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# The Weave of My Life": A Kaleidoscopic Presentation of Rural Life and Human Relation.

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#### ABSTRACT

Literature is the mirror of human experience and the expressions of pent of emotions and aggressions, aspirations and struggle, caused by the long standing exploitation, discrimination and oppression. Dalit literature is truly venturing to divulge out the caste oppression and patriarchal castigation, inflicted on dalit people by the upper caste people. The lower caste people live in unprivileged villages without any kind of civic amenities to live on. The villages or rural settings are the physical condition of their environment which anyone may find quite backward and scenically beautiful but actually they are actually the enumerators of their sufferings. If the rural setting, eviscerated from their agonising painful life, the amount of sympathy on the part of reader will get lessen or decreased. As in kaleidoscope, variegated views are seen from different angles, similarly in Pawar's "The Weave of my Life", we can see diversified rural life and human relations- the rural life and human relations which are not stable but with the point of view from various angles, arise multitudinous interpretations of dalit's way of life- experiences. Changes of their life style come more due to appearances of Dalit -writings by the Dalit writers. Pawar's childhood village life is not that of the village life of adulthood; while earlier they had to trudge along the way on foot, now they use buses; while earlier they had no pacca road, now they have tarred road. After a long stay in Mumbai when she returns to her village, she sees that the village has gone through a sea change. Now people are living in tiled houses; economic proficiency has enabled them to change their culture. They do not use leaves to serve food in marriage ceremonies; rather they hire caterer and the music systems to celebrate marriages. Somewhere at heart, Urmila Pawar becomes nostalgic of the past life and of the human bondages, standing at the centre of changing village life. This article will venture to probe into very core of the rural life and decreasing human values and speculate over the cause of saplessness of human relationship and their changing adaptabilities. Is it the selfcenteredness or lack of collective consciousness that segregated them and left them halfway on the process of gaining emancipation of clutches and enjoying scenic beauty?

Keywords: Rural Life, Changeability, Human Relation, Dalit Aesthetics, Dalit Consciousness, Kaleidoscopic.

#### 1. Introduction

Usually, kaleidoscope refers to a situation, pattern etc containing a lot of different parts that are always changing. In this memoir "The Weave of My Life" Urmila presents the life of her parents and her own struggle in the backdrop of a Konkon region along with the entire Mahar community to gain sustenance and livelihood, in spite of the harsh rural life and the discrimination, inflicted upon them by the upper caste people. A non-percipient writer of Dalit struggle with romantic zeal may find the rural life, as a presented here by Urmila Pawar, quiet enthralling and reposing but to the dalits, it is their hardship and the battleground for their existential struggle. Arjun Dangle in his article "Dalit Literature; Past, Present and Future" has noted that "this literature of Dalits is intimately related to social reality and is not imaginary or entertain oriented (Dangle p255).Here the beautiful sketches of village life may appear quite attractive and romantic to the non dalit main stream writers. If romanticism consists of heightened imagination and sharpened sensibility to attain the unattainable, dalit literature obversely is grounded on reality; there is no hyperbolical aspiration or the creed to attain unattainable; only the

\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: samimbahmed.sk@gmail.com struggle for emancipation from the clutches of casteism and brahmanic oppression on the ground of reality seems to them unattainable. The very reminiscences of past, such as the throwing stones at mango trees beside path, and breaking cashew bulb, making feast, watching kabadi game etc are the exhilaration and amusement to their life but they are not the true panacea for oppression and castigations.

The transcendentalist Thoreau in "Walden" (1862) went away to a secluded rural place to feel the charm of nature and its breath. Keats, and Shelley, Wordsworth find solace in the very lap of nature; Oliver Goldsmith in his "Deserted Village" continues describing all the farms, brooks, bushes, trees and hills and every mundane activity the villagers did, such as sports, dance, singing, all of which were fill of innocence-"those were thy charms, sweet village; Sports like these/With sweet succession, taught even toil to please" (Goldsmith, p31-32)Naturalistic approach with non dalitist niche overlooks the writhing pain and suffering of Dalits but the dalit writers presentation is not polished rather stark. In an interview Harish Mangalam, a dalit writer, remarks "Non dalit writers describe the beloved's cheek by comparing them with roses and liken the beloved's lips to rose petals" but a dalit writer presents it with realistic approach "The beloved's cheek were like hardened lumps of jaggery and her lips were like wrinkled black clay" (Trivedi, *Tongues*p161-62). So the Dalit people specially the Mahar people in spite of having rustic charm in abundance can't enjoy it and it is due to their stultifying, caste ridden existence and social suppression.; in fact, the Mahar's callousness arising out from the long stricken-caste stigma and upper caste dominance has made them so indifferent towards rural scenario that they only feel the harshness but never the soothing and fascinating and benign aspects.

The Mahar people in "The Weave of My Life" live in a central ghetto in a rustic background-"The Weave of My Life" begins with a detailed description of the harsh landscape of the Konkan region on the west coast of India and the relation these dalit women- their own life's harsh and full of toil- have with this landscape. The range of the Sahyadris runs along the coastline and there is a sheer drop down to the sea. The main crop is rice; the poor grow a form of red millet that thrives on the thin soil [Pawar, p13]. This entire description from cinematographic point of view is quite romantic. From the lens of camera if anyone watches the scenario in isolation, it looks beautiful and alluring- "The range of Sahyadris runs along the coastline and there is a sheer drop down to the sea"- will aesthetically be quite valuable but the Dalit villagers are stuck in the austerity of the natural phenomenon, and harsh behaviour of human being. Psychological dilemma and caste oppression together have created a twinged web of thought among the Dalit people that what a upper caste people sees, appears quite different to the Dalits; it is the difference of mentality and thought process that add kaleidoscopic charm to the rural Konkon region- "the difference between the two kinds of writers(dalit and upper caste) is not just because of their castes but also to differing experiences and their ways of interpreting them" (Dangle, p264-65) Phansale village where Urmila's ancestors lived is hoarding always hurdles in the way of their life; "It was an extremely difficult and inconvenient terrain as it lay in an obscure ditch in a far off corner of the hill ... One wrong step and one would straightway roll a down to one's death somewhere in the bottom of the deep valley" [Pawar, p21]. Here in such a barren, inscrutable landscape, the Mahar people have to work hard to earn the sustenance of their life. Not only caste system and patriarchal society create hurdle to the rustic Dalit people, rather nature provides a threat to their life. Nature is a natural construct which is not easily subjugated and behaves akinly to all irrespective of caste, economic status, and religion; rather it is the glances of higher caste people that subverts and demeans the entire meaning of their struggle for existence. Therefore when Mahar women visit to Ratnagiri market with their merchandise, they do not get proportionate price of their woods, wares, grass and rice bags etc-"Women were compelled to make the journey to the market because they had to sell their wares in order to survive; bundles of firewood or rice bags or a grass or whatever merchandise covered with leaves or woollen blankets" [Pawar, p21]. In the market, buyers failed to adjudge the hard some toil of the Dalit women. One Dalit women said "See, I took my bunch of sticks on the stand. Two guys came asking me about the price. Then they started chatting about something else. So I said you are buying this? Are not you? This bunch is quite heavy on my head. So they said, all right, put it down. So I did. Then they tried to lift it and feel its weight. Then one says, Ha this is so light, how can you say it's heavy? I told him straight to his face, it's heavy for us because we come crossing two-three hills with that on our heads! We're bound to find it heavy!"[Pawar, p26] No one takes into account how much pain they have gone through to gather woods. Actually, Mahar people are unable to branding their merchandise. Undoubtedly, the woods, the bamboo wares they sell, are hard-earned and of good quality but due to the lack of proper knowledge of branding they do not get much value. The upper caste people consider their materials as inferior. Again Urmila's father needs to depend on Lanjekar's to sale mangoes because Lanjekar's are expert and can brand their mangoes to sell in high price-"Hapoos mangoes from Ratnagiri reached the Arab countries but never came to us.Allthat came our ways was the ordinary mango called raiwal" [Pawar, p71]. In fact, this lack of knowledge leads Mahar people into inferiority; they work hard but food is enjoyed by the other people who do not work hard like them. Actually, innocence reflects in their village.

Mostly Mahar people in "The Weave of My Life "are agrarian -"it was summer and farmers were burning the land as a preparation for the next planting season" [Pawar, p119]. But the farming was so hard some in this rocky place that some prefer to work as scavenger in Mumbai, as there they are paid much more. Gradually the Mahar people are changing their profession. As per Kapur, Prasad, Pritchittand Babu (2010)conducted in a large scale study in villages (across two Uttar Pradesh sub districts) paying attention to the changes emphasised by dalits who had seen improvement in their incomes and asset holdings since 1990(Kapur et al., 2010,p48). Many Mahar people go to Mumbai to work as scavenger and coolie. Referring to Dr Ambedkar, Pawar writes- "Leave the village" he had told his followers. "The village will never help you progress. Go to the city" [Pawar, p105]. But those who are unable to go outside of Ratnagiri has to cope with their old profession-" She (Aaye) wore all sorts of cane things- big baskets, small baskets with closed tops, baskets for locking in hens, small basket for collecting flowers, cradles-all sorts of things are grist to her mill" [Pawar, p32]. Gradually, the economic condition of the Mahar people is becoming spurious; those returning into village from Mumbai after working as scavenger squanders money spendthriftly, but after few days they become bankrupt. Finally they make debt to reach Mumbai again -"The Chakarmani from Mumbai came with a lot of pump but would invariably ask people for money when returning because he would have squandered all his money away on liquor. I remember one such man who had come to Aaye completely drunk. In spite of knowing what a miser my mother was, he refused to budge from our small farm. He kept repeating-"I will send your money by a money order the moment I reach Mumbai. But please lend me some now!" [Pawar, p101] This clearly shows some dalit people are not calculative in using their resources, and its effect falls on the Dalit culture and on village economy, on society and women. In fact, women are the prime target of main suppression in a village. They are oppressed by the upper cast people and even by their own clan too-"Every house had its own share of drunkards. There would be at least one women among them badly bashed up by her husband" [Pawar, p23].Daughters in laws were always despised and bashed up"[Pawar, p23]. Women are forced to work hard, yet they are allowed to feed leftover food at the very last when everybody in family has eaten their share of food. The psychological traumas that the Dalit women go through can be felt by all readers; their suffering is synonymous to the exploitation of rustic atmosphere. But the women exploitation is gradually also becoming to fade out, though not totally, when women get education and come to be connected with several women's organizations; the picture begins to change, just like, with the shifting of point of view in kaleidoscope, the picture looks different. Mahar people after getting education begin to work in various service sectors. Education creates dalit consciousness for resistance and facilitates economic prosperity. Ananda Teltumbde says "Education was the basic catalyst to germinate consciousness of their being and impel them to agitate against their oppression" (Teltumbde,2014).

"The village held a terrific attraction for us children. Whenever there was holiday and no school, we rushed to our village which was located in a far-flung corner among the hills. Swimming in the rivers, plucking raw mangoes and berries to eat, roaming the hills ... these attractions draw us like a magnet" [Pawar, p22]. Apart from economic constraints and casteism and patriarchal oppression, the ghetto of the Mahar community was a typical presentation of panoramic village life. Here are mountains, rivulets, forest of various kind of trees and agricultural land-"the Konkan region with its rocky path, its precipitous slopes and the nearness of the sea, the always palpable presence of a wild and unruly nature..."[Pawar, p14]. In this natural setting, the Mahar community thrives on their civilization in total communion with the rustic, rural Nature; if we chisel out the concern social, economic, religious suppression, the entire setting is of village life no less alluring; here "the hill of Mirjole was terrible, it was a very steep and we used to get cramps climbing it"[Pawar, p24]. But when they climbed down the hill and hear the splashing sound of water, their anguish frazzles out and temperament becomes smooth-"once we had climbed down the hill, we would hear the splashing noise of the Mirjole River and our heavy feet moved a little faster" [Pawar, p24]. There they would sprinkle water on their faces and wash foots.

The family of the village has integrated relationship with each other; for this the family members are many. The togetherness of all the Mahar people works magically to celebrate religious festivals during the celebration of Tersa Shigma-"On the hill beyond the river of our village there was a huge rock known as Chandaki Devi's rock. The young man of the village would cover the rock with dry leaves and grass, a week before the festival. On the day of Holi all the old and young man and children in the villages would go to go to this rock on the hills, playing in the band. There they would put turmeric and kumkum on the covered rock worship it, break a coconut and set it on fire" [Pawar, p45]. Though they were not given the permission to touch Holi palanquin, yet for the preparation of entire rituals their contributions are no less important. On the occasion of festival, tamashas(folk theatre) are organised and people in a group go there to watch. After the day of tamasha, the tamasha goer demonstrates the entire story to others and it created craze among the people. Even during marriage ceremony, all the Mahar community work together to regale invitees with their simplistic rustic approach-"The pandal was erected in front (of our house) and the villagers had decorated it with twigs. Bunches of mango leaves, considered to be auspicious, were hung in between. A banana plant, heavy with clusters of bananas, was placed at the front door... A ceremonial lamp, called the laman diya, hung next to it" [Pawar, p50]. They lard rice on leaves; they sing songs with the name of bride and groom. During the marriage of Akka the relatives are called for and together all go to market for bride and groom. Though there are constrains and pain in arranging and calling together all people, yet there are solace and tranquillity in mind. But with the passage of time, the wheel of development expands its marching path and gradually all such cultures, traditions of village find nook in nostalgic mind of Urmila. Thus, after so many years of sojourn in Mumbai, when she returns home in his home village, she becomes quite stuck with the nostalgia of her childhood days. She finds changes in respect of habitation, ritualistic customs and human relations—"The wadi had changed completely. The rooftops now sported Mangalore tiles and stone replaced mud in the wall" [Pawar, p182], while earlier Mahar people built houses with bamboo and mud, scrubbed floor with mud. She learns from Santaram's wife that village life has diametrically changed itself; Even Shahu reaffirms that too-"You must see how our village has shed its old skin! It is completely transformed! Now the bus goes right up to the village. You don't have to walk anymore" [Pawar, p181]. The village life of her childhood days is superseded with the practical experiences of adulthood; she sees around that "The rough-hewn paths, full of stones and pebbles, were transformed into tarred roads and looked like sleek black cobras, disappearing fast through the trees. Trees adorned both sides of the road, their huge trunks painted red and white and numbered. Then there were electric poles, bus stops, clusters of tiny, well built houses peeping through the trees. Development from the cities had indeed flowed into the villages! [Pawar, p181]. When Umila asks Shantaram's wife about serving of saar of ratamba leaves at weddings, she laughingly answers-"No! Nobody is so poor now! Now they serve dal, rice, salad-everything-at the marriage feast" [Pawar, p182]. Now caterers are called for arrangement of marriage; there are no custom of using leaves, rather plastic plates are used to serve; mikes and sound systems are brought for celebration."The community development programme, introduced in 1952 as the first large attempt at rural development, was expected to bring changes on rural scene" (Verma, p83). Gradually, with the passage of time, joint families have deciphered into several parts and human bandage no longer has stronghold-"once that house had been such a great source of unadulterated joy! But the epidemic of family guarrels prevalent in the Konkan had struck our houses well. Gobindadada and Shantaram, uncle and nephew, had guarrelled and separated" [Pawar, p183] In short, integrity of human relations in Mahar ghetto is not intact at all; self-centeredness has damaged the pure genuine rusticity of human existence.

Just before conversion into Buddhism, Mahar people took part in public dancing to earn their livelihood but after conversion impositions were laid on their public dancing. The age old tradition of ignominy got shattered and the new dimensional economic system arose there. Besides cultivation and weaving of bamboo wares, Mahar women went to collect crabs, mule fishes, oysters, lobsters etc. in the creek of the river, precariously hanging themselves between life and death. Most often they got drenched and crab biting was common to them. To quench thirst, they drunk river water and dry, stale bread and baked oysters-"they would gulp down the dry pieces of bread they had brought, along with the baked and cooked oysters in the scorching sun. To me the women appeared as shapeless as the Undini trees, covered from head to toe in mud [Pawar, p44]. They did so because they had no other option available; while in the 21<sup>st</sup> century people go for picnicking and adventurous trips and enjoy beauty from their own aesthetic point of view, Dalit people in general and Mahar people in the particular cannot do so. The rocks of Mirya and Sakhar are battle ground of their existential struggle but the way Pawar describes them are quite thrilling to adventuresome to people. What seems to the non dalits, alienated totally from Dalit culture, a matter of joy and beauty and adventure, the same thing to the dalit is the expression of their pent up frustration, anguish and anger. "If pleasure is the basis of the aesthetics of Marathi savarna literature, pain and suffering is the basis of the aesthetic of dalit literature" (Limbale, p115). The rocky and the rusty path in the Konkan region tested their endurance, suffering etc. The more they got frustrated, the more they cursed to their mool purus- "May his dead body rot ...

why did he have to come and stay here in this god forsaken place[Pawar, p22]. Obviously, the physical setting of the village ghetto and its location determines the fate of Mahar people.

Initially, the Mahar people were Hindu in respect of their religious beliefs but due to the castism and Brahmanic oppression and patriarchal system, they got conversed into Buddhism after B.R Ambedkar. After Ambedkar's conversion in 1956 shortly before his death, many Dalit community accepted Buddhism but the strong wave of conversion was seen among the Mahar just immediately after Ambedkar's death-"After the ceremony (funeral ceremony) we went home. Gobindadada and villagers collected the idols and various pictures of the gods and goddesses adorning our walls which I used to worship everyday and threw them into a market" [Pawar, p78-79].Buddham Saranam Gacchami was chanted everywhere but some how they did not relinquish totally their old believes on Hinduism. When Urmila returns to her home village after several years' stay in Mumbai, she finds picture of Hindu god and goddesses and Talisman etc. in several houses-"But when she looks into interior, she is disturbed to find that the old gods and goddesses, and rustic talismans to ward off evil spirits, have returned to the homes of neo-Buddhist villagers [Pawar, p14]. Even Gobondadada who led the movement of collecting hindu gods and goddesses' picture, has returned to his earlier scoop of religious faith-"I looked at Dada (Gobindadada) in utter amazement. Was this the same Dada who led collecting images of the gods by the basketfuls in our houses and thrown them into the stream, saying "Ye Gods, you were never good for us; so now go to your own abodes?" [Pawar, p184].This variable nature in respect of social and religious convictions adds much more dimension to the dalit culture. Under oppressive mechanism of casteism and patriarchy Dalit people formed their own literature which manifests their way of life; their value systems, their cultures and above all their voices become the manifesto of their ways of emancipation. Rege says of the intention of their literature –"The intension is not one of literariness but of communicating the situations of a group's opp

After marriage with Harishchandra, she goes to Mumbai to live there but here shifting of emotion is seen both in a quality and quantity. The more education Pawar gains, the sterner Harishchandra becomes. In fact, he tries to create obstacle in the path of earning educational qualification-"Look, you can do what you like only after finishing your daily chores in the house. Cooking, looking after children, and all that stuff. If you think you can do this and get more education, fine! This was actually his way of saying 'no" [Pawa, p153]. Urmila gets involved in her social services such as women liberation, women emancipation and in her family responsibilities too. At this juncture of life, she gets immersed in her nostalgic remembrances of past; How Harischandra loved her, how beautiful the love-making days were in village and how she inspired him to get more education, how beautiful was their village, how Mahar people took part in festivals etc. Harishchandra scolds her when Malabika disagrees to marry Uday; as a result, Harishchandra is feeling shameful and is not able to face others and relatives-"This woman has ruined my family. Because of her, I lost face in the community" [Pawar, p195]. Though Urmila's aloofness is due to her own Government service, services to society and family but the proximity of human emotion with Mahar community rejuvenates her. When she comes back home she talks with all of them and these aged people, standing at the very brink of life, reminiscences of their past lives. In "Home Matters" Robert Rubenstein (2001) explains that the living place is 'not merely physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space' [Rubenstein, 2001]. Dalit families have disintegrated but emotional attachment is felt in their existential struggle.

Aaye most often cries for the death of Achyut but after father's death, more emotional burden is added in her life. Every day she laments and prays as if she is caught into emotional vortex of lamentation. Urmila as a child, could not realise that feeling but when she herself loses her son, then only she could perceive the real value of tears and heart breaking renderings. With the passage of time maturity in emotional outbreak comes to her. When comes the question of her daughters' marriage she allows them to marry of their own choice though Harischandra keeps pressure on Urmila. She ignores them. In presenting the three generation –Aaye, Urmila, Manini--Urmila speculates over human attachments and pain and suffering in human detachment—"Once I was a child who used to play on the dung heap with broken toys, decorating them with rags. Then I was young girl who accompanied the village women on their journey to Ratnagiri through vales and hills ... I was a growing adolescent who attended school somehow out of sheer fear of her mother ... then a married woman who tried to negotiate her married life like a trapeze artists, fighting off her tears" [Pawar,p200]. Emotional changes and maturity helped Urmila to repress her to show off her emotional turmoil at the time when Harishchandra asked her to leave home though it was very house that she bought with her money.

Urmila returns to her village to attend 'namakaran' ceremony of Shahu's son. Instead of using 'barse' as is termed in dalit community in Marathi, they now use Sanskrit word 'namakaran'. Shahu who is known for his miserliness, is spending money on his three sisters. Time elapses, bringing about changes in everything. Mahar people have begun to celebrate Diwali too. 'Gradually brahminic customs and festivals had stealthily entered dalit house-holds, especially the affluent ones, during the exuberant period of dalit writing, though nobody would have publicly admitted it''[Pawar, p180]. The kaleidoscopic circle of diversity and variations are seen in every chapter of her narration. Pawar's imagination vacillates between the present and nostalgia; whenever she narrates the death of her own son Mander, her memory takes her to her Bhai's death; whenever she hears the marriage song, her imagination springs into the old day's celebration of marriage. In short one issue takes her to another one, similar in tone. Now several Mahar people work in government sector and they have easy access to education. Certainly life has gone through a drastic sea change but the stigma of casteism still not swerved its way; it has become breath for the Dalits. Only with death, it leaves them. Urmila Pawar with a simplistic approach to rustic life and human-relations vividly portrayed the down to earth existence of the Mahar community. Aesthetically, the village rusticism, the penury, the struggle for existence may seem valueless to the mainstream writers but actually they are their own construct. "Dalit literature is the literature produced by the dalit consciousness. Human freedom is the inspiration behind it... As dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary [Muktibodh, p267-70]. Though virulent attack is on caste oppression and patriarchy throughout the memoir but without the presentation of geographical location and atmosph

#### 2. Conclusion

Depending on the ingrained aesthetic value system, rustic life and their relationship strikes attention of readers differently. Thomas Gray's rustic life in "Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard" and the obscure ghetto of Mahar community may find similarity to some extent, but the main difference lies in interpreting them as per the preconceived ideologies. Grey"s poem may have accolades of excellence and highly romanticism because it presents the hamlet villagers' life and their struggle; on the contrary the villagers of Phansale, Patravane of the Mahar community, though struggling for their rights, for their livelihood and for their minimum common amenities to leave on, are termed down trodden, untouchable. Sharan Kumar Limbale says that due to the non-acceptance of the mainstream writers, the dalit people form their own literary Canon i.e Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics. Their penurious lifestyle, their scree ridden paths, their going to forest for adulation, their chewing of cashew, and betel leaves while going to the market of Ratnagiri, their mud build houses with smooth clay scrubbing, their zeal in taking part in religious ceremonies, constitute a texture of life, from which they draw relishes and arise their own consciousness. The more Dalit writers are coming out with their down to earth narration of their struggle in the backdrop of rural setting, the more stark account of village life goes deep into the heart of the readers and acceptability of dalit literature grows among non dalit people. The variability, and changeability, synonymous to kaleidoscopic point of view-are the way of propulsion and promulgation. Each description of village life in isolation may be a eye catching portrait but in entirety, they are the heart- rending story of the hard some- assiduous -struggle of the Dalit people. Marxist criticism believe that ignorance, illiteracy and penury are the main cause of their suffering. But on the contrary, it may be a bless to them; their less polluted atmosphere may provide them f

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