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Caste, Gender and Intersectionality in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*

Abstract : Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* is a significant work of Dalit women's life writing that presents the realities of caste, gender, poverty, and social inequality through the experiences of a Dalit woman. Originally written in Marathi as *Aaydan*, the memoir was translated into English by Maya Pandit. Pawar narrates her own life journey while also bringing forward the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of Dalit women across different generations. The memoir is therefore not only a personal account but also a representation of the wider social conditions faced by Dalit women in Indian society.

This paper examines the ways in which caste discrimination and gender inequality are closely connected in Pawar's life narrative. The study argues that the experiences of Dalit women cannot be understood through caste or gender separately. Their lives are shaped by the combined effects of caste hierarchy, patriarchy, poverty, and social exclusion. Pawar describes experiences of untouchability, humiliation, economic hardship, discrimination, domestic inequality, and limited educational opportunities. These experiences show how caste and patriarchy influence the everyday lives of Dalit women and restrict their social and personal choices. At the same time, the memoir does not portray Dalit women only as victims. It highlights their courage, self-respect, determination, and ability to resist oppressive social practices. Education plays an important role in Pawar's journey, helping her develop confidence, awareness, and an independent identity. Her involvement in Dalit and feminist movements further strengthens her understanding of social inequality and collective resistance.

The paper concludes that *The Weave of My Life* presents a strong intersectional understanding of Dalit women's experiences. By turning personal memories into a wider social narrative, Pawar gives voice to women whose

experiences have often remained unheard. Her memoir demonstrates that life writing can become an important form of resistance, self-expression, identity formation, and social criticism.

Keywords : Urmila Pawar, *The Weave of My Life*, Caste, Gender, Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Life Writing, Patriarchy.

Introduction : Indian literature has a long tradition of representing different social experiences, but the voices of marginalized communities have received greater attention in recent decades. Among these voices, Dalit literature has played an important role in bringing the realities of caste discrimination, social exclusion, poverty, humiliation, and resistance into the literary mainstream. Dalit women's writing has added another important dimension to this tradition because it presents experiences shaped not only by caste but also by gender and economic conditions. Their writings reveal that the life of a Dalit woman cannot be fully understood by looking at caste or gender separately. Both operate together and influence her everyday experiences.

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* is an important contribution to Dalit women's life writing. Originally written in Marathi as *Aaydan* and later translated into English by Maya Pandit, the memoir presents Pawar's personal journey from childhood to adulthood while also recording the experiences of her family and community. The narrative covers her childhood, education, marriage, working life, and involvement in social and political movements. Through these experiences, Pawar gives readers an insight into the changing lives of Dalit women and the social conditions that continue to influence them.

The title *The Weave of My Life* has a meaningful connection with Pawar's family history. Her mother was involved in the traditional work of making bamboo baskets, and this activity becomes an important metaphor for the memoir. Just as separate pieces of bamboo are woven together to create a basket, Pawar brings together memories, family experiences, social events, and the stories of other women to create a larger narrative. Her life story, therefore, goes beyond the individual and becomes connected with the collective experiences of Dalit women.

The present study focuses particularly on the relationship between caste and gender in Pawar's memoir. Dalit women often face discrimination from dominant caste groups while also experiencing patriarchal restrictions within their families and communities. Poverty and limited access to education can further deepen these inequalities. At the same time, Pawar's narrative highlights the ways in which women challenge these conditions through education, awareness, writing, social participation, and collective action. Her memoir demonstrates that remembering and narrating one's own experiences can itself become an act of resistance.

The Weave of My Life provides an important space for understanding Dalit women's identity, suffering, dignity, and resistance. It shows how caste, gender, and class intersect in everyday life and why Dalit women's experiences require a broader and more inclusive understanding of social inequality.

Need and Significance of the Study : The study of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* is important for understanding the social realities of Dalit women in Indian society. Dalit women often experience discrimination in different forms, particularly through caste, gender, poverty, and social exclusion. Therefore, their experiences cannot be fully understood by examining caste or gender separately. An intersectional approach helps to understand how these forms of inequality influence their everyday lives.

Pawar's memoir is significant because it is not limited to her personal experiences. Her memories are connected with the lives of her family, community, and other Dalit women. The memoir brings attention to issues such as untouchability, social humiliation, economic hardship, gender inequality, limited opportunities, and the struggle for dignity. It also shows how women respond to these challenges through education, self-awareness, writing, and collective action.

The study is particularly relevant to Dalit feminist literary studies because it brings caste and gender together in the analysis of women's experiences. It also questions the limitations of approaches that discuss gender without considering caste or caste without considering gender. Pawar's life writing provides a strong voice to experiences that have often remained unheard.

Thus, the study contributes to a better understanding of **Dalit women's identity, marginalization, agency, and resistance**. It also highlights life writing as an effective means of expressing personal experience and challenging social inequality.

Objectives of the Study

- **To examine** the representation of caste discrimination in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*.
- **To analyse** the forms of gender inequality and patriarchal practices experienced by Dalit women in the memoir.
- **To explore** the intersection of caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions in shaping the lives of Dalit women.
- **To examine** the role of education, writing, and collective resistance in the empowerment of Dalit women as represented in the memoir.

Research Questions

- How does Urmila Pawar represent caste discrimination and gender inequality in *The Weave of My Life*?
- In what ways do caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions intersect in the life experiences of Dalit women portrayed in the memoir?
- How do education, writing, and collective resistance contribute to the empowerment and development of Dalit feminist consciousness in Pawar's narrative?

Research Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀) :-There is no significant relationship among caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, and these factors do not significantly influence the life experiences and social position of Dalit women.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁) :-There is a significant relationship among caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, and these factors significantly influence the life experiences, social position, and struggles of Dalit women.

Materials and Methodology : The present study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to examine caste, gender, and intersectionality in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*. Since the study is based on a literary text, the primary method used is close textual reading. The memoir is carefully examined to understand Pawar's representation of caste discrimination, gender inequality, poverty, patriarchy, education, identity, and resistance.

The primary material for the study is Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, translated into English by Maya Pandit. The study also makes use of secondary materials such as books, research articles, scholarly essays, and other relevant academic sources related to Dalit literature, Dalit feminism, life writing, caste, gender, and intersectionality.

The analysis focuses on selected experiences and events in the memoir that reveal the interaction between caste and gender in the lives of Dalit women. The study also examines how socio-economic conditions influence these experiences. Special attention is given to Pawar's portrayal of education, social awareness, writing, and collective action as ways of challenging discrimination and gaining self-respect.

The theoretical framework of the study draws mainly on the concept of **intersectionality**, which helps explain how different forms of social inequality operate together. The study also uses insights from Dalit feminist criticism and life-writing studies to understand Pawar's

narrative. The collected material is interpreted thematically rather than statistically. The findings are based on a close reading of the text and a critical interpretation of its major themes.

The methodology combines **textual analysis, thematic analysis, and an intersectional perspective** to explore how caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions shape Dalit women's experiences in *The Weave of My Life*.

Review of Literature : The existing scholarship on Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* mainly focuses on caste, gender, Dalit identity, memory, feminism, and resistance. Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* is an important work for understanding Dalit women's testimonios and the relationship between caste and gender. Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste* explains how caste and patriarchy work together in shaping women's social position. Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* provides a broader understanding of the Dalit movement and the struggle against caste-based inequality.

In the field of Dalit literature, Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchable to Dalit* examines the historical development of Dalit consciousness and the movement for social equality. S. Anand's *Poisoned Bread* brings together important Dalit literary voices and helps establish the social and political significance of Dalit writing. Raj Kumar's *Dalit Personal Narratives* specifically discusses Dalit autobiographical writing and its importance as a form of resistance.

Studies focusing specifically on Pawar's memoir have examined its representation of Dalit women's lives, social exclusion, memory, and resistance. Maya Pandit's translation of Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* makes the Marathi memoir accessible to a wider English-speaking readership. Research by Joy Das and Bibek Adhikary has examined gendered Dalit memory in Pawar's narrative, while other studies have focused on Dalit women's consciousness and resistance.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into caste, gender, memory, and Dalit feminism. However, there is still scope for a focused study that brings these dimensions together through an intersectional approach. The present study therefore examines how caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions interact in Pawar's life narrative and how education, writing, and collective action contribute to Dalit women's empowerment.

Research Gap :- Previous studies on Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* have mainly focused on caste discrimination, gender inequality, Dalit identity, memory, feminism, and resistance. However, limited attention has been given to the way caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions work together in shaping the experiences of Dalit women. The present study addresses this gap through an intersectional approach, examining how these factors influence identity, marginalization, education, dignity, and resistance in Pawar's memoir.

Caste Discrimination in *The Weave of My Life* : Caste discrimination is one of the major concerns in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Through her memories of childhood and family life, Pawar shows how caste affects the everyday experiences of Dalit people. She describes a society in which a person's caste can determine how they are treated, where they can go, what work they can do, and how they are viewed by others. These experiences make caste discrimination appear not as an isolated incident but as a part of ordinary social life.

Pawar's memories also show the painful experience of untouchability and social exclusion. Dalit people are often treated as inferior by members of dominant castes and are expected to remain within socially defined boundaries. Such practices affect their dignity and create a constant sense of humiliation. For Dalit women, these experiences become even more difficult because caste discrimination is closely connected with poverty and gender inequality.

The memoir also highlights the economic dimension of caste. Traditional occupations and limited economic opportunities keep Dalit families in difficult social and financial conditions. Pawar's mother's work of making bamboo baskets represents both the skill and hard labour of

Dalit women and the economic limitations imposed upon them. Through such experiences, Pawar connects personal memories with the larger structure of caste-based inequality.

However, Pawar does not present Dalit life only through suffering. Her journey towards education, awareness, and social participation shows a gradual development of confidence and resistance. Education enables her to question social practices and develop an independent identity. Her writing further becomes a way of speaking against discrimination and recovering the dignity that caste society attempts to deny.

Thus, *The Weave of My Life* presents caste discrimination as a deeply rooted social reality while also emphasizing the courage and resistance of Dalit individuals, particularly women, who challenge inequality through education, consciousness, and self-expression.

Gender Inequality and Patriarchy : Gender inequality and patriarchy are important themes in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Through her own experiences and the stories of women around her, Pawar shows how women are often expected to live within social and family rules created largely by men. Their choices regarding education, work, marriage, family life, and personal freedom are often restricted. For Dalit women, these restrictions become more complicated because gender inequality operates alongside caste discrimination and poverty.

Pawar's portrayal of her mother is particularly significant in understanding women's position. Her mother works hard to support the family through the traditional craft of making bamboo baskets. Her labour is necessary for the family's survival, yet such work receives little social recognition. Through her mother's life, Pawar draws attention to the invisible labour performed by many women and the unequal responsibilities placed upon them.

The memoir also shows that patriarchy is not limited to the relationship between men and women in the wider society. Women may experience restrictions within their own families and communities as well. Marriage, domestic responsibilities, and expectations about women's behaviour can limit their independence. At the same time, Pawar does not portray women as helpless victims. She highlights their strength, patience, determination, and ability to negotiate difficult circumstances.

Education becomes an important means of challenging patriarchal expectations. Pawar's own educational journey helps her develop confidence and a broader understanding of society. As she becomes more aware of gender and caste inequalities, she begins to question practices that had previously been accepted as normal.

Pawar's narrative also points to the limitations of treating women's issues only through gender. The experiences of Dalit women are different from those of women who do not face caste-based discrimination. Their social position is shaped by the combined effects of caste, gender, and economic hardship.

Therefore, *The Weave of My Life* presents patriarchy as a social structure that limits women's freedom while also emphasizing their agency and resistance. Pawar's life writing gives Dalit women a voice and challenges the social attitudes that have historically silenced their experiences.

Caste, Gender and Intersectionality : Caste and gender cannot be understood separately in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. The memoir shows that the experiences of Dalit women are shaped by several forms of inequality at the same time. They face caste discrimination from dominant social groups, while also experiencing patriarchal expectations within their families and communities. Poverty and limited access to education further increase these difficulties. This combined experience makes the life of a Dalit woman different from that of both Dalit men and women from socially privileged groups.

The idea of **intersectionality** helps us understand this complex situation. In Pawar's narrative, caste is not simply a social identity, and gender is not merely a personal category. Both

influence a woman's opportunities, relationships, work, education, and social status. For example, Dalit women's economic struggles are closely connected with their caste position and the unequal value given to women's labour. Their experiences of social exclusion are therefore shaped by both caste and gender.

Pawar also shows that Dalit women have often remained marginal within mainstream feminist discussions as well as within broader Dalit movements. Mainstream feminism may focus mainly on gender inequality without giving sufficient attention to caste, while caste-based movements may sometimes overlook the specific problems faced by women. Her memoir creates a space where these concerns can be discussed together.

At the same time, intersectionality in the memoir is not limited to oppression. It also helps us understand the different forms of resistance developed by Dalit women. Education, employment, writing, social awareness, and participation in collective movements provide opportunities to challenge both caste and patriarchal restrictions. Pawar's own journey demonstrates how awareness can gradually lead to greater confidence and independence.

Thus, *The Weave of My Life* presents Dalit women's experiences through a complex relationship between caste, gender, and socio-economic conditions. The memoir shows that understanding Dalit women requires attention to all these factors together. Pawar's narrative consequently becomes an important example of **intersectional Dalit feminist life writing**, giving visibility to experiences that have often remained unheard.

Education and Self-Empowerment : Education plays an important role in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. For Pawar, education is not simply a way to gain employment or improve one's economic condition. It becomes a means of developing self-confidence, social awareness, and the ability to question discrimination. Her educational journey shows how learning can help a person move beyond the limitations imposed by caste, gender, poverty, and social expectations.

As a Dalit girl, Pawar faces several difficulties in pursuing education. The social and economic conditions of her family create challenges, while caste-based attitudes make the path more difficult. Despite these obstacles, she continues her education and gradually develops a stronger understanding of the society around her. Education gives her the confidence to recognize that many forms of inequality are not natural but are created and maintained by social structures.

Pawar's experience also shows the connection between education and economic independence. Access to education provides opportunities for employment and a more secure life. More importantly, it gives her a sense of personal identity beyond the traditional roles expected of a Dalit woman. This transformation is significant because women's dependence on family and limited access to education can reinforce patriarchal control.

Education also contributes to Pawar's political and social consciousness. As she becomes more aware of caste discrimination and gender inequality, she develops an interest in social movements and feminist ideas. Her involvement in public life enables her to connect her personal experiences with the larger struggles of Dalit women.

Writing becomes another important form of self-empowerment. By narrating her experiences, Pawar takes control of her own story instead of allowing others to define her identity. Her memoir gives her an opportunity to speak openly about experiences that have often been ignored or silenced.

Thus, education in *The Weave of My Life* represents much more than academic achievement. It becomes a path towards **self-respect, independence, awareness, and**

resistance. Pawar's journey demonstrates that education can help Dalit women challenge social restrictions and create a stronger and more confident identity for themselves.

Dalit Feminist Consciousness : Dalit feminist consciousness is an important aspect of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Through her personal experiences and the lives of other Dalit women, Pawar shows that the problems faced by Dalit women cannot be understood only through caste or gender. Their lives are shaped by the combined effects of caste discrimination, patriarchy, poverty, and social exclusion. This understanding forms the basis of a distinct Dalit feminist perspective.

Pawar's narrative gives particular importance to the everyday experiences of women. The lives of her mother and other women in the community reveal the burden of domestic responsibilities, economic hardship, social restrictions, and unequal treatment. Their experiences show that Dalit women contribute significantly to their families and communities, yet their labour and voices often remain unrecognized. By bringing these experiences into her memoir, Pawar challenges the silence surrounding Dalit women's lives.

The memoir also questions the limitations of mainstream feminism. A movement that focuses only on gender may fail to address the specific problems created by caste. At the same time, Dalit movements that focus mainly on caste may not always give adequate attention to women's experiences within their own communities. Pawar's perspective brings these two concerns together and emphasizes the need to understand caste and patriarchy simultaneously. Education and social awareness play a major role in the development of Pawar's feminist consciousness. As she gains education and becomes involved in social and political activities, she begins to question traditional ideas about women's roles and social status. She learns to speak for herself and for other women whose experiences have often remained unheard.

Writing itself becomes an important expression of Dalit feminist consciousness. Pawar uses her memories to challenge social inequality and reclaim her identity. Her personal story gradually becomes connected with the experiences of many Dalit women.

Thus, *The Weave of My Life* presents Dalit feminism as a struggle for **dignity, equality, education, independence, and social justice**. Pawar's narrative demonstrates that Dalit women are not merely victims of oppression; they are also active subjects who question, resist, and transform the conditions around them.

Life Writing as Resistance : Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* shows how life writing can become a powerful form of resistance. For Pawar, writing about her life is not simply a way of remembering the past. It is a way of speaking about experiences that have often been ignored, hidden, or silenced. By sharing her memories of caste discrimination, poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion, she challenges the social structures that have shaped the lives of Dalit women.

Pawar connects her personal experiences with the lives of her mother, family members, and other women in her community. In this way, her autobiography moves beyond an individual story and becomes a record of collective experiences. The ordinary struggles of Dalit women, including their hard work, limited opportunities, and search for dignity, gain a visible place in literature.

Writing also allows Pawar to question traditional ideas about caste and women's roles. She does not present Dalit women only as helpless victims. Instead, she highlights their courage, determination, and ability to resist difficult circumstances. Her own journey through education, social awareness, and activism reflects this process of empowerment.

The act of writing therefore becomes a way of reclaiming identity and dignity. Pawar uses her own voice to challenge the silence imposed by caste and patriarchy. Her memoir demonstrates that personal memory can become a form of social criticism and resistance. Thus,

The Weave of My Life establishes life writing as an important space where marginalized women can speak for themselves, preserve their experiences, and challenge social inequality.

Intersectional Resistance : Intersectional resistance is an important aspect of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. The memoir shows that Dalit women do not experience caste, gender, and poverty as separate problems. These forms of inequality often come together and affect their everyday lives. At the same time, Pawar shows that women develop different ways of responding to these challenges and creating space for themselves.

Education is one of the most important forms of resistance in Pawar's life. By continuing her education despite social and economic difficulties, she challenges the traditional belief that Dalit women should remain within limited social roles. Education gives her greater confidence and helps her understand the social structures that shape her life. Employment and economic independence further strengthen her ability to make personal choices.

Pawar also presents writing and social participation as important forms of resistance. Through writing, she gives expression to experiences that have often remained outside mainstream narratives. Her involvement in Dalit and feminist movements allows her to connect her personal struggles with the larger concerns of marginalized women. In this process, personal experience becomes a source of collective awareness.

The memoir also suggests that resistance is not always dramatic. Everyday acts such as seeking education, earning a living, questioning social practices, speaking openly, and maintaining self-respect can challenge oppressive structures.

Thus, Pawar presents resistance as a gradual process of **awareness, self-confidence, education, and collective action**. *The Weave of My Life* demonstrates that Dalit women are not merely victims of caste and patriarchy; they actively challenge these structures and work towards dignity, equality, and greater control over their own lives.

Findings of the Study

- **Caste discrimination** is presented as an everyday social reality that affects the dignity, opportunities, and social position of Dalit people.
- **Dalit women experience multiple forms of marginalization**, as caste discrimination and gender inequality often operate together in their lives.
- **Patriarchy and socio-economic inequality** further strengthen the difficulties faced by Dalit women, particularly in relation to family responsibilities, work, education, and social freedom.
- **Education and self-awareness** play an important role in Pawar's journey towards confidence, independence, and empowerment.
- **Writing and life narrative become forms of resistance**, allowing Pawar to express experiences that have often remained unheard and to challenge caste- and gender-based inequalities.
- The memoir presents **Dalit women as active agents of change**, showing that education, social participation, collective action, and self-respect can help them challenge oppressive social structures.

Conclusion : Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* is a powerful account of caste, gender, poverty, identity, and resistance. The present study shows that the experiences of Dalit women cannot be understood by looking at caste and gender separately. Both are closely connected and influence their everyday lives. Pawar's memories reveal how caste discrimination affects social relationships, education, work, dignity, and personal identity, while patriarchal practices place additional restrictions on women.

The memoir is significant because Pawar does not present Dalit women only as victims of social injustice. She also highlights their strength, courage, hard work, and determination. The

experiences of her mother and other women demonstrate how Dalit women contribute to their families and communities despite difficult social and economic conditions. Their struggles also reveal the importance of education and economic independence in challenging traditional limitations.

Pawar's own journey shows how education can create greater awareness and confidence. As she becomes more conscious of caste and gender inequality, she begins to question social practices and participate in wider movements for change. Her writing further strengthens this process by giving her the opportunity to speak in her own voice.

The study therefore concludes that *The Weave of My Life* offers a meaningful intersectional understanding of Dalit women's lives. It brings caste, gender, and socio-economic inequality together and shows how these forces shape identity and experience. At the same time, the memoir presents education, writing, self-awareness, and collective action as important forms of resistance. Pawar transforms personal memories into a broader social testimony, making her life writing an important contribution to Dalit feminist literature and the struggle for dignity, equality, and social justice.

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