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**UNDERSTANDING NATURE & NURTURE: URMILA
PAWAR'S *THE WEAVE OF MY LIFE***

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Abstract:

*Urmila Pawar's life story is very important and noteworthy document to understand the very nature of Dalit Women Autobiography. Dalit Women autobiography has a unique place in literature as it portrays the pathetic condition of women in Dalit community in particular and as a woman in general. Mukta Sarvagond, Kumud Pawde, Shantabai Kale, Baby Kamble, Vimal More, Janabai Girhe, Urmila Pawar and many other women published their life stories. These life stories are not stories of an individual. They are the stories of pain, maltreatment, harassment, socio-political, poverty and hunger of humans who on the basis of their caste and gender were treated inhumane. It is very important to understand the carving of these autobiographies because except experiencing unbelievable atrocities and oppression from generations they rose up like phoenix and achieved dignity, identity and honour in the ironically called high class society. This paper is an attempt to understand the carving of Urmila Pawar's personality through her life story *The Weave of My Life*.*

Keywords: *Nature and Nurture, Dalit Women Autobiography, Poverty, hunger, exploitation, oppression, etc.*

Nature refers largely to our genetics. It includes the genes we are born with and other hereditary factors that can impact how our personality is formed and influence the way that we develop from childhood through adulthood. Nurture encompasses the environmental factors that impact who we are. This includes our early childhood experiences, the way we were raised, our social relationships, and the surrounding culture.

Urmila Pawar's life story has the similar pattern. It opens up with the description of her ancestor's and their painstaking efforts for living, then about her school education, description of various customs and traditions of Dalit community, Impact of Savarna people on Dalits, about her marriage and shifting to Mumbai later on her life as a working women and social worker, upbringing of children and so on. Urmila's ancestors were from the Ratnagiri district of Konkan region of Maharashtra. The chief business of earning livelihood for the people was selling baskets made up of bamboo or cane. Women from the community used to weave the baskets and bins of cane and used to sell them in the nearby villages on the occasion of bazar and festival days. And other times they worked as farm labourers or do any job offered by the Savarna people. They were unable to fulfill the basic needs of life like, food, shelter, clothing and then education. Education was the last priority for them. Their houses were small huts. They didn't have sufficient plates to serve the food. They used to sit together to eat in a single plate and there was quarrel in between them for the food. Urmila Pawar narrates "It was true that dalits had the custom of all people eating from one plate but that was usually because there were few plates in the homes. But this eating was a shade different. When men sat down



to eat, they would count how many bites each one had. Everybody would count how much everybody else had eaten. Then they would fight, 'You had two bites. I had only one' or, 'Now wait, your turn is over' or 'He had one bite just now, now it's my turn! This 'conversation went on all the time. If someone took one morsel more, there would be bitter fights. That's why they were known as 'bite-counters' and the house was known as the 'bite-counters' family'. The Mahars were generally known for talking loudly while eating so whenever there was a cacophony, others would say 'Don't worry; it's the Mahars eating!' (Pawar, TWML, 20).

Men from the family will have dinner and then women will have to enjoy the dinner if there remains anything otherwise they starve. Men and women never sat together to have the dinner. This is also another example of gender bias. A Woman was working for the welfare of the family for the day and night. She was putting all her efforts for the family. Though she was oppressed and exploited by her own family members. Urmila Pawar recorded numerous examples of women's harassment by her own family members. She describes "Every house had its own share of drunkards. There would be at least one woman among them badly bashed up by her husband. She would walk painfully, somehow managing to drag her aching body along the way. If someone asked her what was wrong, her anger gushed out 'Let his drinking mouth be burnt off forever. Let his hands rot.' This would be followed by a detailed account of the reasons for the beating. He demanded money for liquor, she was late in serving his meal; she asked for money for household expenses, for buying medicines for the sick child. The narrative would be followed by spirited discussion and curses, which propelled them forward on their way". (Pawar, TWML,5).

Experiencing such a brutal physical harassment Women from the Dalit Community were spending their whole life in a desolate condition. Nobody from the family was going to resist the beating. After experiencing harsh beating when the woman returns to her mother and father, they without a single word protests about the beating. They asked the girl to return back to her house after few days stay with them. Susheela, Urmila's cousin sister was also victim of such a severe beating. Urmila explained her story "I always remembered my cousin Susheela at such times. She was married to a man in Partavane. He was a drunkard and Susheela's mother-in-law was a tyrant. Both beat her up mercilessly at the slightest pretext. They would drive her out of the house with her young children and cross the hills and valleys at night, her face broken, body swollen, bleeding and aching all over, and reach her mother's house at Phansavale. When she came like that, and if Baba saw her, he would bark, 'Who's that? Susha? All right give her something to eat and send her back the way she's come. She must stay with her in-laws!" (Pawar, TWML, 33).

The men in the family used to beat his wife and the women in the family also join him in beating his wife like above mentioned incident. Victims Mother-in-law and sister-in-law used to join in humiliating the other woman. This other woman is for the day and night serving for the welfare of the family, taking care of all their needs though she has to experience such a severe beating from all the family members. Urmila and her brother-in-law including her mother were the victims of male dominant society.

Urmila from her childhood experienced the oppression and exploitation of Dalit Woman. She herself was oppressed by her husband, Harishchandra when Urmila was engaged in various feminist activities. Harishchandra was a good person. He loves and respects Urmila. He was proud of her because of her qualification. Urmila was the first Dalit woman from the Konkan region who had completed Masters in Marathi Literature. But Harishchandra's childhood memories and the impact of many years of woman dominance in the family and society was not allowing him to tolerate Urmila's participation in feminist activities. He used to quarrel with Urmila for no reason. Form the childhood Mr. Pawar had seen the hardships of woman in the village. For the whole day women were busy in their household works and they were not complaining about the very hardships. The women and men



also believed that women have to carry out and experience all those hardships because they are women. That was their duty and part of life. But Urmila Pawar was going to participate in public programs, she has established herself as a writer and she has been invited by the various organizations for speech and other public programs. This experience was new for her husband Mr. Pawar. He had not seen such new things. His image of women was stereotypical. He felt that his wife is not under his control and now she is not going to respect him anymore and so on. Urmila Pawar narrates “the picture of our house in Bhirunde floated before my eyes, especially the way it was during the rainy season. The day began very early for women, at four o’clock in the morning. In spite of the heavy rain, they had to fetch water from the well for everybody in the house to bathe in, drink, and cook the food and so on.

Then they cleaned the pots and plates used previous night and cooked for the whole house. They breakfasted with their men folk and went with them to work in the fields. They planted paddy till their backs broke. They had to carry lunch if the fields were far away. After lunch they worked in the fields once again and returned home in the evening, 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, returning from the fields. After heating the bath water, they began preparations for the evening meals. The spices had to be pounded and grains ground. Then there was the cooking to do! Sometimes they had even husk the rice before cooking. Even as they worked ceaselessly on these tasks, 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 of all the people in the house, hang them out to dry, light the lamps and serve food to the men first. After everybody in the house had eaten, they ate a few morsels from the leftovers. Then they had to roll out the beds for everybody. The work was still not over. 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 because of the hard work. After a few hours’ rest, however, it was dawn again- time to get up and welcome the new day with a smile on one’s face! “There were several such women around who suffered at the hands of their heartless husbands. When the torture crossed the limits of their endurance, they came to my mother to confide in her, to give vent to their anger. One such woman, I remember, came to us from the village Pali. ‘The son of a bitch beats me up without any rhyme or reason. May his face burn!’ She started abusing him. Then she saw her husband coming by and, terrified, asked mother to hide her. We made her climb the ladder to the loft and hide there. We hid the ladder as well.

The husband arrived with a stick in his hand, his eyes spitting fire. ‘Where’s that whore?’ Without asking my mother’s permission, he pushed his way into our house. This infuriated her. She shouted, ‘You bastard, whose house do you think you are in? Get out, get out first!’ But he was dead drunk. He searched for his wife everywhere in the house, looking even under the small wooden bench. He asked us, the children, all kinds of questions in order to know to find out about his wife. When he could not find her, he went up to Aai and repeatedly touching her feet, apologized again and again. He called Aai, ‘Akka! He was a cousin of our first mother, our father’s first wife. He kept making flimsy excuses for beating up his wife. By this time the anger had subsided. ‘You idiot, you drunkard! What reasons you give!’ Aai shouted, ‘Get up and get out! Go, leave his instant’. But he wouldn’t stop. ‘My wife quarrels with my mother. She tells her to get out. She doesn’t even wash her sari. She steals food from the house.’

His wife, listening from the loft above, started shouting, forgetting that she was hiding from him. Then, without waiting for the ladder, she stepped on the plank in the wall and jumped down. Standing in front of her husband, sitting like a spent force now, she fired at him. ‘What are you saying? I steal food? What do I steal? Your mother locks up all the food. Even on festival days, when



she makes vadas, she counts them before going for a piss, and makes sure their number is the same when she comes back. What is there for me to steal? Why should I wash her sari?' (Pawar, TWML, 154,155). Urmila Pawar through various incidents tried to forefront pathetic and painful condition of women of Dalit community. Men from the community believed that they have the right to treat their mothers, sisters and wives according to their wish. The women did not have any opinion or a say in their family matters. They believed that women have to look after the children and kitchen. But this picture changed totally because of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his followers who devoted their life for the welfare of Dalit community. Dr. Babsaheb Ambedkar gave a call of educate, unite and resist to Dalit Community. Dr. Ambedkar knew the importance of education. It is the education on the basis of which Dalit community overcome the cudgels of banishment and exploitation. So the people from the community joined the school and sent their children to school. Urmila Pawar's father was also well connected with Ambedkariate movement. He started a school in his village for Dalit children. Some of his community members and his relatives were against the schooling. They used to humiliate him on occasions. But he was reluctant on his views of educating the children. He encouraged his children to attend the school and anyone who missed the school has to experience severe punishment. Urmila's elder sister was admitted to school but the community members were always cursing her father in the words 'Actually nobody was in favour of Akka's going to school and her staying so far away from home.

All the women complained 'Bah! What do women have to do with the education? Ultimately she would be blowing on the stove, wouldn't she? Or is she going to be a teacher, a Brahmin lady, the she goes to school? (Pawar, TWML, 18). Dalits' believed that education is not their right. They were born to look after the family. The life of a woman is limited to her home, husband and children only. Her life is not beyond the threshold of the house. Though she got educated she has to look after the family. But Urmila's father neglected such remarks and asked Urmila to attend the school regularly. Education changed the life of Urmila and her sisters. Urmila got the job. She along with her husband shifted to Mumbai where she came in contact with *Maitreen* group and engaged herself in women empowerment movement. She was the active volunteer of the feminist movement. She was invited to deliver lectures in public places on women empowerment and liberation. The Weave of My Life is portrayal of life stories who were illiterate and who are literate. Urmila Pawar's ancestors and Dalit community members who were illiterate and not provided any opportunity to their children of education they had to face poverty and hunger. They were treated inhumane. But those who understood the importance of education and sent their children to school, they were living happily and have honour and pride in the society. Urmila Pawar got educated, got service in government sector and devoted her life for the women empowerment movement and also established herself as a writer. She received various prestigious awards for her creative writing. Her way was full of hurdles like hunger, poverty, oppression. Both the aspects nature and nurture are very aptly described by UrmilaPawar in *The Weave of My Life*.

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