



## DALIT FERVOUR IN THE SELECTED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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### ABSTRACT :

Chokhamela in 14th century being recognised as the first Dalit poet of Maharashtra, the Dalit fervour continues even since six centuries as a result of expressions of the experiences of the communities being exploited and humiliated for centuries in the Indian caste-ridden Hindu society. With Chokhamela, the Dalit literature recognised and in to vogue in the contemporary age as a special branch of literature it is largely in written and published in regional Indian languages, it has the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. The impetus of the literature in Maharashtra and Ambedkarite thought is still the lifeblood of Dalit literature. This lifeblood is coming up in number of litterateurs in all regional languages crossing the geographical limitations as Dalit sensibility and humiliation is equally shared by the Dalits in common in all parts of India. Largely the Marathi literature is known as Dalit literature apart from the writing force in the regional languages like Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi etc are creating rich works. There are many autobiographies among in the literature representing the experiences of Dalit life. Portrayal of Dalit life by a non Dalit and a Dalit writer differs in the genuine feeling one undergoes.

### INTRODUCTION :

*Abhangas* of Chokhamela keep motivating the amateur poets and authors about their bondage towards themselves and the community. Life of Dalit is what is not actually viewed though transformed in life style today but self-respect and dignity remain at the backseat at the mercy of the upper castes. The self-respect and identity of Dalit was never an issue in the olden age against the Brahmin tide. It culminated in revolutionaries Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar's uprising against the communal tide of Brahmanism, then followed number of biographies of these great persons inspiring followers their writing in autobiographies as daggers drawn out after ages. That is fervour of the Dalit writers albeit far advanced socially and economically somewhere or the other they undergo the severity of the caste-riddle. That is where the Indian society fails even as against the counter issue of racism in Africa and the other parts of

the world where it is on the decline. The literature, cinema and other modes of media is witnessed being declined racism there. But the caste-ridden culture is so deeply rooted which allows it to diminish at a snail's pace so can be observed even today.

Following are some of the most widely read writers of Dalit literature that are available in English translation- Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Dr. Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India*, Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outside: Akkarmashi*, Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild*, Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, Baby Kamble's *Our Existence* and *Imayam Beats of Burden*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, and among the prominent Dalit writers are Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Baburao Bagul, Rabi Singh, Namdeo Dhasal, Dutta Bhagat, Lakshman Mane, Neerave Patel, Palamalai, Sudhakar, D. Gopi, T.K.C. Vaduthala (T.K.C. Vaduthalayude Kathakal) and

Narayan (Kocharayathi) are the other prominent Dalit writers. There are number of other writers writing Dalit literature but do not share the Dalit writers' category as the latter are not Dalit by birth as the other Dalit writers by birth. Mahasweta Devi, Sara Joseph, Kumaran Asan, Mulkraj Anand and Premchand are some of the well known names writing in diverse Indian languages.

Following autobiographies are selected for this paper; *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* by Urmila Pawar, *Untouchables': My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India* by Dr. Narendra Jadhav and *. Baluta* by Daya Pawar.

**Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*:** It is translated from Marathi *Aaydan* by Maya Pandit, *aaydan* is a generic term used for all things made from bamboo; Urmila describes in her autobiography the long journey from Konkan to Mumbai, bringing to fruition the struggle of three generations for a Dalit modernity about which readers have hitherto heard so little. She has brought to light her experience, through her travelling journey from her native place to an extremely modern place Mumbai where caste experience is slightly on the verge of decline. Outspoken, confronting the issues of domestic violence squarely, she talks of what it is like to be an educated Dalit woman. Urmila Pawar brings to the fore the complexities of the life of the Dalit community and especially of Dalit women, in a society that is changing rapidly after independence in 1947. She engages with issues of identity and selfhood, caste/class consciousness, changing expressions of patriarchy and Dalit women's participation in emancipation struggles and the closure and atrophy in Dalit politics. Her memoir reveals a complexly constructed self as well as the troubled and complex line between the feminist and Dalit movements. As a young girl, brought up by her mother who was a single parent, Pawar's perception of the residual and newly emergent forms of patriarchy, religion, familial relationships, violence and liberation is intense and acute. Of special interest is the record of three generations for Dalit modernity,

about which readers have hitherto heard so little.

**'Untouchables':** My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India by **Dr. Narendra Jadhav:** *'Untouchables'* is a story of awakening of Dalits. It is a story of one Dalit (untouchable) family's struggle, inspired by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who left overwhelming effects on the millions' lives of Dalits of whom Damu (Damodar) Runjaji Jadhav; author's father, was just one of them. Damodar was an ordinary man who did an extraordinary thing by standing against the oppression of the caste system by teaching his children to believe in themselves and reclaim their human dignity, self respect, identity as human rights. Damu responded duly to the call of Ambedkar to Dalits to "Educate, Unite and Agitate". The story stands as follows: Damu comes to Mumbai to escape the tyranny of the upper castes in his native village Ozar situated 25 kms from Nasik city in Nashik District of Maharashtra. His struggle for survival and his transformation under the guidance of Dr. Ambedkar, from servility to awakened self-consciousness, is the main theme of this book. Though Damu was not a born leader, nor did he ever become one. But he had one exception- he chose to rebel against the prevailing caste system to create his own lot. An intelligent man, with no formal education, he worked hard to be allowed to live with dignity. Damu was abused and severely beaten up by upper-caste people in his village, for refusing to take out a putrefied body from a well. His forefathers were required to wear clay-pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.

Damu's story differs from those Indian Dalit autobiographies which revisit and relieve the horrors of untouchability without going beyond. The simplicity of the narrative brings out the misery in the story and triumph of the Damu's family describing various landmarks like, a radical transformation under the spell of Dr. Ambedkar in Damu and his family; their sloughing off of servility and realization of their

self esteem and finally their empowerment through education.

Well known economist Stanley Fischer has noted, the book eloquently tells the story of a Dalit family's journey from an Indian village to the Indian and international middle class. It is the story of the genius and determination of the (author's) illiterate father and his strong mother and their remarkable children. It is also a story about modern India and its potential. Even more it is a touching story about humankind in all its complexity.

*Baluta* by Daya Pawar: (1935 December 20, 1996) or Dagdu Maruti Pawar was born in Dhamangaon (Taluka: Akole, District: Ahmednagar, Maharashtra), was a Marathi author and poet known for his contributions to Dalit literature that dealt with the atrocities experienced by the Dalits under the Indian caste system. Poetry being his forte, gave expression to the oppression of the Dalits through his verse. He gained fame for his autobiographical novel published in 1978 written as a story being told to the more literate by Daya Pawar. The novel recounts the experiences of an untouchable struggling for a peaceful existence, mentally tormented but incapable of retaliation in word and deed. The book shook Marathi society and was a critical success in both Marathi and in its Hindi translation, but received considerable anti-Dalit blowback for its frank exposition. *Baluta* talks about the harsh realities of the caste system in India. *Baluta* created ripples in the literary circles and earned him many awards at all levels including one from the Ford Foundation. It got translated into several languages. The strengths of the book are the simple, straightforward and to-the-point portrayal and a transparent realistic illustration of the ethos around him. This book created a new genre in Marathi literature. Many autobiographical books talking about harsh experiences hard realities were written after *Baluta*. What is special about Daya Pawar is his use of language which is not merely that of revolt but of a deeply introspecting analytical intellectual.

Pawar's writing's reflects his active participation in the social, cultural and literary movements on the national level, his avid following of foreign literature, analytical and contemplative thinking, unwavering stance, deep understanding and empathy towards social happenings and issues. His work was highly effective. But due to oppressive circumstances, he suffered mentally and physically in his personal life. It is this perennial suffering that comes through sharply in his writings. Among his other famous works are *Chavdi* and *Dalit Jaanivaa* which are two of his compilation of articles, and *Vittal* a collection of short stories. He wrote the screenplay for Jabbar Patel's film *Dr. Ambedkar*. He was appointed with the National Film Development Corporation. Pawar won the prestigious Padmashri award of the Government of India.

The autobiographies are the burning desires for freedom from the cultural clutches binding for centuries. A large majority of population in India have been kept subjugated number of conventions which are forced upon them without any faults of theirs. All the above cited authors whether male or female suffered equally or in fact the female more than that of the male authors as they were exposed to the caste ridden system and by the patriarchal order of the society. Those who have followed in the footprints of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar have surely gained self-respect and a sense of rights to be enjoyed by themselves and others are coming forward to revolt against the system claiming his/her equal human rights which are not only endowed upon the constitution but natural rights as well. Any social odds they come across are strongly tackled by the ones who think and act. These autobiographers are in a way mirrors to the Dalit writers and the entire community. This Dalit fervour continues to motivate the coming generations in order to stake their rights and live with self pride and dignity what was dreamt by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In this respect one thing can be observed that situations of marginality have produced or produce ideas of justice. Considering the notion of justice in the

milieu of the Dalits for the Dalits the question of justice goes much beyond the narrow limits of distributional aspects like reservation or compensatory discrimination realising the aspects like violence, powerlessness, fear, cultural identity etc.

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