**Urmila Pawar’s The Weave of My Life: Depiction of Patriarchy and Subordination of Women**

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**Introduction**

The untouchables, lower caste people and women were bound by the Hindu social order. These restrictions in the form of laws enforced all forms of slavery, such as economic, social, mental, and physical servitude. They continued to hamper the identity of these people. Then the Independent, Sovereign, and Republic India—rose on the horizon. Earlier days women were psychologically oppressed to the point where, despite receiving freedom under the Indian Constitution, they continued to view themselves as the slaves of their male counterparts. Numerous female authors have made an effort to challenge and condemn the patriarchal system that privileges males over women. Women's literature that challenges patriarchy from a feminist perspective appears to be a valid critique of patriarchy. The genuine evidence for such a stance is found in the memoirs of Dalit women. Critics have acknowledged autobiographies as a tool for introspection of the self- “an individual’s story becomes significant in the exploration of group identity” (Deo and Zelliot 2016). The Autobiography, translated as *The Weave of My Life*, is the memoir, the author chose to shed light on the patriarchy. The "Weave" is a true parody of patriarchy that crushed women beneath its vicious boots in the name of culture, civilization, religion, etc. Dalit women are constantly in a struggle for their identity, survival and equality.

1. **Identity**

In *The Weave of My Life*, Urmila discusses both the "public" and "private" sides of her existence. She is candid about her marriage and family issues. She is forthright in her criticism of Dalit and feminist politics. The author compares her own "act of writing" to her mother's work of weaving aaydans, or baskets. In her memoirs, Urmila Pawar describes the arduous trek from the Konkan to Mumbai, which culminated in three generations of Dalit people's battle for modernity. As Bama commented in her narrative, the belief of upper class people about the lower class is:

“They believe that everyone from a low caste is inferior in some way. They believe we lack culture, morality, and hygiene. They believe that nothing can ever change this.” (*Bama* 2005)

Asserting upon the autobiography, the translator, Maya Pandit in her introduction to the book writes:

“The Weave of My Life also depicts the conditions of a whole community's subhuman life, which is brazenly exploited by the upper castes and degraded to the status of animals of burden…It is a complicated story about a gendered person who initially sees the world through the lens of her caste identity but later transcends it from a feminist perspective. (Pawar xvii)

The Dalit woman is triply opressed first by her gender, second by her caste, and third by her class. In her childhood recollections from her Konkani, UrmilaPawar describes the mistreatment of poor Dalit women by their husbands. The destitute Dalit women were forced to make a living by selling a variety of goods at Ratnagiri Market. Even after providing for their families, these women still had to put up with their drunken husbands' abuse. The author’s father was particularly interested in girls' education. He aimed to educate the girls so that they would become independent. When her father takes a position against sending her married cousin Susheela to her in-laws' home, the author is taken aback. She believes that Baba's stance reflected a patriarchal mindset. She says:

“But in the instance of Susheela, the same Baba acted so carelessly. Never did he approach her in-laws about how they were treating her so cruelly. He never assisted her in any way. She later passed away at Partanvane at a very young age. Did he hold the rigid belief that a girl must reside in the household, she has been married into?” (Pawar 33)

Urmila Pawar also recalls the game they used to play to teach the girls how to treat their various husbands with extreme meekness.The author reflects on the bias of family against the girl kid: "I was the youngest child in the family. I was never indulged, though. Because I was a girl, I was an undesired kid. When I was born, my cousin Govindadada intended to abandon me on a pile of manure. Many people would beat me.”(Pawar 64)

1. **Survival**

A Dalit family seldom provided good food for the female members to consume. Even if the food they received was unhealthy for them, they had to feed their husbands and other male family members while also feeding themselves. One such instance is described by Urmila in her memoir that Besides rice, fish was a frequent food option. Following the Dasara celebration, the fishing season began. Fishermen brought back a lot of fish. Small fish would be separated, dried, and kept for times of scarcity. Rich folks kept sode, tisrya, or mule meat in storage; impoverished people kept the water used to cook these fish. After being cooked until it was sauce-thick, the stock was put into bottles for storage. The term for this was kaat. Women and girls only ate kaat when the males went out and they stayed at home. In the past, daughters-in-law would often eat this saar. The unfortunate things inadvertently consumed them, and they, therefore, suffered the repercussions. (Pawar 100)

By using the example of her cousin, Urmila Pawar makes the point that women require marital stability more than men do. A man who had previously been married to Urmila Pawar's cousin. His wife treated him like royalty. To demonstrate who loved him more, they competed with one another. He was a fisherman, and as he entered the boat that would take him to his ship, they would start to cry. When Urmila was younger, she used to make fun of them. But today, she understood that their sobs were motivated by a desire to smile. Urmila Pawar claims that it was their last-ditch effort to protect their marriage. When Urmila Pawar moves in with her new husband's parents after being married, she recalls the incident. She was admonished by her mother-in-law to treat her brothers-in-law with respect. She describes the incident as:

“She was not very sure of me, because I was educated and worried how I would cope with her family, people and their customs. After Harishchandra left, she told me quite a few things to initiate me into their ways of life. Two points were always highlighted. One: ‘Always address your dirs with respect, in the plural. Never call them in the singular form even though they are younger than you!’ But I noticed that she had not included her daughter in this category! (Pawar196)

1. **Equality**

Urmila Pawar draws attention to the disparate treatment of men and women in society. Society accords women a significant position in the entire system for maintaining the social structure and allowing males to become eternal through their sons. Urmila's husband pushed her to have another child after having a son, since having two sons was something to be proud of. However, it was a struggle for women. Urmila bemoans her husband's lack of concern for the situation:

“When our son was two, I found myself pregnant once again. I wanted another son so that I could go through the family planning operation. This was a common thing to do. Many women went through sterilization after having two sons and showed off their status! But my second child was a girl. So Harishchandra said, ‘Let’s take one more chance.’ But once again it was a girl! I thought how simple and easy it was to have a baby, like saying let’s have one more cup of tea.” (218)

By reservation policy, Pawar was promoted to Branch Manager in the 1970s, but she was unable to get the same level of deference from her peers that the male officers did. According to Pawar, it was due to their unfair treatment of a Dalit lady. She describes the internal suffering for denial of position in these words:

“A guy became a "Bhausaheb" or "Raosaheb" the instant he was elevated. But even after their promotions, women continued to be addressed as "Bai" without the "Saheb"! In addition, I am a Dalit! " Why should she anticipate being called "Bai Saheb?"(235)

One female acquaintance was a bit disturbed when Urmila began attending classes at the house of someone she considered to be her brother. She found it problematic that Urmila visited someone whose wife wasn't living with. The attitude of her female companion annoyed Urmila. According to her, such behaviour on the part of women feeds the patriarchy. Even when the author started performing all the domestic tasks and going to public meetings, her husband continued to object to her being called a writer. He was pleased with her work; on the one hand and on the other hand, he detested the thought of making his wife a well-known person. He wished for his wife to emulate the country lady, who devotes herself to her husband's service after completing all household duties. He and she argue occasionally over her employment. She recalls instances like these:

“His attitude towards me was full of contradictions. On the one hand, he was proud of my writing; he admitted as much to his friends and relatives. But on the other, he immensely resented my being recognized as a writer, my speaking in public programmes and my emerging as a figure in the public domain. Our arguments would invariably end in bitter quarrels. I would say, ‘Please, have a heart! I am a human being too. I too work like you. I too get tired. My work also has the same value as yours.’ But neither my words nor my work had any meaning for him! On the contrary, he would tell me, ‘Look at the village woman. The husband’s wish is law for her. She does not dare to sit down or get up without his permission. Tell me, in that case, how is she able to run her home well? ’ Was not the answer implicit in the question itself?” (246)

Since she began taking part in the women's movement, Pawar has been more aware of herself as a liberated and unique human being. She compared men and women as independent, equal individuals rather than as superior or inferior. In the following sentences, she describes how she feels:

“I felt that a woman was also an individual, just as a man was, and was entitled to all the rights of an individual. If a man has muscle power, woman has the power to give birth.These are the distinctly different capacities and need to be evaluated differently, not in the same way. (248)

In addition to being aware of a woman's right as a free and distinct person, the author also began taking action against the injustices done to women by their husbands. In one instance, according to Urmila, she interrupted her husband's drunken wife-beating. When the author learned about the Dalit movement, she discovered that males were found to be sitting on every chair on the dais. She uses the following phrases to condemn the movement's treatment of Dalit women secondarily:

“Usually in the Dalit movement, whenever women’s conventions are organized, men are found to occupy all the chairs on the platform! Naturally, women find it very difficult to express themselves freely.” (259)

**Conclusion**

Urmila Pawar has demonstrated several times that she is a Dalit feminist activist and a fierce opponent of patriarchy. The fact that she refuses to observe Bramhanical holidays like Gauri-Ganpati does not host a Haldi-Kunkum celebration at home, and observes Manusmruti Burning Day on December 25 as "Women's Liberation Day" demonstrates her advocacy in creating new analogy that is antagonistic to Brahmanical Patriarchy. “Dalit writers voiced their feelings of frustration and dissent, challenging the hegemony of upper-caste people. They also voiced their support for Dalit self-confidence and self-respect” (Babu 2017). By depicting both her own life and the changes the Dalit community underwent as a result of the Ambedkarite Movement, Urmila Pawar develops her own identity. She decries not just the Brahmanical rule, but also the male predominance that is pervasive in the Dalit community and movement as Pawar asserts “The women’s movement had given me great strength to perceive every man and woman as an equal individual. It had taught me to relate to them freely, without any prejudice whatsoever!” (248)

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