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"I had discovered my voice at last!": Articulation of subjectivity in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*

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ABSTRACT:

The genre of autobiography, theorized for several decades by literary critics as the preferred mode for articulating the subjective self-fashioning of white bourgeois men only, now offers a discursive space for marginalized and stigmatized social groups to enunciate their identities in the public sphere. My paper explores the ways in which dalit writers such as Urmila Pawar, among others, appropriate the genre and transgress, reshape and redefine its generic conventions to exploit its emancipatory and transformative potential. *The Weave of My Life* can be seen as consolidating the now burgeoning tradition of Dalit women's autobiographies inaugurated by Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* The paper undertakes a close reading of Pawar's autobiographical narrative titled *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs.* Pawar is outspoken in her critique, not only of casteist exploitation and dispossession, but also a vehement castigation of Dalit patriarchy. I situate and contextualize her narrative in the long tradition of autobiographies by male dalit writers and focus on the departures it makes from that tradition as well.

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> The weaker are always anxious for justice and equality. The strong pay heed to neither.
>
> Aristotle, (*Politics*, s1318b)

The genre of autobiography, theorized for several decades by literary critics as the preferred mode for articulating the subjective self-fashioning of white bourgeois men only, now offers a discursive space for marginalized and stigmatized social groups to enunciate their identities in the public sphere. While recording the experiential realities of the lives of members of these communities, it enables them to confront and contest established notions of their identity, defined by dominant groups, and to inscribe their selves, marked by dignity, self-worth, and respect. Edwin and Shirley Ardener have made a distinction between the sphere of articulation and self-representation of dominant groups and that of 'muted' groups who do not have access to public modes of articulation and therefore have to accept the standards and cultural norms decided by dominant groups. Nevertheless, they have a sliver of existence, in certain regions of practice and belief that lie outside the cultural world created by dominant groups. This 'sliver of existence' may be viewed as a 'wild zone' by the latter but this 'wild zone' serves to challenge and extend the boundaries of their limited imaginative universe. Urmila Pawar's autobiographical narrative *The Weave of My Life* performs precisely such a function, in bringing to light that which has been so far hidden from view. In reading

this text, the paper will interrogate some of the foundational tenets of autobiography criticism as laid down by critics such as Gusdorf, Olney and others and examine the ways in which Pawar appropriates, contests, reshapes and transgresses normative autobiographical practices to inscribe the subjectivity of a Dalit woman. This involves probing the very terms in which the autobiographical subject has been thought in formative criticism of the genre. If conventions regarding the genre stipulate 'a legitimate class' of autobiographical narratives, focusing on the lives of 'men of lofty reputation'/ 'great' and 'extraordinary' men, each of whom constitutes a unique, sovereign, and discrete individual, a valorization of the ideals of autonomy and sovereignty, and development of the individual measured in terms of progress, achievement and material success, then autobiographies by dalit writers, male and female, reveal that the genre is no longer the exclusive province of 'great men' alone and 'the lives of the obscure'(Woolf) can also be mapped in it. Almost all the narratives by dalit writers subvert the singular focus on individual eminence and achievement in the canonical 'great men' paradigm. Since the emancipatory politics of these narratives stems from "bringing culturally marginalized experiences out from the shadow of an undifferentiated otherness" (Smith & Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 435-436), there is an emphasis on the representative status of the autobiographer rather than a unique and ineffable personality. In fact, the text exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality, and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective elements of Dalit women's experience. In addition, their lives are circumscribed by subjection rather than defined by autonomy and sovereignty and their narrative itinerary comprises of a tortuous and traumatic process of self-formation rather than a smooth attainment of selfhood. Another area of investigation would be to situate the narrative in the tradition of Dalit autobiographies by male writers and see the departures it makes from that tradition as well.

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The idea of the autonomous, discrete, and isolate self-valorized by the canonical autobiographies is inapplicable to autobiographical writings by members of subaltern groups such as blacks or Dalits or women. This individualistic paradigm of the self, a product of bourgeois individualism, doesn't take into account the importance of collective identity for oppressed groups. Group consciousness, arising out of a shared history of oppression as well as shared cultural traditions, plays an important part in the definition of self for members of marginalized communities. Political marginalization, economic exploitation and dispossession, social exclusion, along with derogatory cultural representation of the entire group/community lead to a sense of alienation as well as the possibility of their politicization and emancipation. Their sense of a shared identity and group consciousness doesn't obliterate their individuality, rather exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness. Socialist feminist critics such as Sheila Rowbowtham deconstruct and critique this exclusionary individualistic paradigm and see it as stemming from and reflecting the privileged position of white men, who alone can afford to see themselves as individuals, while Dalits, women, and blacks have no such luxury as they are not allowed to forget their caste, sex or race at any given point in time.

The text presents the construction of the self as determined by the multiple and intersectional registers of identity such as gender, caste and class. Focusing on one axis such as caste or gender alone "effectively erases the complex and often contradictory positioning of the subject." (Smith &Watson, *Decolonizing the Subject* xiv) When Gopal Guru lays stress on Dalit women's need to 'talk differently' and organize their struggle around 'a politics of difference,' (Rao, *Gender & Caste* 80) he implies that their self-representations will take cognizance not only of the proliferation of these categories of difference but of their inextricable linkage to one another as well. In *The Weave of My Life,* too, the narrative is concerned less with focusing on the unique individuality of one woman than with delineating communal subjectivity and the specific problems and experiences which bind most, if not all, Dalit women together. It is the representative

aspects of her experience which are important from the point of view of the Dalit women's movement. Not wanting to essentialize or construct monolithic images of Dalit women or their lives, certain tropes and incidents seem to recur in almost all Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, such as the obstacles to education in the lives of Dalit women, the life cycle and coming-of-age, marriage, conjugality and family, physical violence in the domestic sphere, sexual abuse by upper caste men, experiences of casteist humiliation in the public domain etc. The narrative, thus, tends to lay stress on those events of an individual's life whose typicality is more important than their uniqueness without obliterating her individuality. Since the putative role and function of the autobiography has undergone a change since its inception, narratives such as this one are instrumental in the creation of a politicized communal identity. Hence, the genre is often used to articulate gender- and caste-specific experiences undergone by Dalit women communally and individually and plays an important role in the process of cultural critique while charting the processes of self-formation.

Pawar's text is, in many respects, a continuation of the tradition of autobiographies by Dalit writers as innumerable manifestations of casteist oppression and discrimination, experienced by her and other Dalits, men and women, occurring both in the village and the city, are sprinkled throughout her narrative. For instance, she describes her extreme reluctance as a young girl to deliver the baskets woven by her mother to upper caste households, where she is made to stand at the threshold, and coins are dropped from a distance and the baskets 'purified' by sprinkling water on them. The school in the village, a familiar trope in Dalit discourse, is yet another site of casteist abuse experienced by her. The *Shimga* festival provides another example of the exploitation of the Mahars who would perform all the tough tasks involved in the festival but would be prevented from participating in any of the festivities. Worse still, the upper castes would pray to divert all the calamities towards the *maharwada*. Caste prejudices are not confined only to caste Hindus but have become so deeply entrenched in the psyche of people that even insane patients at the mental hospital don't spare

Shantiakka working there. From the Muslim tenants in their house to landladies in villages and cities—the hold of caste is ubiquitous. Pawar's brother and son fall prey to another pernicious manifestation of casteist violence in the 'modern' and 'secular' space of the government office and college respectively. The casteist taunts stemming from strong anti-reservationist sentiments in the 1990s drive both of them to commit suicide. The fact that both she and her son experienced humiliation in school and college underlines the resilience of caste as an institution and its persistence in the 'modern' and 'secular' space of the independent nation. MSS Pandian underlines the fact that Dalit autobiographies inhabit the domain of the ordinary, "The everydayness and repeatability of untouchability in these texts […] place them outside the domain of history" (Pandey 196).

An issue arising out of the representative status of the individual in Dalit autobiographies is to probe the extent to which the 'I' represents all the other members of the Dalit community, including women. For instance, in the narratives of Dalit writers such as Tulsi Ram or Balbir Madhopuri or Omprakash Valmiki, there are hardly any episodes in which the conditions and circumstances of Dalit women's lives are explored. So, if Omprakash Valmiki's or Tulsi Ram's life is putatively representative of the 'we' of the Dalit community, then the 'we' definitely seems to be male. If Dalit men are the 'other' of savarna society, then Dalit women seem to be subject to the same process of exclusion and 'othering' by Dalit men. Dalit women identify themselves with their community, but unlike the men, not exclusively. If male Dalit writers' sense of subjectivity is completely saturated by and only defined by their consciousness of caste, Dalit women's sense of identity strains not just at the boundaries of caste, and class, but also, more importantly, gender. Hence, Maya Pandit comments on the significant departure *The Weave of My Life* makes from the path traversed by autobiographies of male Dalit writers, "It is a complex narrative of a gendered individual who looks at the world initially from her location within the caste but who also goes on to transcend the caste identity from a feminist perspective." (Pandit Introduction xvii) The title page

boldly announces the departure that the text makes from other texts in the Dalit autobiographical tradition by consciously labelling it "A Dalit Woman's Memoirs."

Sidonie Smith underscores the emancipatory potential of autobiographies by members of marginalized communities as they resort to an 'epistemological breakage'(Smith & Watson *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 436) in affirming the legitimacy of a new perspective from the margins. As Hartsock says these narratives offer the occasion for 'standpoint epistemologies' where the world is being viewed from the margins, and the resultant vision has the potential of not merely exposing the falsity and partiality of dominant view but the potential to transform both the margins as well as the center. Pawar's text is overtly political in that the author uses her personal experiences in the private and public sphere as a basis for analyzing such gender specific issues of Dalit women as the drudgery of housework, autonomy of women, gender roles, childcare, women's creativity and the hindrances, material and ideological, faced by women writers, childcare etc. Both the private sphere and the public domain are subjected to critical reflection and the text exemplifies the motto "Personal is political." The process of critical self-examination and reflection is a politically significant act in relation to a projected community of readers who are aware of the silence which has been imposed upon these issues over the centuries, hence the text has socially transformative potential as the emancipatory potential of women's narratives in consciousness-raising was well recognized during the second wave women's movement. Pawar, is outspoken in her critique, not only of casteist exploitation and humiliation, but also of Dalit patriarchy and *The Weave of My Life* can be seen as consolidating the now burgeoning tradition of Dalit women's autobiographies inaugurated by Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*.

The decentring of the 'I' and the emphasis on a group identity, arising out of common experience of tribulations, is evident from the first chapter which is devoted to a detailed description of the harsh lives of women from Pawar's Phansvale village in the Konkan area. Pawar offers a graphic description of the women "With their

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emaciated bodies covered in rags, bony stick-like legs, bare feet, pale, lifeless faces dripping either with sweat or rain, sunken stomachs, palms thickened with work, and feet with huge crevices […] they looked like cadavers in powerful streams […](2) whose 'wretched lives' are marked by unending drudgery, deprivation, hunger and abuse. She devotes an entire chapter in describing the arduous and dangerous journey, metonymic of their lives, these women make every day from the village to Ratnagiri to sell firewood. Given that Dalit women's lives have, for a long time, remained largely defined by their relegation to the domestic realm, the private sphere necessarily constitutes the starting point for critical reflection. The stark poverty of their lives drives these women to endanger their lives by trying to collect oysters and fish at the time of low tide, leading to drowning many a times. Susan Friedman's corrective to dominant theorizations of subjectivity is very pertinent in the context of Dalit women's lives, "The very sense of identification, interdependence and community that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity […]" (Smith & Watson *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 75). Characteristics which are anathema to the individualistic paradigms of canonical autobiography are very useful in shaping the subjectivities of marginalized individuals.

A little later in the same chapter, the focus shifts to the history of her family, wherein one of her forebears, influenced by the spirit of rationalism preached by the Satyashodak Samaj, had defied the humiliating pollution taboos observed by the Brahmin priest in the village, and begun to perform rituals for the Mahar community. This episode serves to root the writer in the long tradition of resistance to hegemonic power represented by this bold and defiant ancestor of hers. Her father, a teacher himself, continuing in the footsteps of his father, went against prevalent ideas throughout his life and stressed the need for his daughters to be educated and become financially independent. Though he died in 1954 when Urmila was in the third standard, his constant refrain "Educate the children" and the legacy of his values continued to inspire her throughout her life.

The narrative moves from the general to the specific, from a description of the harsh lives of women in her village to offer thumbnail sketches of individual women around Urmila—her cousin Susheela who falls prey to the brutalities inflicted by her husband and mother-in-law, Vitha and Parvati Vahini, whose unending domestic drudgery is compounded by their unpaid farming work and utter powerlessness at home. In a moment of genuine self-reflexivity, Pawar underlines her own callousness at an earlier age, "But young as I was I never realized the worth of her work, her endurance, and the deliberate indifference of the others towards her" (43). It is only in hindsight that a mature, sensitive and guilty Pawar realizes that "Her eyes had reflected so many things—helplessness, vulnerability, defencelessness"(43)! Pawar comments on her own growth and how this episode made her more humane and compassionate. Manjula Tai's selfless service and endurance is rewarded by continual harassment by her in-laws. Alcoholic husbands and penury-ridden in-laws find an easy scapegoat in venting their frustration on the vulnerable women of the household. Dalit women faced sexual violence both as a form of retaliatory politics of the upper castes and as a form of patriarchal control within their own homes. Acts of brutality routinely inflicted by men like her cousin Shantaram bashing the head of his wife don't elicit any reaction, let alone outrage, from the members of the community—"People felt that he was her master and had the right to do anything to her"(154). To worsen matters further, caste panchayats deliver vigilante justice for 'errant' women. One such incident, which leaves a scar on her psyche, is when the caste panchayat orders a pregnant widow to abort her 'illicit' child and she is tortured and humiliated by the women in her own community. Yet another episode, centering on the question of the 'honour' of the entire community, provokes an anguished questioning from Pawar as to "Why should this so-called honour, this murderer of humanity, this tool of self-destruction, be so deeply rooted in women's blood? Why" (156)?

After the death of her father, his insistence on education for girls ringing in her ears, Pawar grows from a school-bunking and truant-playing girl to being an

industrious and dedicated student, continuing her higher education after marriage, despite being vehemently dissuaded by her husband. She describes the excitement which set her heart aflutter when she met Harishchandra during her teenage years, and went on several clandestine rendezvous with him. This romantic interlude lasting several years is unprecedented in a Dalit autobiography. Acknowledging the role of popular romantic novels in Marathi, and films in her socialization, she describes how the once-reluctant student blossoms into a confident and bold young teenager in school, participating in theatre workshops, enacting central roles in plays and delivering speeches without any stage-fright. Married to Harishchandra in a simple, ritual-less Buddhist wedding, as against a typical wedding ceremony lasting several days in the Konkan area, the couple move to Bombay from Ratnagiri (the move from the village to the city being another trope in a dalit autobiography) and this inaugurates the twin-pronged activist- cum- writer phase in her adult life.

Activists in the Ambedkar movement discover a bold and articulate speaker in her. This initial period is marked by a productive restlessness which makes her introspect on her own experiences, of growing up as a woman, of casteism, of differences in the status of women in rural and urban areas etc. This time her creativity finds a vent in another medium that of writing short stories. Regularly invited to read her stories in Asmitadarsha Sahitya Sammelanas, she soon discovers her literary calling and begins to write stories. Ironically, stung by a compliment paid to her about the 'cultured' language used by her leads her to deeply reflect on the issue of aesthetics in literature—"Which culture were they talking about? Whose dominance were they praising? Patriarchy? Caste system? Class? What was it? And why was *our* writing termed uncivilized, uncultured" (232)? Interacting with the Dalit activists at close quarters, she offers a very prescient comment on the exclusionary nature of the Dalit movement—"The people from the Dalit movement treated women in the same discriminatory manner as if they were some inferior species […]" (235). Organizing

programs, writing plays and stories, founding Dalit women's organizations, delivering speeches, her life had taken turn an irreversible turn.

Describing the lives of Dalit women, Gopal Guru says that the moral code imposed by Dalit patriarchy relegated Dalit women into the private sphere and denied them public visibility. And when, Urmila Pawar moves beyond her prescribed roles as a wife and a mother, and becomes visible in the public domain, her husband Harishchandra is extremely resentful and makes it difficult for her to perform her domestic and public duties. In frustration, she describes herself as a 'trapeze artist' performing a balancing act between her various roles as a wife, a mother, a woman, an activist, a writer and a student. She feels a growing sense of alienation and estrangement from her husband whose reactions to her growth are ambivalent in that he expresses a sense of pride in her achievements while being resentful of her growing presence in the public domain. Conditioned as he is by gender ideologies, his expectations of a docile and submissive wife run against a spirited Pawar active in the public domain while dutifully fulfilling all her domestic obligations. She voices the tensions which erupt in the domestic sphere thus—"Gradually it became clear to me that everything that gave me an independent identity—my writing, […] my education, my participation in public programs irritated Mr. Pawar no end" (246). So strong is the stranglehold of gender ideologies that despite fulfilling her domestic obligations single-handedly, her husband often induces feelings of guilt in her vis-à-vis the upbringing of her children. She reveals the pressures that gender ideologies exert in making women conform to cultural norms and definitions of womanhood, "I continued living in the house with a smiling face. That is what a woman is trained to do in spite of such intense humiliation" (310). The process of critical understanding of the self as it is shaped by both material conditions and discursive practices is very much part of the emancipatory project of feminism. Emphasizing the typicality of her own subordinate condition as a Dalit woman, she says, "This was not an isolated picture of an unusual household. It was representative of the way things were in most of our households. All were run like

this. In addition, the woman had to behave as if she were a deaf and dumb creature" (247). Her narrative itinerary reveals how, due to her self-reflexivity and introspection, both caste and gender get transformed into political categories from being merely experiential categories. Her ability to engage in critical reflection and introspection is responsible for the trajectory of her growth and individuation. Having experienced discrimination throughout her life on account of both her caste and gender identity, she is now able to fathom the complex dynamics of the intersectional markers of identity. Her mind full of turbulence, she begins to pore over basic issues concerning identity—"I felt that a woman was also an individual, just as a man was, and was entitled to all the rights of an individual"(248). Again, it is her resilience, endurance and her determination to study which enable her to sail through the turbulent waters of domesticity. As she becomes more and more involved in the women's movement and the Dalit movement, she begins to understand theoretically the mechanisms by which patriarchy also functions by coopting women, making them internalize its 'norms' and become complicit in other women's oppression—"How we women nurture and protect patriarchy, like a baby in the cradle" (240)! Forming life-changing friendships with women like Hira Bansode and Chhaya Datar, Vidya Bal and Usha Mehta while interrogating the reductive concept of universal sisterhood, she becomes immersed in the women's movement, which gave her "a new vision, a new perspective of looking at women" (248). She now begins to internalize and understand the real import of ideas of gender equality, which do not remain merely abstract concepts propagated by the women's movement. Without romanticizing the women's movement, she acknowledges the support systems it provided to women in distress. At the same time like other Dalit feminists, she voices her strong protest against the women's movement which was largely concerned with middle class, upper caste women's lives. Highlighting the exclusionary nature of both the women's movement and the Dalit movement, what Rege has presciently termed the "the savarnisation of womanhood and masculinization of Dalithood" (Rao *Gender & Caste* 91) she avers, "Women's issues

did not have any place on the agenda of the Dalit movement and the women's movement was indifferent to the issues in the Dalit movement" (261). Locked as Dalit women are in oppressive caste and gender structures, Pawar doesn't merely offer portrayals of Dalit women's subjection, victimhood and vulnerability; rather the focus is also on their agency in seizing a greater role in shaping their lives. Through her writing and activism, she creates space for herself as a political subject and the inscription of her subjectivity should be seen as a powerful political act.

Recognizing the various forms of oppression resulting from the intersectionalities of multiple vectors of identity such as gender, caste and class, she begins to truly understand Ambedkar's idea about organic relationship between the caste system and patriarchal control of women's sexuality. Her in-depth study of Ambedkar's ideas reveals to her how women were the gateways to the caste system. She recognizes that the most radical, activist politics develop when one tries to understand the dynamics and mechanisms of oppression and then forges coalitions with other oppressed people. She begins to interrogate dominant accounts of history and the role of collective memory. Finding a conspicuous silence in the archival material about the role and agency of Dalit women in the Ambedkarite movement, she and Meenakshi Moon carry out research on the subject and construct a history of these women and rescue their contribution from oblivion—"The women in the movement left an indelible print on the history through their indefatigable work. They had been harassed by their families and by people at home and outside; they had been subjected to harsh words, were berated and at times badly beaten up by their husbands. And yet their history now lay forgotten" (295).

Finally, autobiography, predicated as the genre is on self-revelation and self-exposure, sometimes runs the risk of being indulgently solipsistic and narcissistic. Pawar's text, while mapping her interiority, never falls into the trap of what Felski calls 'indulgent navel gazing.'(Smith & Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 87) It charts the process of a Dalit woman's assertion of a politicized identity against the backdrop of

the lives of several generations of Dalit men and women in the Konkan area. The narrative inscribes Dalit women's subjectivities as they are shaped by turbulent historical processes such as the encounter with colonial modernity through enrolment in the British army, education provided by missionaries, a discourse of equal rights, transition to the city, empowerment of Dalits through education, social movements such as the women's movement and the anti-caste movement, new and changing forms of conjugal and parental relationships in the urban domain etc.

Without subscribing to any essentialist characterizations of women's autobiographies as being fragmented and discontinuous as opposed to men's narratives being linear and continuous, Pawar's narrative is marked by some distinctive stylistic features. The life-story, instead of proceeding in a chronological fashion, has a circular shape, beginning and ending with life in Phansvale Village in the Konkan area. Though the writer hasn't provided titles for the individual chapters, as some writers tend to do, the chapters are structured around a particular nucleus, for instance, her forefathers vis-à-vis the dominant community, education, marital life, the literary vocation and activism. The narrative flows fluidly, despite digressions in each chapter which function to enliven the narrative. The writer captures the distinctive cultural traditions and life-worlds of the Mahar community by heavily drawing upon the oral traditions of the folk in the Konkan area and including wedding songs, farmer's songs, caustic proverbs, vitriolic abuses, Buddhist chants and subversive jokes etc. The narrative makes a departure from most Dalit autobiographies in that it inscribes Pawar's sexual attraction towards Harishchandra and the resultant romantic interlude into the text. Pawar's inclusion of the episode pertaining to the start of menstruation and childbirth in the text not only challenges normative definitions of experiences considered 'appropriate' for literary texts but also provides another instance of how women's life narratives, by giving space to women's bodily experiences, reconfigure canonical autobiographical narratives, which privilege cerebral and 'disembodied' subjectivity. Since both Dalits and women have had to contend with the burden of pollution taboos, Pawar's inclusion

of a Dalit woman's experiences of menstruation in the narrative further defies definitions of Dalit women as polluted. Another marked feature of the text is the way in which the entire narrative, one of Pawar's growth into a confident, assertive and resolute woman, is punctuated by several episodes of loss. In fact, Pawar is able to fully relate to her mother and empathize with her sense of loss and anguish only after the loss of her own son. She says, "I find her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering and agony that links us" (304).Contending with the loss of her father at a very young age, the untimely deaths of two of her brothers, then the death of her mother, the anchor of the family, and finally culminating in the tragic suicide of her son and the death of her husband by cancer—the narrative is marked by an overwhelming sense of personal loss and trauma. Yet the narrative reflects the dignified and resilient persona of the writer, without her betraying any traces whatsoever of maudlin self-pity. Pawar doesn't bemoan her individual circumstances or resort to a politics of defensiveness around caste or gender issues. Rather, her politics translates into a politics of activism, a politics which seeks to recognize, expose and destroy the systems of domination and oppression. Governed as Dalit autobiographies are, to a large extent, by the prescriptive constraints of identity politics, Pawar's narrative refuses to succumb to these dictates and often turns a critical gaze upon the regressive customs and traditions of the community. She doesn't ever fall into the trap of what M.S.S. Pandian calls "caste narcissism" (Pandian, 34). Not only does she offer a scathing critique of Dalit patriarchy, but wryly observes her sister's susceptibility towards 'sanskritisation' in her imitation of Brahmanical mannerisms and customs. In fact, the concluding episode in the narrative, which includes her visit to Phansavale Village, reveals to her the frightening hold of superstitious practices over the minds of her own people. The penultimate paragraph in the text sums up her critical attitude "Mindsets frozen in rituals and casteism scare me" (320).

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