

Executive Summary

Title: Such a Long Journey from Repression to Resistance: A Study of Dalit

Womanhood in the Works of Bama and Urmila Pawar

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Dalit literature spurted out to expose issues of exploitation, repression and discrimination of the underprivileged sections of the Indian society. Writing as a technique of resistance is employed by many writers like Bama and Urmila Pawar who belong to marginalized sections of the society. Irrespective of state, culture, caste, religion, customs and traditions, their writing has gained the status of self-survival mechanism - with autobiographical representations, poems, novels and short stories abetting to outlive the pressures imposed by caste, race or the state.

In their works, Bama and Urmila Pawar throw light on the socio-cultural identity of Dalit women. They record the customs and habits of their communities – their everyday ordeals, food habits, traditions and ceremonies associated with marriage and childbirth, festivals and games. Vivid vignettes of weddings, festivals and other rituals capture the life of two Dalit communities in transition – Mahar community in Maharashtra and Paraya community in Tamil Nadu.

The authors highlight the pathetic plight of women who have to suffer discrimination based on gender in society and violence at home. They cite instances where the girls are discriminated against even at home in the matter of food and studies. The best share of food went to the boys. Bama in *Karukku* complains that her grandmother always preferred her grandsons than granddaughters, when she served food. The education of girls was not given importance; the prime importance was to marry them off as early as possible. In the workplace, they were given low wages when compared to men and they also had to endure sexual exploitation by landlords.

The authors in their works explore the traumatic experiences and humiliation that Dalit women had to undergo on account of caste discrimination. In *Karukku*, Bama narrates various instances of caste discrimination she had to suffer in school, hostel, convent and during travel. Urmila Pawar, in *Aaydandwells* on the pitiable plight of the children of Mahar community, who were not allowed inside the village school. She also narrates her bitter experiences extended to her by her landlords, when they came to know that she was a Dalit convert.

Both the authors capture the Dalit women's spirit for survival, their indomitable will power and their zest for life. The picture of Dalit woman that emerge from the works of both the writers is that of a courageous woman with resilient, questioning spirit, a fighter and a survivor determined to follow her dreams, even at a cost. Their autobiographies, novels and short stories have become a weapon of resistance to reimburse the deep delved agony, violence and humiliation endured by Dalit women during these centuries. Despite the hardships, the Dalit women characters in the works of both Bama and Urmila Pawar are lively, energetic, cheerful and optimistic in their outlook. They face obstacles with a smile on their faces and they possess tremendous courage, will power and spirit for survival.

Dalit women's voices in Indian literature are very significant as they break not only the silence of centuries, but also invent new literary techniques, by violating the traditional syntax, imagery and symbols. Both Bama and Urmila Pawar consider literature as the most influential form to assert their rights and autonomy and they oppose all institutions that marginalize them. Their literature exhibit their pursuit of empowerment and liberation. By articulating their voices through their fiction and short stories, these writers strive to alter the conventional image of a Dalit woman as meek and timid sub-human beings. Their voices elucidate the transformation of Dalit woman from the abyss of repression and rejection to the path of resilience and resistance.
