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Looking Idan and Jhuthan beyond Gender, Identity and Region: The similarities and dissimilarities in the lives of the two Dalit autobiographers.

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Introduction:

Writings have always remain one of the most loving aspects of Human civilization. The feelings of sadness, happiness, carelessness, acceptance have come across through the writings of any individual human being. Like an omnipotent God the art of writing have existed from ancient time. Even till now the literary writings have remain major source for our understanding of past. All types of poetry, ancient tales, philosophical intellectual discussions, religious writings, political commentery, and other art's have been presented through the art of writing. Most of the Human beings in his life use this format to express their thoughts and feelings; In Gunjan Kumari's: "Words act as the window to our personality. It is majorly through words that our attitude towards our life as a whole is reflected. While writing, we emphasize on those words which seem close to our heart. For instance, if a person is sad, he would use depressing words, whereas the tone of a delighted person would change automatically."¹ the great philosophy's, idea's, and historical texts have remain with us despite the original author's demise.

The art and style of writing's have change time-to-time; where as earlier we use leafs or other objects for writing now through the invention of Computer's and other technology's the process have become more easier. After the coming of social media the broader and unlimited space have open for any indivisual to show their creative writing art. The most interesting thing is that the art of writing have brought many new things and new aspects which have able to surpass the pain, greef, happiness, sadness of different identity such as women's, tribes, disable and most importantly to the Dalit's whose writings is the discussion for our paper.

By coming of previous century different types of new studies have been encouraged by the scholars and historians. The event centric focus have change completely. Instead of this economic, cultural, philosophical and societal lives have been looked. After the decades of 80's the situation drastically changed; after the rice of subaltern study's the life stories of downtrodden were been looked; those who were living in worst conditions have not only got education after lots of struggle but after that they have written their experience in the form of autobiography's. Which is the central theme for the discussion to our paper. In this paper we will

¹ Gunjan Kumari, writing as a therapeutic practice: a study of select dalit autobiographies, Unpublished theses, (2013):p.15.

we will investigate the autobiography's written by Omprakash Valmiki and Urmila Pawar who wrote down their life experience in the form of autobiography.

Jhuthan And Idan: The lives of Omprakash Valmiki and Urmila Pawar

1.1: similarities

Living in the Same age but different direction

The most stimulating fact contained in these two autobiography's is that The lives of Omprakash Valmiki and Urmila Pawar begins in the same age; both have born during the decades of fifty's and spend their childhood days in their village. Both lives under the highly conservative family. Where caste discrimination was presence everywhere. Their journey flows carrying the time with fast paste: they do their study's with the same time frame: during the decades of sixty's they went for their schooling, for their college education, circumstances change their way towards Mumbai; where they involved in Dalit movements and theatrical activity's. Later both of the autobiographer becomes very influential writer's in their respective field. But despite these many similarities both carry distinct identity at their own: where one as born in the north India, on the another hand one has born in the hilly area of Konkan district Maharashtra. Where one has taken birth as masculine gender so another has born in feminine gender. Despite their separate gender and regional differences they both carry same Identity: both belongs from the Dalit caste. In this they also carry remarkable difference: where one has born in Cuhra caste of Uttarpradesh and other has born in the Mahar caste in Maharashtra.

Caste prejudices: Failing in education

The both the author Urmila Pawar and Omprakash Valmiki has remain very intelligent students in their class. They extremely performed very well in their class as compare to other upper-caste students. We have to remember this fact as-well that this was the time when class discrimination was so high that only few children's from the Dalit community could get into education. During the decades of fifty's and sixty's sending their children into school's were not given more priorities. If the child is girl then probabilities of going her into school's was also less. Even the upper class girls were also not been encouraged for going into the schools. After discerning the above fact talking about Dalit girl should made us to think about the worst situation of the time in turms of education.

Despite the high intelligence among the all students both of students were failed: the reason was plane simple: to stop them for getting education. To stop them for persuing further because in the eyes of them their works is to serve the three upper Varna of the society. There place was the field not the school; there original work is to perform the cleaning, kooking and other various works in their home. These were the reason's that these author's had to failed in their respective class dispite high intelligence.

Let us look to the narrations one by one; in Idan when the author was in fourth standard she was anxiously waiting for her result. She wrote: When Guruji came to the class with the result sheet, I had eyes for nothing else. He began to announce the results. He would read the name, the roll number, and then shout Pass or Fail so loudly that probably even the surrounding villages heard our results. There was another problem. The classrooms had tin partitions; sometimes the voices of different gurujis, declaring results on either side of the partition, got mixed up and one would hear Pass instead of Fail or vice versa. We would sit, literally with our souls in our ears, praying to the thirty-three crore gods to allow us to hear the results right. The moment a student heard the word pass, he jumped in his seat and rushed to the guruji to receive his progress card from him. Students kept returning to their seats, triumphant, brimming with joy. Looking at them made me feel more scared than ever. Will I pass? Crouching low in my seat, I sat frozen with fear awaiting my turn. I was desperately praying to God, begging Him to pass me so that I would be able to escape the clutches of this monster, our Herlekar Guruji. Two students before me had passed, but two had failed and were now sitting like squashed mice in their seats. Finally, Guruji called out my number. I was all ears. My heart thumped loudly in my chest, my legs turned to jelly. I somehow managed to scramble up to the Guruji's table. He stared at me furiously and kept on staring till I had reached his table, his eyes boring holes in me. Then he placed the progress card in my hand with a flourish, as if he were bestowing some honor on me, shouted my name and announced, "Fail." The other students began to laugh. As I turned and started returning to my place, he fired the parting shot, "Show that progress card to your mother!" He went on to speak at length. A dark pit had opened under my feet into which I began to sink. The word fail reverberated in my ears. I heard nothing else. The thought of sitting in Herlekar Guruji's class for yet another year petrified me. It was far more overwhelming than the fear of facing my mother at home with my progress card. Tears choked me, but, desperately trying to hide my tears, I somehow returned to my place. I wanted all students after me to fail. I sat down, watching the faces of students who were declared to "fail" and in the same boat as me.²

The same narrative goes with omprakash Valmiki as well but in his later age when he was appearing for inter's examination. The act of failing him was also deliberate by his high caste Brahmin teacher's because he had earlier achieves the status of passing his metric examinations from first class marks. Even he became the first Dalit Men to have surpass the metric examination and appearing for his inter level (class 12th) examinations. First of all the teacher brijpal singh does not allow him to sit in the laboratory though the author had always gets good marks in chemistry. The entire year he desperately try to enter into the chemistry class for the lab practices but the teacher Brijpal singh does not allowed him to sit in the laboratory as the result he got failed in his class 12th final examination in chemistry. While narrating to this story Valmiki wrote: Brajpal Singh was still teaching chemistry. I had not an iota of respect for him in my heart. I had never, however, exhibited any disrespect toward him publicly. I enjoyed studying chemistry. My marks in chemistry in class eleven's annual exams were very good. But soon after starting class twelve, I felt that whenever I went to the lab for practical's or experiments that

² Urmila Pawar, Idan (eng: the weave of my life), trans, Maya Pandit, Colombia university press, (2008):p.56-57.

would be counted in the examinations, Brajpal would keep me out on some pretext or other. This was my last year in the intermediate program, and I would take a board examination at the end of term. My whole future depended on how well I did on this examination. When I was unable to do any lab experiments after trying for several months, I began to feel certain that I was being kept out deliberately. I asked him, “What have I done? Have I damaged anything?” But Brajpal didn’t bother to reply. When I told Ram Singh of my problem, he suggested that I go and meet the principal. The principal, Yashveer Tyagi, heard me attentively. He assured me that he wouldn’t let anything happen to me. He said he would talk to Brajpal Singh to solve the problem. But what happened was just the opposite. I was unable to conduct any experiments during that whole year. Not only did I do very poorly in the lab tests on the board exam but I also got low marks on the oral, even though I answered the examiner’s questions quite correctly. When the results were announced, I was among the failures. I had good marks in all other subjects except chemistry. I had failed the lab tests. This turn of events put a horrendous barrier in my path. I no longer felt interested in studying. I couldn’t make up my mind about what to do next.³

These similar experiences of the both of the author’s needs to see in the following point-of-view that not only their one entire year has wasted but they suffers from extreme mental and psychological pressure in their early year of childhood. If we overlook the wastage of a year but still the basic questions needs to be answered:

“does education is only for the privilege class?” “why after drafting several laws and instead of constitutional protection we have not been able to give them equal opportunities for their growth and development through the light of education?” “why marginalized students are still working in the field and not appearing in academia?” If we don’t find appropriate answer to these questions but still its doesn’t make much impact: because nowadays the quality education is only preserved for elite upper-highly wealthy class. All the government school and institutes where the children’s of lower and poor people goes for the study has suffering from high shortage of teacher’s, infrastructure, basic books and other necessitital equipment for the quality education. When the author’s completed their schooling those were the decades of sixty’s: poor infrastructure is and Poor facilities of schooling inter alia other discriminatory factors are still present; as a result in drop out of 50 per cent of the Dalit children at high school level⁴ Again, at school level the pass percentage of Dalit students (69 per cent at class X and 71 per cent at class XII), is much less than the average (75 and 77 per cent, respectively);⁵ And those who could surmount the obstacle to reach the universities suffer severe inhuman assaults in the class room’s.

The basic fact needs to be understood that education doesn’t mean just going to school everyday and sitting in the class room; education means developing critical thinking to a student; providing intellectual capabilities so he can make appropriate decision for not only himself but his family, society, and for the nation. Looking to this devastating situation of education in India

³ Omprakash Valmiki, trans, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Joothan, columbia university press (2003):p. 79.

⁴ GOI (Government of India). (2014). Educational statistics at a glance. New Delhi: Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

⁵ Kumar Rana, educational exclusion in India: Sub-group Divisiveness among Dalits (2017) :p. 104.

economist Amartya Sen puts it: “India is the only country in the world which is trying to become a global economic power with an uneducated and unhealthy labour force. It’s never been done before, and never will be done in the future either.”⁶

Rebelling against tradition: marrying on their own will

She meets her future partner one day after coming to school, when she saw him for the first time. Her mother informs her that he was the friend of the Khedaskar and works in his office. She then after went to give him tea and have conversation with the first time. They not only formally introduced with each-other and after that starts meeting often in different place. She describe his characteristics of her first meet with this word; “He was a dark man with a fresh-looking face. He had a wide forehead, amber eyes, straight nose, thick curly black hair, nicely trimmed moustache, and smiling lips.”⁷ At that time of her first meeting with Harishchandra she was studying on eighth standard. Thereafter, they often meet in different place’s of their village’s and according to the author it took a year to understand that they loved each-other. When they were in love the utmost opposition comes from her family mostly to her brother and mother. She marks: “Everybody in our family noticed that Harishchandra came to our house frequently and that we sat chatting for hours. They had no objection to his coming as a friend. But nobody wanted us to be married. He was only an SSC-pass and worked as a simple clerk. My sister wanted my husband to be at least a graduate. My brother in Mumbai wanted me to marry a man who was more educated than me and equal to us in status. And my mother considered my age, sixteen years, as quite dangerous. So when Harishchandra came visiting, she kept me occupied in some work. She often threw veiled suggestions at him to come less frequently and leave sooner.”⁸ Thus no one was willing to get her marrying with Harishchandra and that doesn’t stop them for carrying their efforts with their utmost capability. One day Harishchandra arrived at the author’s house with his baba, kaka, mama, and mami and made a formal proposal of marriage. That time some of the family members of hers were favor of the marriage and by this time, the opposition of the others in the family had considerably weakened too. So finally after much efforts their parents were agreed: but with the approval her family put some conditions. They were: “The marriage will take place at your village Bhiraunde; the expenditure of the marriage will be shared equally by both parties; we will not buy any clothes or a gold ring for the groom; we will not insist on your buying anything for the bride; our own traveling expenses to and from Bhiraunde will be borne by us!”⁹ finally the marriage takes place; and they live happily for year’s up until the death of her husband Harishchandra at the age of 67.

⁶ amartya Sen: India can’t become a global economic power with an uneducated, unhealthy workforce. Retrieved 30 November 2015, from <http://qz.com/557199/amartyasen-india-cant-become-a-global-economic-power-with-an-uneducated-unhealthy-workforce/> ———.

⁷ Urmila pawar, the weave of my life: p. 89.

⁸ Ibid: p. 91.

⁹ Ibid :p. 112.

Omprakash Valmiki married in December 27 1973 with her Bhabhi's sister after much struggling to his family. When he established himself in good position working in the ordinance factory in Mumbai their parents started force him for the marriage. His brother Jasbir find him a match from his own clan but when the author enquire heavily and try to find necessary information about the girl then he discover that his mother's brother was behind this match. He wanted to tie this noose around him so that he would never be able to get out of his clutches.¹⁰ When he got relevant information about the conspiracy then he forced his brother and parents that "he wants to see the girl." The author also narrates the situational conditional social reality of that time which we have discussed above that "our community didn't have the custom of showing the prospective bride. The elders decided it all. And the boy and the girl would go along with their decision. No one in the boy's family would go to see the girl. It was considered impolite. The mediator was trusted. Many a time this trust had led to horrible tragedies. My demand was like a bombshell. Everyone was staring at me, their eyes popping with astonishment."¹¹ Thereafter, with so many excuses they avoided to show the girl. At this point omprakash Valmiki felt very depressed; his family were arguing strongly to marry with the chosen girl for him; they ridiculed him: "How dare I flout the rules of our caste, our community? Education did not mean that one should stop obeying the hallowed customs of our people."¹² In this difficult circumstances he met Swarnlata Bhabhi's sister, Chandrakala, also called Chanda. Telling her about everything in detail, he also told her what was in his heart, "Will you marry me?"¹³ Chanda was studying for her intermediate then. According to the author Surprise was written all over her face, and she asked, "What are you saying?" "Think about it and let me know," he said confidently and left. After then in the next day she agreed and both get marry after convincing very hard to their parents.

Division among Dalits and their identity crisis

Let me elaborate this section with the words of Valmiki: The Dalits who have become educated face a terrible crisis—the crisis of identity—and they are trying to find an easy and instantaneous way to get out of this crisis. They have started to use their family gotra as their surname after just a little bit of fine-tuning. For instance, Chinaliye has become Chandril or Chanchal, and Saude has been changed to Saudai or Sood. One gentleman has converted Parchha to Partha. My mother's family's gotra is Kesle, which some people have changed to Keswal. They find that the easy way out. Behind all such acts is the anguish of identity crisis, which has come about as a reaction to the blatant inhumanity of casteism. Dalits want to join the mainstream of society after getting an education, but the savarnas prevent them from doing so. They discriminate against Dalits. They think of them as inferior beings. They cast doubts on their intelligence, their ability, their performance. They use all kinds of nefarious means to attack

¹⁰ Omprakash Valmiki, Arun Prabha Mukherjee Joothan (2003) :p. 168.

¹¹ Ibid :p. 169.

¹² Ibid:

¹³ Ibid: p. 169.

Dalits. In these times of dire danger to our existence, when a man like me comes around with his caste-marker surname, all those people who want to hide their caste become wary. They feel that someone is letting out their secret. They find it easier to run away from the problem. But the truth is that change won't come about through running away. It will come about through struggle and engagement.¹⁴

Similar narratives of changing the identity to hide their caste is also evident in Urmila Pawar's work; while reading this we got to know how in most metropolitan city of India Mumbai, caste system has mark the full presence. And to hide themselves the Dalit's change their caste surname with the similar sound of upper caste. "There were many Dalit officers living around But the nameplates on their doors told a different story; these were all Brahmin names like Tambe, Kamat, Sahasrabudhdhe, Barve, and so on."¹⁵ It was quite difficult to make out whether they belongs from dalit family or belonged from upper caste people. One day the author decides to find out the truth with her friend. They climbed four flights and, panting for breath, pressed the bell of a flat. "Someone peeped through the eyepiece. "What do you want?" A voice inquired. The cold tone startled us a little. But soon we regained our composure and answered, "We are starting a Dalit women's organization, want to talk about it." The woman quickly lowered the chain, opened the door, let us in, and closed the door again, with a worried expression on her face. "Sit down," she said and went inside to get some water for us. We looked around. Classy furniture, color TV, phone ... quite an affluent house. But no signs of Phule and Ambedkar! The woman returned with glasses of water. She was plump, fair, and decked out in heavy gold jewellery! "All right, what is it?" She said. So we began our well-rehearsed speech. But she was not even listening. "How did you know that we are one of you?" She asked us. "Oh, we just guessed." "But how could you? Nobody here has the slightest suspicion that we are like that. In fact, because of our looks, they think we are Kobras." "Kobras?" Meenakshi was completely at a loss. "Kokanstha Brahman!"¹⁶ Because of this incidences both of the writer's share major concerns about hiding the identity's to move away from the caste. They thought that changing the caste name into upper caste will help their situation into the betterment. But both the author's share major concern regarding this. Urmila Pawar asserts: "Many people in our community look after their own interests alone; they change their surnames, hide their caste. But does it help the oppressed people in their community? Does their situation change? Don't you think this is escapism?"¹⁷ when omprakash valmiki worked their in Maharashtra while observing to dalit community's he had also found out that because of the division between Mahar's and Mehtar's. And how a distrust have built in these communities. "Looking at Maharashtra's Dalit bastis— both rural and urban— fills one's heart with sadness. Thanks to Ambedkar's consciousness raising among the Mahar bastis, Mahars had turned to education en masse. But Mangs and Mehtars and others were still illiterate. Dalit activists had plenty of pluck. Their resolve and activism filled one with hope. Even the activists, however, har- bored feelings of caste

¹⁴ Joothan :p. 197.

¹⁵ Urmila pawar, the weave of my life: p. 172.

¹⁶ Ibid:

¹⁷ Ibid: p. 172-173.

differences. Although they talked outwardly of forgetting the differences between Mahars, Mangs, Chamars, and Mehtars, all untouchable castes, internally they were caught in the clutches of these beliefs.”¹⁸ Even for attending Ambedkar Jayanti which has remain one of the most celebrated festival for dalit’s only the Mahar’s were more enthusiast for the celebration. When Ambedkar had converted into Buddhism with him many mahar’s community’s had also accepted Buddhism. But despite the conversion lots of families were still tied to the Hindu gods and goddesses. Valmiki states: “Babasaheb’s message had not reached the Mehtar bastis at all. Whatever little had trickled in had come packed in a casteist mold. Whenever I talked about it with a Mehtar, he looked at me in surprise. Mehtars had respect for Babasaheb, but his followers had not been able to win their minds and hearts. They were Mehtars, placed at the very bottom of the social ladder. This feeling prevented them from joining the movement. They were suspicious of the Dalit leadership. The internal contradictions of the Dalit movement have weakened it, and the consequences have been felt at the political level too.”¹⁹ Even he find many similarities between Mehtar community with his own community. “There is no real difference between Maharashtra’s Mehtars and Uttar Pradesh’s Chuhra Valmikis; except for the language, everything else is similar. The Mehtars also breed pigs. They too make an offering of pig and liquor in the worship of their gods and goddesses. Their customs and traditions are pretty similar as well. The centuries-old inferiority complex affected a segment of the Dalits, and this compelled them to hide their identity as Dalits. They kept their distance from other Dalits in order to win favor from the savarnas, and they worked against Dalits, reporting on their activities to the savarnas.”²⁰ Because of the differences and identity crisis among the Dalit’s both the author’s felt very urgent need to fix this issue.

Mode of protest: thespian resistance

In Maharashtra likewise Dalit literature Dalit theater had also rising slowly in the decades of 70’s. The idea’s of Ambedkar’s message and the burning issue’s which impacts Dalit’s were the major focus of these theater. Both the author’s have not only contributed for the theater by acting but wrote and created many play’s which got well appreciation from all corners. The Dalit theater had also originated among Marathi speaking people. And now, it has presence all over India.

When Urmila pawar was studying in the ninth standard, she had a teacher called Vasantrao Deshpande who decided to stage a one-act play called Kalalavya Kandyachi Kahani (The tale of the onion that poisoned people’s minds) for the interschool one-act play competitions. The story was simple. A princess once found an onion among the fruits. Out of curiosity, she started peeling it, which made her eyes water. The tears simply would not stop. The king made a public announcement that the man who made her laugh would receive half his kingdom. So many people came and gave it a try and finally the princess did laugh. While remembering those days

¹⁸ Omprakash valmiki Joothan: p. 177.

¹⁹ Ibid: p. 177.

²⁰ Ibid:

the author says that “The subject was amusing enough for children. At that time I was quite a hefty girl. My elder sister, who was thin as a straw, used to say, “Don’t stand next to me! You will break my bones if you accidentally fall on me!” The teacher thought that I looked funny enough for the role of the king. I had no stage fright, as I regularly participated in many programs. The teacher also knew that fellow students found my mimicry of other teachers quite entertaining. We did lots of rehearsals and performed well in competitions but did not win any prize, but I got at least one for my performance. For quite a long time, the water seller named Aagashe, near Lata Talkies, and some people would call out, when they saw me passing by, “So your royal highness, how are you?” People remembered my role for a long time.”²¹ This instance of involving into theater in 9th standard not only boost her competition but in future prepare her for theater. Omprakash valmiki have not introduced himself into the theater in school days the reasons behind might be that those days in his school the atmosphere of the school was not acquainted with theater. But when he reach in Ordnance Factory Training Institute for his training he discovered theater with the involvement of Marxist students. He writes: “I joined these Marxists in forming a theater group. We rehearsed in the hostel. We staged many plays in the institute’s auditorium.”²² At the training institute he discover himself he started writing poetry, reading different types of literature and the involvement of the theater’s is already discussed now. After the theater had introduced to him In the training institute from that point onwards he starts writing the short-story’s and play’s and acted and directed in those play’s as well. “I also began to write short one-act plays and to stage them. I did both acting and directing. It was the beginning of my involvement in theater. Shri Vermaji was a well-known theater person in Khamaria. I staged several plays under his direction.”²³ When omprakash valmiki later move in Mumbai for his further training he indulged in watching theater’s regularly. “Every Saturday and Sunday both of us went to Bombay to see plays. Once in a while, if there was a good show in the middle of the week, we would sneak out.”²⁴ And that made him to write and act in play’s later in his life.

Urmila Pawar starts working in theater as a women artist from early age. The reason behind this was that those days the great theater artist Shantabai Jog came to stay in Ratnagiri. Those days Ratnagiri where Urmila lives was also a place for theater lover’s. She informs that “Any theater company from Mumbai would come to Ratnagiri first before embarking on the tour of Maharashtra. There were many theater groups. Our Marathi teacher, Vasantrao Deshpande, was an amateur theater artist. He performed the main role of Dada in the play Vedyacha Ghar Unhat. People liked him so much that he founded a group called Natraj Sewa Mandal. Many people like Baban Bane, Suresh Gandhi, Shanu Mestri, Bhau Shetye, and Bapu Pandit became its members. In those days women artists were difficult to get; they had to be hired from Mumbai. So they forced my friend Sumati Vaidya and me to be members of the group. Maybe they believed in our

²¹ Urmila Pawar, the weave of my life: 104.

²² Omprakash valmiki, joothan: p. 149.

²³ Ibid:

²⁴ Ibid: p. 153.

histrionic abilities!”²⁵ the childhood involvement in the theater’s made her to understand the power of theater later in life. And that also helps to spread his idea’s into the common masses. Later when they both starts working in their respective area’s besides the work they both devoted time for theater. And for them these activities carried immense happiness and pleasure. Urmila Pawar happily narrates those story’s of involving with theater while working in offices. Women from Ratnagiri were a little hesitant about acting in plays. There were two women called the Hegishte sisters who could be hired to act in plays. But they were busy. So someone asked me if I would like to act. I agreed on two conditions: no late-night rehearsals and no physical contact with co-actors. I acted in several full-length plays, such as Mala Kahi Sangaychay, Ashrunchi Zali Phule, Shantata Court Chalu Ahe, and quite a few oneact plays, like Bandu Natak Karto, Bandu Undir Marto, Swapna, and so on. My role as Benare in Tendulkar’s Shanata Court Chalu Ahe was widely acclaimed and I won the first prize for acting.²⁶ Similarly later when valmiki was working in the ordinance factory he founded his theater group namely Meghdoot Natya Sanstha in 1974 and actively engaged in the group till his transfer from Mumbai in 1985. He notifies: “In 1974, with the help of a few friends, I started a theater group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. Soon this group became well known around Nagpur for its engaged perspective. A campaign had begun with regular shows and street plays to acquaint the wider public about contemporary issues. A team of brave young men was devoting itself fully to this task.”²⁷ But actively involving into the theater the problem of caste was still remains’: in the field of theater where people expect that people working here transform’s the boundary of caste, class, religion, region and so on. But the truth was different. Valmiki made aware of this fact with the description of celebration of the Ambedkar Jayanti: “Residents of the Ordnance Factory Colony in Chandrapur celebrated Ambedkar’s birth anniversary with great fanfare. I participated in it with great enthusiasm. We organized poetry readings, panel discussions, and art exhibitions and staged plays and street theater. The savarna caste members of our organization, which was called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha, would inevitably be very busy with some important matters at such times. They disappeared from the scene during the Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations. Only during Ganesh Chaturthi, Shivaji Jayanti, Janmashtami, and Ramnavami, all important festivals of the gods worshipped by the savarnas, did they work on behalf of Meghdoot Natya Sanstha’s endeavors. This behavior exposed the internecine divisions among us.”²⁸ This discrimination by the Svarna member’s in theater’s made us to think that the caste system in India is so rooted that despite getting good education it have not been able to eradicated. Because of these reason’s Valmiki began to search those people’s who can actively wants to devote for the theater’s and wants revolutionary change in society. With the continuous efforts he stage many Dalit play’s and influenced many other with his work. “We staged many Dalit plays. One was Mumbai Nagri by Daya Pawar. A convocation of Nagpur University was held in

²⁵ Urmila pawar, the weave of my life: p. 110.

²⁶ Ibid: p. 145.

²⁷ Omprakash valmiki, Joothan: p. 166.

²⁸ Ibid: p. 178.

Chandrapur. Meghdoot Natya Sanstha staged a play at the convocation. Many intellectuals, writers, and professors commented positively about the production.²⁹

His Natya sanstha got several awards and recognition's from many organization's. His theater group has won first prizes many times. While reliving this memory he wrote: Ballarpur Paper Mills sponsored a drama competition every year. This competition for Hindi and Marathi plays was important not only for the theater people but also for the audience in the Ballarpur area. Meghdoot Natya Sanstha had made a name for itself in this competition by staging plays like Aadhe Adhure, Himalaya ki Chhaya, Sinhasan Khali Hai, and Paisa Bolta Hai. We won many prizes. I was awarded the best actor and the best director prize several times. Chanda won the best actress prize for her central roles in Himalaya ki Chhaya and Aadhe Adhure."³⁰

Working for the emancipation of Dalit's: The activism in Mumbai

It is very strange that both of them have born in different region but when they came for the better opportunities of work in Mumbai they both after spending year's became associated with Dalit movements. They actively participated and extensively wrote for the growth of this movement. The strike differences is that after the coming in Mumbai the Urmila Pawar does not associated immediately with the Dalit movement because of her study's and family responsible's and office work's but later from 1988 she devotes herself for the cause of Dalit's liberation. Both of the author takes note of the struggle of changing the name of the Marathwada university in to Ambedkar university in their autobiographical account. This incidence becomes major point for the Dalit's. When this incidence happens Urmila Pawar was in her second year of her B. A. Course. And while acknowledging to the impact of the movement she feels guilty for not participating in it. Valmiki too was working in ordinance factory. And closely saw this movement and struggle's of the dalit's for the assertion of their rights. Let us recall those days of activism for changing the Marathwada university to Ambedkar Univercity from both the autobiographical narration. Urmila Pawar while informing to the movement and feeling guilty for not participating it writes: "The movement for changing the name of the Marathwada University to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University was gaining ground. Mumbai reverberated with the slogans raised at processions held by activists from all over Maharashtra. We saw innumerable activists camping in the Azad Maidan, the public park in south Mumbai, with their banners. Since it was very close to our offices, we got to watch these scenes every day. We saw so many women from the villages and slums walking in the processions, carrying children in their arms. We used to feel guilty that middle-class women like us did not participate in the protest marches. I often spoke about it in my speeches. But we had never participated in any protest marches till then."³¹ Valmiki while closely observing to this movement ad's: "In 1978 the Dalit Panthers organized a huge rally in Bombay, demanding that Marathwada

²⁹ Ibid:

³⁰ ibid: p. 191.

³¹ Urmila Pawar, the weave of my life: p. 156.

University's name be changed to Dr. Ambedkar University. Dalit Panther activists from all over Maharashtra gathered in front of Bombay's legislative assembly. The state assembly passed the bill for the name change. Savarnas, or upper-caste people, had opposed the bill on a large scale, and rioting and destruction of public property occurred in several towns and cities. Ahmadnagar, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Sholapur, Bombay, Nasik, and Amravati were tense. Marathwada felt the effects of the rioting the most. Dalit neighborhoods were torched. Hundreds of people died. The news in the papers broke one's heart. The name change had become a selfhood issue for Dalits. Nagpur saw incidents of violence. Protesters had also marched in Chandrapur. The Maharashtra government withdrew the name-change bill. The Dalits were disappointed. They did not lose heart, however, and were working relentlessly to keep the issue in the public eye. They channeled all their energy into the movement. The inspiring leadership and impassioned speeches of Bapu Rav Jagtap and Jogendra Kavare kept Dalits fired up. The hatred of thousands of years was once again visible in its original form. I saw this movement of Dalit assertion from close up. Each follicle of my body felt the heat of the movement. The cruel social arbiters of Indian society were denying individual merit. In their eyes Ambedkar was simply a Mahar, and they could not care less if his scholarship was as vast as the sky. The battle for Dalit selfhood that Ambedkar had fought in his life had unleashed the flow of self-confidence among the Dalits."³²

Both of the author tirelessly work for the Dalit liberation and wrote many article's and thought provoking poems and published in various news paper's. Both involve actively in writings and speaking in public forum's. While reading to these accounts we get to sense that though they are actively involve for the Dalit cause but never meet with each-other in their life. One side we have Urmila Pawar who work's and understand the lives of Slum area's "Participating in public programs like Ambedkar Jayanti and Mahaparinirvan Din in the slums, however, made me see the poverty and suffering of our people at close quarters. A few of our relatives lived in slums, so I knew what life in the slums was like. But those slums were not like the ones I went to! Life here was impossible! Tiny, eight-feet-by-six-feet huts, crammed back to back in a very small space ... cane partitions in between ... low tin roofs with a couple of old rags and a few pots and pans by way of possessions ... stinking open drains and gutters in front, with clouds of flies and mosquitoes hovering over them ... attacking humans for trespassing on their land ... mice and bandicoots chasing each other all over the place ... children defecating and pigs roaming on the dung heaps nearby ... people spitting everywhere ... women throwing dirty water anywhere ... bitter quarrels going on ... and, even in this atmosphere, people with pale, emaciated faces trying to strengthen each other's resolve to live in the hope of a better life!"³³ even till this day the difficulties of living in the slums areas of Mumbai have highlighted time-to-time by various publications. The recently released film Gully Boy's (2019) directed by Zoya Akhtar and starring Ranveer singh and alia Bhat which became super hit has also highlighted the lives of and working conditions of the people who are living in the slums.

³² Omprakash valmiki, Joothan: p. 173-174.

³³ Urmila Pawar, the weave of my life: p. 164.

Valmiki also with his active participation in these movements narrates how because of these struggle's he find out his inner sides of activism. The incidence happened in 1984 closely relate to this; while describing about this incidence he wrote: In January 1984 an incident that took place in Malkapur in the Amravati district that epitomized the narrow-mindedness of these parts. A Marathi textbook meant for class seven included a lesson on Ambedkar. All the students ripped out the lesson on the orders of a Brahmin teacher. The class included some Mahar students, and they felt that ripping out the lesson was wrong. Those students quietly picked up the torn pages from the rubbish and took them home to show them to their families. The news spread. Protests began. Someone sent a detailed account along with the torn pages to Lokmat's Nagpur bureau. Lokmat published the story and photographs of the torn pages. Rallies and protest meetings began all over Vidarbha as soon as the story broke. This incident became a symbol of Dalit oppression. Thousands upon thousands of people came to a huge rally staged at Bhadravati. I too addressed the rally. Most speakers spoke in Marathi. I spoke in Hindi. This was a new experience for me. The crowd was simmering with anger. At that moment I experienced my belonging to the Dalit movement intensely. I wrote a poem entitled "Vidrup Chehra" (Crooked Face), and many magazines and newspapers published it. The movement was gathering force by the day. In many places savarnas threw stones at Dalit marchers and rallies. The police were indifferent. The board of education took no disciplinary action against the teacher [who had told the students to tear the Ambedkar chapter from their books]. While Dalits called impassioned meetings in many places, the administration was trying to suppress the whole thing. This whole episode affected me deeply. Now I was spending most of my time in Dalit bastis.³⁴ It is evident that how because of their involvement of the Dalit movement's made huge impact on the lives of Dalit's. Their work's and writings have become very influential work in Dalit literature. Because of their active involvement in these struggle's in Mumbai it shed important light of caste discrimination and conflict in urban India. And established the fact the not only in the village's the level caste discrimination is high but urban India is also not an exception.

2.2 Dissimilarities

What was uncommon in their life?

Every human being has different life experiences and understanding. With the so many distinctions it was challenging for us also to denote the similarities of the two lives. It is also very astonishing fact that despite taken birth in different gender, different region, different caste, their lives experiences are inter-connected. But in their lives many dissimilarities could also been noted down; and it is understandable. Every human being has different experience. And therefore, in their case the dissimilarities in their life is not an exceptional fact. As urmila born in feminine gender her experiences as mother, facing patriarchal structure of the family, forming the Dalit women organization, facing the stigma of menstruation and many such issue's differentiates her from Valmiki's life. Even their birth in different regions increase the possibility

³⁴ Omprakash valmiki, Joothan: p. 180-181.

of this distinction further. The cultural difference of Maharashtra specially the village's of Ratnigiri and Uttar Pradesh's Barla village's also forms various differences altogether. The food habits, caste dynamics, cultural subtleties also helps very much. Therefore, let have quick and brief look to some of the dissimilarities of their live experiences.

The patriarchy in Dalit family

The notion of patriarchy in Dalit family's is highlighted in great detail by Urmila Pawar in her autobiographical narration's. As in historiography section "The feminist stand point: looking the oppressed under the oppressed" we have looked how the women activist and academician's have wrote about the patriarchal structure of the Dalit family's and how the Dalit movements have failed to integrate this. Urmila Pawar later when she established herself as distinguished author not only established Dalit women's organization but actively highlighted the patriarchal attitude of Dalit leader's and activist. But the story is not limited to the Dalit leader's and activist. She had to face it from the beginning; as she informs that her husband doesn't opposed to her education at the beginning but when she completed her graduation and enrolled herself for M. A. Course then he starts opposing her; Urmila remarks: "I enrolled myself for the M.A. course. Frankly speaking, I had a great desire for further education. It was at this particular point that Harishchandra realized that he had lost control over his wife, that I had gone too far ahead of him."³⁵ He argues to her by saying: "Why do you want to do M.A.? Now pay more attention to the children and the house."³⁶ The notion of carrying the household chores and responsibility for taking care of children's have still ingrain among Dalit families. And that is the reason that they can't pursue their education and other out-side work further in their life. After passing the M. A. Exam her involvement in public events, her writings made tremendous impact on her personal life. While recognizing the contradictory character of her husband she composes: I slogged the whole day in the office, at home, and after an arduous journey was dead tired by the time I got back home. And yet at night, though my body was a mass of aches and pains, I pressed my husband's feet. I was ready to do anything he wanted, just to make him happy. I was ready to die for a smile, a glance from him. But he accused me, "Let alone an ideal wife, you are not even a good one!" Later on he began saying that I was far from being a good mother as well! I failed to understand what exactly he wanted from me and became miserable. Gradually it became clear to me that everything that gave me an independent identity—my writing, which was getting published, my education, my participation in public programs—irritated Mr. Pawar no end. Gradually, he began to be full of resentment. His attitude toward me was full of contradictions. On the one hand, he was proud of my writing; he admitted as much to his friends and relatives. But, on the other, he immensely resented my being recognized as a writer, my speaking in public programs, and my emerging as a figure in the public domain. Our arguments would invariably

³⁵ Urmila Pawar, the weave of my life: p. 155.

³⁶ Ibid:

end in bitter quarrels.³⁷ The common characteristics of the patriarchal perception is that men wants to give the educational environment till the limited standard so that she can take care of the house very well. But when Urmila cross the boundary by liberating herself through the education and starts writing actively her husband fear losing control over her. But despite the fact that she still pay her utmost attention to the family works from taking care of the children's to taking care of her husband. By involving in women movements her thought process also went very significance change's. She starts believing on individual freedom. The thought of equality between men and women also rises after the involvement in the women's movements. She remarks: "I was full of many new thoughts. I felt that a woman was also an individual, just as a man was, and was entitled to all the rights of an individual. If man has muscle power, woman has the power to give birth. These are distinctly different capacities and need to be evaluated differently, not in the same way. On the other hand, the people of my community often confronted me with, "Who are those women you are mixing with these days? Take care; they belong to a different caste. Our community does not need their thoughts and values." While they said this, their way of talking made me feel as if I had joined some criminal gang. I had realized that I now had a new vision, a new perspective on looking at women. I had lost my fear. The women's movement had given me great strength to perceive every man and woman as an equal individual. It had taught me to relate to them freely, without any prejudice whatsoever!"³⁸

This patriarchal attitude was not limited to home: but in the Dalit conferences and other events it becomes strait with full strength. She mentions how in the dalit conferences the voice of the women's were absence. All the space has been occupied by the men's. To counter this problem she adopted humorous approach. "well. I would often tell a joke while making the point that our leaders are not as aware of women's issues as they are about the internal differences among themselves; hence people get disillusioned with them."³⁹

Pawar's role in women's movement and as a women Dalit activist

To fight the patriarchal notion of the Dalit family she began to writing in full swing's. Her short-story's were not only published in reputed newspaper's and columns. Even her story's were included in the syllabus in Mumbai university. She went to found Dalit women's organization to bring the Dalit women writer's in single place. While remembering this incidence's she wrote: "One day, Hira and I were having lunch in her office. Suddenly she had a brainwave. "Hey, we always attend the Asmitadarsha, Dalit, Buddhist Marathi Sahitya Sammelanas. It is always men who organize them, right? We women only present our writings. Why shouldn't we have our own independent platform for literature?"⁴⁰ when this idea originated after much struggle's she has to face challenge's for founding the organization but with the great determination she completed this task.

³⁷ Ibid: p. 159.

³⁸ Ibid: p. 160.

³⁹ Ibid: p. 165.

⁴⁰ Ibid: p. 170.

Thus in conclusion we can say that these autobiographical narration supply's us great information regarding of their personal experiences with the detail account of Dalit movement and how it impacted their lives. They highlighted the effect of caste exploitation of the society and informs how because the cruel caste system they have to suffers various misery's in their lives. While observing the impact Valmiki remarks: What historical reasons lie behind this hatred and malice? Whenever I asked those who find the varna system ideal and take pride in Hindutva, instead of replying directly, they either avoid my question or get angry. They talk about gyana, or knowledge, in a convoluted vocabulary, but they will not accept the truth, that depriving human beings of human rights on account of their birth is not justifiable on any grounds. Savarnas harbor all sorts of preconceptions that make it impossible to develop normal personal relations with them. Caste is a very important element of Indian society. As soon as a person is born, caste determines his or her destiny. Being born is not in the control of a person. If it were in one's control, then why would I have been born in a Bhangi household? Those who call themselves the standard-bearers of this country's great cultural heritage, did they decide which homes they would be born into? Of course, they turn to scriptures to justify their position, scriptures that establish feudal values instead of promoting equality and freedom. The savarnas constructed all sorts of mythologies: of chivalry, of ideals. What was the outcome? A defeated social order in the clutches of hopelessness, poverty, illiteracy, narrow-mindedness, religious inertia, and priestocracy, a social order embroiled in ritualism, which, fragmented, was repeatedly defeated by the Greeks, Shakas, Huns, Afghans, Moghuls, French, and English. Yet in the name of their valor and their greatness, savarnas kept hitting the weak and the helpless. Kept burning homes. Kept insulting women and raping them. To drown in self-praise and turn away from the truth, to not learn from history—what sort of a nationbuilding are they dreaming of? Times have changed. But something somewhere continues to irk. I have asked many scholars to tell me why savarnas hate Dalits and Sudras, the lower castes, so much. The Hindus who worship trees and plants, beasts and birds, why are they so intolerant of Dalits? Today caste remains a preeminent factor in social life. As long as people don't know that you are a Dalit, things are fine. The moment they find out your caste, everything changes. The whispers slash your veins like knives. Poverty, illiteracy, broken lives, the pain of standing outside the door, how would the civilized savarna Hindus know it? Why is my caste my only identity?⁴¹ It is very hard to answer the questions raised by Omprakash valmiki; and if we have to achieve the real progress and want to established India as a great power then we have to rise above the caste lines. The caste system of India constructed by the Hindu's is the mostly responsible for all the major social problem's of India.

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⁴¹ Omprakash Valmiki :p. 204-205.

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