled for higher education but no one wanted her to study. They wanted her to get married.

“What do women have to do with education anyway? In the end, she'll just be tending to the stove, won't she? Or is she supposed to become a teacher, a Brahmin lady, just because she goes to school?” (Pawar 18).

The passage reflects a dismissive and patriarchal attitude towards women's education. The speaker sarcastically questions the value of educating women, implying that their ultimate role is limited to household chores, like cooking ("blowing on the stove"). The rhetorical questions underscore the belief that women don't need education since they won't have professional roles, such as becoming a teacher or a Brahmin lady, who might traditionally be seen as more justified in

seeking education. This highlights the entrenched gender and caste biases that restrict women's opportunities. The sad truth is that these questions have no end. It still continues. Some people think that if women get good education they will become so arrogant and they will lose their respect towards others.

Another incident put forward by Pawar is that when her sister had attended tuition to learn English she had a Brahmin friend and she used to imitate their Brahmin habits very fast (Pawar 101).

Pawar's memory of the school educators and the shame experienced by Dalit children holds political importance. Educational institutions were accessible to Dalits, yet the institution, syllabus, and instructors still reflect Brahminical ideals. While Dalit youngsters struggle to enroll due to their families' poor circumstances, they also lack the privileges enjoyed by upper-caste peers in school. Even educators would remark that they were unfortunate to teach Dalit students.

Also she talks about one of the Brahmin teachers, who was a stickler for cleanliness. Who examined the nails, fingers, teeth, eyes like a doctor. The teacher asked her to buy some new clothes when Pawar got some scholarship money. It made her feel humiliated in front of other students.

“Teacher taught them and examined their slates from a distance. They would hit the children with stones if they made any mistakes” (Pawar 64).

Such treatment prompted numerous relatives of Pawar to forsake their education, consequently depriving them of its benefits.

“He always made me do the dirty work, like cleaning the board, class, collecting and disposing of it. Besides, our school verandah was used as a sort of toilet by buffaloes and cows. Students in every class turn cleaning it. When it was our class, I alone was forced to clean the entire mess” (Pawar 67).

Pawar narrates another incident from her teacher named Herlekar. Once she refused to obey his command then he slapped hard on her face. Her mother got enraged and she questioned him.

Look, I am a widow; my life is ruined. Yet I sit here, under this tree and work. Why? Because I want education for my children so that their future will be better. And you treat my girl like this? How dare you?' Aaye was speaking in her dialect in a voice, loud and ringing. Then she thundered, Let me see you laying even a finger on my girl again and I'll show you! Let me see how you can pass this road if you do so. (Pawar 69)

Then she enrolled to high school in Ratnagiri. Her brother went to Mumbai for further education. Her sister Manjula Tai became the first dalit girl to have passed the matriculation examination. Soon Manjula got married to a man who was a graduate and doing his L.L.B. Even though her husband was educated he ill treated her with his parents. Later Manjula had left her in-law's house and started living independently.

Pawar enrolled herself in a college and then she got married to her lover. She graduated and earned her postgraduate degree from Mumbai University. The completion of her postgraduate studies made her exceptionally courageous and self-assured. She exhibited increased courage and confidence in confronting challenges, while also attaining the self-identity she desired. Subsequently, she actively engaged in Dalit organizations, and participation in the women's movement further bolstered her confidence and resilience. Despite lacking support from her family, this experience served as an awakening, instilling new hope and vigor in her. She demonstrated heightened activity and astuteness throughout her journey, steadfastly continuing despite the absence of familial support.

Pawar faced the typical challenges encountered by working women in India. Despite being labeled an irresponsible housewife and mother due to her involvement with a Dalit welfare organization, she demonstrated courage and established a welfare organization specifically for Dalit women. Despite her husband's disapproval of her public engagements, Urmila Pawar managed to overcome this obstacle and actively work for the welfare of Dalit women.

Pawar eventually began writing and gained recognition as a talented writer. Despite her husband feeling proud of her accomplishments, he never openly expressed it, showcasing his male ego. This lack of encouragement from her husband was a notable aspect of their relationship.

"Listen, you can do whatever you want only after completing your daily household chores. Cooking, taking care of the children, and all that. If you believe you can handle this and pursue further education, fine! But this was essentially his way of saying no" (Pawar 153).

The statement reflects a common scenario where traditional gender roles and expectations are enforced within a household, often subtly discouraging women's aspirations for further education or personal growth. The speaker, likely a husband or a male authority figure, outlines a condition where the woman is allowed to pursue additional education only after fulfilling her daily household responsibilities, including cooking, childcare, and other domestic tasks. This condition, while seemingly permitting her to seek further education, is practically a way of saying no. The implicit message is clear: the extensive and time-consuming nature of these chores makes it almost impossible for the woman to find the time or energy for educational pursuits. This approach highlights a manipulative tactic where the denial is not direct but rather embedded in unrealistic conditions, reinforcing the barriers that

prevent women from breaking free from traditional roles and achieving personal growth and empowerment. This reflects a broader societal issue where women's potential is stifled by the weight of domestic expectations, effectively curtailing their opportunities for advancement and maintaining the status quo of gender inequality.

Through these Pawar explains the changes in her husband's attitude towards her when she obtains more qualifications and power compared to him. His ego got triggered at her progression and accomplishment.

Pawar's memoir depicts who have benefited from educational opportunities. The first one is the author herself, she describes how education strengthened her to challenge the norms and customs of the society, obtain freedom and advocate for herself and for others from her community.

The memoir probably portrays additional Dalit women within Pawar's family who have reaped the rewards of education. These women might have leveraged their educational opportunities to enhance their socio-economic standing, assert their independence, and make substantial contributions to their communities.

In her memoir, Urmila Pawar might also recount narratives of Dalit women in her community who have found empowerment through education. These women may have triumphed over societal obstacles, developed self-assurance, and achieved remarkable progress in both personal and professional realms as a result of their educational journeys.

These instances from Urmila Pawar's memoir exemplify the pivotal role of educational opportunities in empowering Dalit women, equipping them to confront challenges, affirm their identities, and aspire to a brighter future in a society rife with caste bias and gender disparities.

The literary works penned by Dalit women delve into the discriminatory practices that serve as testimony to the trauma endured by generations of Dalit women due to years of suppression. Within the women's movement, they actively question the caste and gender roles prevalent within the Dalit community. Actually they were not educated, and also marginalised. Dalit movement protest against equal rights for women and children.

These individuals encounter numerous challenges and possess numerous aspirations. They must provide education for their offspring. Dalit women constitute a marginalized community and are deemed untouchables, yet they possess equal entitlements as others. Occasionally, Dalit women are coerced into engaging in prostitution. Historically, the devadasi system was prevalent in India, wherein women were integrated into it. Moreover, there exists a ranking system within Dalit communities, with certain Dalits occupying higher positions on the social ladder than others.

Dalit women historically faced marginalization and lacked access to education. They were part of a marginalized group within the Dalit community, advocating for equal rights for women and children through the Dalit movement. Pawar says that even though she worked hard through the movement many people were not ready to appreciate or they don't actually know about her and her activities.

Meeting people for interviews was very interesting. Some people would be so disappointed when they learnt what we were working on. What rubbish! There were no women in that struggle!' They said. Sometimes someone would confidently recommend a 'very great activist' to us and we would rush to interview her. But she would say, 'What movement? Who worked in it? At least not me! I had nothing to do with it!' Again sometimes people would



reject a name, saying, "This woman had nothing to do with the movement! Why go to her? You are wasting your time.' There were instances when a woman's neighbours knew nothing about her work, but she came up with amazing accounts of the movement, her participation in it, and her experiences of the men and women who had worked with her. (Pawar 294)

Despite being labeled as untouchables, Dalit women assert their equal rights alongside others. Tragically, some Dalit women were coerced into prostitution, reflecting the harsh realities they confronted. Furthermore, India's past included the devadasi system, where women were integrated, highlighting historical injustices. Additionally, within Dalit communities, a social hierarchy exists, with certain groups holding higher positions than others.

Women writers express their ideas and experiences through their writings, particularly within the context of Dalit literature, which stands apart from other literary genres due to its distinct writing style. In India, Dalit women aspire for self-identity, and feminism serves as a source of strength for Dalit women writers. The Dalit feminist movement has instigated societal changes through radical and thought-provoking writings, emphasizing a strong connection to social realities. Dalit feminism vehemently opposes narrow-minded attitudes, violence against Dalit women, and advocates for the overall freedom of the community. Writers within this movement channel their anger and frustration into their works, prioritizing women's safety and challenging traditional power structures. Unlike Marxism, which often overlooks the interconnectedness of caste and gender, Dalit feminism emerges from the lived experiences of Dalit women, highlighting the injustices and atrocities they face rooted in religious customs and cultural norms.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion**

Millions of individuals, mostly in South India, are impacted by caste discrimination, a widespread social problem that is mostly seen in South Asia and India. Numerous fundamental rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural ones, are violated by this discriminatory conduct.

Caste separates people into unequal, hierarchical categories in society, severely marginalizing and dehumanizing those at the bottom. They are frequently branded as filthy and contaminating, which gives rise to the untouchability policy, which excludes them from both public and private domains and causes them to be shunned. This group, referred to as Dalits in South Asia, is frequently the target of violence and prejudice in numerous forms. They are also put into the most grueling tasks and exposed to hazardous, forced labor.

The majority of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) are made up of Dalits, who face discrimination in the political, social, cultural, and religious spheres. Caste consciousness is difficult to maintain because of institutional prejudices and its deeply ingrained nature, even with efforts to promote it.

Furthermore, Dalit women experience heightened levels of violence and discrimination, reveals the overlapping challenges encountered by disadvantaged communities within the caste system. Addressing caste discrimination requires comprehensive efforts encompassing legal reforms, social awareness, and economic empowerment to ensure equality and dignity for all individuals regardless of their caste background.

Socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in Dalits' healthcare challenges. Poverty and limited financial resources prevent many Dalit families from affording

essential medical care, medications, and follow-up treatments. This financial strain can force individuals to forgo necessary healthcare or rely on substandard and often unsafe alternatives, exacerbating their health conditions.

Moreover, systemic discrimination and prejudice within the healthcare system contribute to Dalits receiving inferior medical attention compared to higher-caste individuals. Dalits may encounter discrimination, bias, and mistreatment from healthcare providers, leading to distrust in medical institutions and reluctance to seek help when needed.

Addressing these disparities requires a multi-faceted approach involving improved healthcare infrastructure in Dalit communities, equitable distribution of resources, financial assistance programs, anti-discrimination measures within the healthcare sector, and increased awareness and advocacy for Dalit healthcare rights. Without these fundamental changes, the cycle of inadequate healthcare and preventable tragedies, such as the ones faced by Pawar's family, will persist among Dalit populations.

Dalit women, through penning their own narratives, confront entrenched traditions and restrictive confines as well as the enforced silence imposed upon them. By sharing autobiographies detailing their lives and histories, Dalit women writers defy the prevailing societal framework, particularly patriarchy, caste, and its underlying ethos. Moreover, these authors assert the importance of voicing their own experiences and reject being depicted by others, transforming from passive subjects to proactive agents. Pawar, as a Dalit author, sheds light on personal anguish and communal agony by spotlighting poverty, caste-based discrimination, powerlessness, and unrealized dreams. She depicts the shameless exploitation perpetrated by higher castes and the extreme marginalization faced by "others." What distinguishes her

memoir is her depiction of her journey. It's a challenging narrative about a gendered individual who initially views the world through the lens of her caste identity but eventually transcends it with a feminist perspective. Her journey unveils the enduring pain, tracing it back to the past and diverging toward a future where education not only uplifts but also asserts and reaffirms an individual's rights and sense of self. She intentionally portrays the facade of her falsely constructed identity shaped by social status, religion, environment, male dominance, and cultural norms. She manages to overcome all obstacles to discover her true essence and redefine herself. She possessed an autonomous mindset that drove her to question society's archaic customs and assert her individuality. Simultaneously, the translation of TWML lays the groundwork for the concept of Dalit feminism. It facilitates the convergence of various contexts and perspectives on feminist and Dalit activism. Translation, in essence, enables the text to transcend not only geographical boundaries but also social barriers simultaneously. It aids in reconstructing the past and metaphorically weaving together memories that are intentionally being erased from the nation's consciousness.

In her memoir TWML Pawar narrates numerous examples of symbolic caste-based violence experienced by Dalits. Her autobiography presents a broad Dalit feminist viewpoint, highlighting various instances of caste-based violence. Through her memoir, Pawar elucidates on the collective experiences of Dalits and Dalit women, who confront untouchability and degradation, hindering their integration into human civilization and impeding progress.

Pawar narrates the story of three generations of Dalit women in her novel. Laxmi Pawar, belonging to the first generation, serves as an inspiration to her daughter Urmila. The mother-daughter relationship depicted in her memoir aims to captivate the reader's hearts. Pawar eloquently compares the art of weaving strips to

weaving words, creating baskets and text respectively, which adds an intriguing layer to her narrative. As part of the second generation, Pawar herself emerges as a strong advocate for the liberation of Dalit women. Education empowers her to challenge the male-centric societal norms. Her daughters, Malavika and Manini, represent the third generation, having been instilled with the values of independence and courage by their mother, prepared to navigate life with boldness and autonomy.

Dalit women were marginalized in society, relegated to menial roles without acknowledgment or support. Despite their inherent potential, they faced constant humiliation and discrimination from those around them. Lack of access to basic education was another significant hurdle, with a majority of Dalit women being illiterate. In stark contrast, higher caste individuals enjoyed privileges and opportunities, while Dalit women remained unaware of their rights and the world beyond their immediate surroundings.

Pawar vividly portrays these harsh realities in her memoir, revealing how the higher caste segments deliberately kept Dalit women in ignorance to prevent their success. Additionally, they perpetuated discrimination and humiliation, ensuring that Dalit women remained marginalized and deprived of opportunities.

The novel illustrated the story of Pawar who stands out as a remarkable individual who transcended caste-based prejudices to achieve success as a writer within the Dalit community. She depicts within the memoir how education helps an individual to challenge the oppressive structures and to attain personal growth.

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