



A Critical Analysis of Urmila Pawar's "Aayadan"

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Abstract

This paper discusses Urmila Pawar as a Dalit writer through her autobiography 'Aayadan.' This is the story of three generations and a woman's transformation into a well-known feminist and Dalit writer. Pawar's achievement would not have been possible without his perseverance and determination. Urmila Pawar is a Marathi literary personality best known for her short story writings. She was born and raised in Maharashtra's Konkan region. She was born in the Ratnagiri District village of Adgaon in May 1945. She is best known today as a feminist writer and leader of the women's liberation movement.

Keywords: Aayadan, Urmila Pawar, Dalit writer, Autobiography, Women writings

Introduction

Urmila Pawar has established herself as a prominent voice of Dalit literature, following Daya Pawar, Baby Kamble, and Shantabai Gokhale. Dr. Maya Pandit translated her memoir 'Aayadan,' which was published in 2003, as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir*. 'Aayadan' means cane basket weaving. It was the main source of income for the mahar community, to which she belonged. Another meaning of the word Aayadan is utensils used by them. The Mahar community was staying in the village's centre because they could be useful to the upper caste people for sanitation-related work as well as to protect themselves from outsider attacks.

Aayadan: A Dalit woman's memoir

"Aayadan" is a basket that the Ratnagiri district's Burud clan weaves. Before plastic penetrated their way of life, even the people of Maharashtra were actively engaged in basket weaving. According to Pawar, "My mother used to weave Aayadan and I was writing this book, both were activities of creation of thought and practical reality of life." (Pawar, *Aayadan* 1) Compared to poetry and fiction, the genre of autobiography is rarely written by Indians. In the context of India, it problematized the crucial issues of class, caste, and gender. It provides a backdrop picture of Indian culture, including interpersonal and intercommunal relations, conflicts, and tolerances, in addition to chronicling a woman's discovery of selfhood and assertion of individuality.

The key metaphor of the current narrative is weaving; the protagonist's mother's primary occupation is weaving bamboo baskets, which symbolises both their low caste and extreme poverty. Pawar mentioned that her father passed away when she

was in the third grade. Her mother was taking care of the kids on her alone and wasn't attending any community events or other programmes. When she was in school, she only had two sets of clothes that she alternated between for three or four days. Once, as they were doing their weekly laundry, she started spitting around Urmila, which was quite offensive to other people because Urmila was ignorant of this awful behaviour.

Pawar has expressed her gratitude to her teacher Biwalker, who instilled in her the value of cleanliness and excellent manners. In the fourth standard, she received her first scholarship of Rs. 12/- (twelve), and for the first time in her life, she was able to see the Rs. 10/- note and the Rs. 2/- note. Her instructor instructed her to use the money to get two new dresses for herself. In her memoir, Pawar describes the experience as follows:

Aye was weaving her baskets as usual. She did not see me when I crossed her and entered the house. Her face looked worried. She was engrossed in her own thoughts and her fingers flew over the basket. Going to her, I told her about the scholarship and held the twelve rupees before her. Suddenly her face lit up with a sunny smile and eyes sparkled. (91)

Pawar was extremely sensitive to both her caste and her poverty, so from the time she started school, her conscious mind was aware of the constraints placed on people of lower castes and the true meaning of poverty, as opposed to how it was shown in books. She mentions that the

upper caste girls always used words like 'Ladu', 'Modak', 'karanjya', 'Puranpolya'. They brought such novel items in their tiffin boxes as well as at times we went on excursions. However, I never asked myself the stupid question, why we do not prepare such dishes at home? We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in a particular caste and in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly. (93)

The preparation of their meals at home is another significant indicator of community living and the exploitation of women.

The narrative makes it abundantly clear that different food preparations were made for men and women, and that the daughter-in-law in particular was utilised to the most extent. Pawar has brought attention to a problem as a feminist and a Dalit woman, as she writes,

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

Well, what they cooked was fish water!

Someone has had a bellyful and how!

She wears a short sarees, down to the feet now

To hide what 'trickling down from her butt. (100)

The usual diet for daughters-in-law used to consist of this sagar. In those times, during the Buddha-Ambedkar Revolution of changing religious belief, conversion was the primary effort. Following Govindadada's conversion to Buddhism and the placing of Dr. Ambedkar's photograph on the wall, changes could be seen in

everything from marriage ceremonies to other religious practises.

As stated by Urmila, according to Buddhist religion, the previous ceremonies to recognise birth, marriage, and death were given up and new ones gradually came to be formalised. (111) Pawar has provided incredibly minute facts of the mistreatment and abuse of women and girls. The humiliation can occasionally be so severe that it hurts the reader's sensibilities. The following remark from Pawar reflects both the hunger and the insult that girls experienced. When they receive a decent meal or a complete meal, they find it difficult to maintain control. As Pawar narrates the incident,

Once, I went to attend wedding at my sister-in-law's place, along with two of my nieces. However, when we three spout girls set down to eat and begun asking rice repeatedly, the cook got angry, 'Whose daughters are these anyway?' 'He burst out. 'They are eating like monsters' then someone answered 'they are from our' Sushi's family! Daughters of Arjun master!' On hearing this, the host came forward. 'Oh! Are they? All right, all right let them eat as much as they want! Serve them well!' The cook returned with more rice but being called monster was not easy to digest and we politely declined. (117).

Urmila Pawar was born and raised in Adgaon, but for the sake of her studies, her family was living close to Ratnagiri.

Pawar recalls her memories of her time in school. Her schoolmates had made the decision to prepare a lunch one day. The foods that each person was to bring—rice, lentils, etc.—had been discussed. Pawar recounts the occurrence, "What should I bring? Nothing, they said.' You must bring some money." (107) Due to the absence of the girl's parents, they were headed to Tarlatan Savant's house. Girls prepared a simple but tasty lunch of rice, dal, and vegetables –Sushi Dhaka, Kamal Chaman and Sunland Bhopal.

It may be observed that Pawar describes a traumatic event that they did not allow me to touch anything. However, we all ate together. I really enjoyed the meal. The next day I was horrified to hear that my eating had become the hottest topic for juicy gossip. Girls were whispering in groups about how much I had eaten. (110)

Urmila felt thousands of deaths that day, which was extremely humiliating. Two significant challenges in the nation's cultural heritage are highlighted in this narration. Children display evidence of Untouchability and caste distinctions, and poor people are made to feel ashamed of their hunger.

After Dr. B. Ambedkar's Maha Nirwan, religious practises too saw a metamorphosis. The villagers agreed in unanimity to remove all gods and goddesses and replace them with pictures of Dr. Ambedkar and Lord Buddha. As Urmila narrates,

We put all of them in a basket. In fact, the silver and the brass would have fetched a tidy amount if we had sold the stuff. However, we have firmly resolved to discard the gods with all the accompanying paraphernalia. Therefore, we went to the river with the other people, the young children in row. On the way, people chanted the same traditional invocation but with a completely different set of words:

O ye Gods;
Yes that's right, Maharaja,

Go back to your own place.
 'Yes that's right, Maharaja
 You never did well to us. (116)

The populace placed its trust in unethical and inexperienced medical care as well as naive faith. Sushi, her older sister, perished in her own sorrow and pain since her father never looked after her after her marriage.

Urmila Pawar has occasionally felt that while her father was a reformer for the outer world and society, he used a patriarchal approach toward his own daughters. She describes the situation of Parvati, her sister-in-law, who is unable to make decisions for herself or eat by herself. She had given up on life. Pawar illustrates how women are exploited and oppressed via her case. Similar to the Black Feminist philosophy, which accepts the harsh realities of being a woman and a person of colour, they exploit both white people and the men in their own community.

When Pawar talks about her time at school and the lunches she shared, she notably mentions the items made by upper-class kids. The variety of the items appealed to her, but given her family's financial situation, she never even considered discussing them at home. In her English language class, where her teacher used to berate her for having a poor mastery of the subject, she felt ashamed. He once reprimanded her, "This is English, the milk of tigress; it is not easy, like acting in plays." (160) She has talked about her classmates and the sexual exploitation she experienced as a young adult. Her narrative makes clear this narration and instances of sexual exploitation, "My maternal uncle plays dolls with me and pretends to be my husband drags me into an alcove and presses me hard." (125)

Urmila's sister began her education in high school. After a few weeks, her language and demeanour toward her mother, sister-in-law, and others show some noticeable changes. She addressed her family members with respect, which is a sign that women are changing as a result of education and social reforms. Her sister used to speak in Brahminic plural verb tenses. Pawar objected to this type of strategy for two reasons: first, it departed from communal lingo, and second, from a feminist standpoint, it devalued oneself unnecessarily in the eyes of others. She describes cases of wife being beaten both at home and in the neighbourhood.

The account of the pitiful occurrence in which a pregnant woman was beaten only out of blind faith is sensitive as well as scary for future generations. When Pawar went missing for a day and wasn't located until late at night, this kind of misunderstanding took place. She was with Harishchandra that day in front of the school entrance, close to the sea. However, the entire family believed that she was being haunted by a ghost, which caused uncertainty. Her mother exclaimed, "Thank God! The ghost did not crumble you up. The God of this place has saved you! It is the spirit of the ancestor's that has protected you!" (136)

Simultaneously, it may be observed that Pawar describes her first-night experience which she cannot forget as has earned her the label 'frigid'. She narrates, "Never mind! My husband's hands were groping all over my body. The tiny room with its peeling walls, the single iron bed with its creaking iron strips, the smelly, moldy mattress with hard lumps of cotton, the dirty, stained, old bedspread, the flat hard pillow smelling like a naphthalene bag... the sharp yellow strip of light from the bulb piercing the eye..." (183)

She was a little upset, but then the second thought occurred to her: it could be the husband's wish. A sign of her virginity. He would have suspected her virginity if she had taken any initiative. She thought she was aware of every movement, but she remained noticeable.

Urmila recalls her first salary after her marriage, which indicated her happiness at the time, but she was also aware that she had to give it to her husband, Harishchandra. As a result, the characters have only changed, but the dependence has not. Urmila notes,

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 handling it over to my husband. If this is not like deliberately offering head for the butcher's knife, what else is it? (208)

Harishchandra, Urmila Pawar's husband, experienced caste discrimination when he left his job at Ratnagiri to become District Superintendent. Harishchandra was aware of the strong caste barriers that existed even among the upper castes. Even educated people treated him as if he were untouchable. This traumatic experience had convinced him to seek employment in the city. After being discriminated against, he made the firm decision not to work in the village. He recalls Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's call to young people to go to the city and forget about the caste system.

Pawar is confident that while self-respect for men comes naturally, it is challenging for women to obtain without efforts. Her involvement in play during her school and college years and her strong belief in reading books about Babasaheb Ambedkar and other Dalit authors were the beginnings of her inner transformation. As she writes, Pawar provides a list of specific surnames used in their community: Kacharya (Dirt), Honda (stone) Magadha (stone) Bhikya (beggar). Later on, names began to be written with English initials, like, R. L. Tambe, K. D. Kadam, G. B. Kamble, and so on. (149)

Pawar had plenty of chances to hone her writing abilities while working in the Mumbai office. She had plenty of free time to write short tales, articles, make friends with other women, and raise awareness of their issues. Her "Kathakathan" tales and conventional methods were intended to affect a small amount of change in the neighbourhood. She recalls the episode involving her husband Harishchandra's vehement opposition to her admission to the M.A. programme. Being a traditional spouse, he anticipated that Pawar would devote more time to domestic duties than the other women in the town. As a typical wife, she should support her children's well-being, education, and domestic duties.

Pawar had the first realisation of her life. She could tell that her husband's ego was wounded and that he could not stand having a wife who was more qualified than he was. As soon as his traditional patriarchal command began to show, he denied her and told her not to enrol in the M.A. programme. There was no history in the family to pursue an interest, and there was no such support from the home front. She first learned about Maitrini, a women's organisation, via her friend Heena Bansode. There, she could meet well-known women like Chhaya Datar, Vidya Bal, and Usha Mehta.

Pawar recalls receiving her first request to read a short tale at the Sahitya

Sammelana in Vikroli, where she was fortunate to be present when Padmashree Daya Pawar's book "Baluta" was published. The format of an autobiography was the subject of a significant controversy. On the stage with her were prominent speakers Daya Pawar, Bhausahab Adsul, and Appa Ranpise. As Pawar writes, Adsul said in this book, Daya Pawar has torn to shreds the dignity of our mothers and sisters! Had Babasaheb Ambedkar alive today, he would have kicked this book out. (229) Pawar highlights the differences between the titles and positions held by men and women. According to her, a male would become a "Bhausahab" or a "Raosahab" when promoted, while a woman officer would simply become a "Bai," lacking the title of Sahib.

The autobiographer felt strongly that it was an affront to her status and caste as a Dalit writer. Today, regardless of their rank, all women are addressed as "Madam" due to usage of English language. The women are now debating their own sense of self-respect as a result of this. Using the example of her own brother Sahu, Pawar has brought attention to the other crucial issue of male children. When her brother had a son, the urge for male children was brought to light. At Ratnagiri, the namkaran was to be performed. The indigenous Marathi word Barse has been supplanted by the word Namkaran.

Subsequently, it may be noticed that the subject of women's post-marriage property rights is raised during a conversation. The New Hindu Code Bill by Dr. Babasaheb is also discussed. "Don't you know that Babasaheb had asked in the Hindu code Bill to give the daughters their share of property? So come on, get up now!" (289) She has also related another event involving a daughter's property rights, in which all the sisters got into a fight with the brother while attending the naming ceremony for the Sahu family's boy. Her mother reprimanded the daughters, telling them not to expect anything from their brother because they are educated and content with their lives. It implies that after being married, the daughters have no natural right to benefit financially from their parents.

Pawar has also told the tale of Joyti, a lady who tried to kidnap another woman's child in order to satisfy her husband's obsession with male children. She expressed herself through her narrative, "Shalya." The life of Joyti, who had five daughters. She feared that her husband would torment her for the female kid when she became pregnant for the sixth time. She managed to switch her daughter with another unmarried girl who had just given birth to a son. Further – when she was asked to read this narrative at a gathering – Pawar mentions, that Harishchandra urged that they keep their son together so that they could demonstrate to people that they actually do have a son.

Similar to this, she brought attention to the delicate subject of daughters' parental rights after marriage by setting an example as she left Ratnagiri's home. Her sister-in-law has also mentioned the historic Marathi Sahitya Konkan conference where she could meet Ramakant Shadan Chadrahas Gadre, Prakash Karat, and P V Shashikant Lokhande, which reflects Baba Saheb's attempts to abolish blind faith and religious traditions. The establishment of the Dr. Ambedkar, Konkan Sahitya, and Arts Academy was decided upon at this summit, which took place on January 5, 1991.

Additionally, Pawar made the decision to contact the women who had collaborated

with Ambedkar in his movement in order to reunite their recollections when she made the decision to create a biography on "Dr. Ambedkar's life and activity." They were Chandrika Ramtake, Tayabai Pawar, and Laxmibai Kakde. When she once questioned her mother about "motherhood," she responded with the term "sacrifice" and a visibly distressed expression on her face, "I just wanted to know how she would express the feelings behind the word 'Mother'. My question made her wince with pain. She said, to be a mother is to commit sati, to immolate oneself: nothing less!" (298) She had released her first children's book, "Sixth Finger," with Jagdish More's "Samvadini Publication." Shri Sushilkumar Shinde, Arun Sadhu, Shri Nerurkar, Chhaya Datar, and Shri Bhalchandra Mungekar also were present for the publication function.

On the home front, meanwhile, her situation was uncomfortable because Harishchandra frequently felt that Urmila's achievement had overshadowed his own. She describes this suffering in these words:

His attitude towards me was full of contradictions. On the one hand, he was proud of my writing, he admitted to his friends and relatives. However, 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. (246)

She frequently recalls her mother and her efforts to weave the basket whenever she makes reference to her autobiography writing. There was no point in connecting Urmila's writing analysis to the terrible situation she was writing about because she saw writing as an escape from the grief of losing her kid. Shri Sushilkumar Shinde remarks, "But she has lost one son but got another it means she could establish herself as a writer." (252)

Conclusion

Author and activist Urmila Pawar recalls the struggles of three generations of dalit women as they attempted to overcome the constraints of their caste. India's poorest group is known as Dalits or Untouchables. They are only permitted to carry out the most unpleasant and unhealthy tasks. Dalits were compelled to live in segregated societies because it was thought that they were racially inferior and that they were filthy by nature. In this open and private memoir, Pawar conveys not just the excitement of a growing consciousness during a period of significant political and social change, but also her painstaking efforts to overcome a horrifying personal tragedy.

References:

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