

# Presentation of Food, Hunger and Poverty in Dalit Autobiography: With Reference to Urmila Pawar and Bama.

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.02.2019.p8690

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.02.2019.p8690>

**Abstract-** Autobiography is record of individual's struggle to reach the goal in life. Poverty is major obstacle to reach that aim, because hunger distracts the attention. When we read Dalit Autobiography the most common factor among all the autobiographies is poverty. Dalit autobiographies give us account of life story with along with the suffering from the hunger, scarcity food and utter poverty to full fill basic needs. Usually we see detailed description about food in these autobiographies. The intention behind this may be to introduce their food and food habit to other people or to show other people Dalit have never eaten food of other people

**Index Terms-** Poverty, food, hunger, caste, society, culture, community, oppressed.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The terms food, hunger, and poverty are strongly connected with each other and they are very significant in everybody's life. Eating food is a fundamental human activity, which is necessary for survival. Hunger is a basic human instinct. Hunger and eating are connected with the financial position of the person. The food we eat represents what we are. It stands as the powerful image in the presentation of culture and social status. The theme of food is also associated with other fields like anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, nutrition, geography and ecology. We can sense the particular bonding between food, personality, social origin, and geographical availability. In present society, there is great importance for the interest in food. The theme of food has recently started dominating literature because it portrays peculiar traditional rules and habits in the act of eating. Themes related to food were common even in the literature which is written long back, but their food was presented with the ideal image but in recent literature food categories caste and creeds of the society. Hunger is another face of food. It is said that when we don't have anything to eat we feel more hunger. Poverty leads for the scarcity of the food and it leads for hunger. Financial status decides our quality and quantity of food. Hunger makes human physically and mentally weak and make human unable to concentrate on anything. If a person is hungered his/hers ideas rotate around only how to fill the belly other things became secondary. Especially in the life of Dalits food, hunger and poverty are the common terms. The presentation

of food in autobiography is concerned; it is associated with memory and feelings. Especially when we study Dalit autobiography food plays a vital role to present the economic condition of the writer. The writer selected for study Bama and Urmila Pawar in their autobiography dedicated major portion for the descriptions for food habits. They used food as a metaphor to their situation.

Urmila Pawar throughout her autobiography gives references to poverty, food, and hunger. She belongs to Mahar community of Maharashtra lives in Konkan region, Later she lived in Mumbai. She gives us details of the way of life, their poverty and the food her community people prepare and eat. Her community people's main livelihood comes from the weaving of the bamboo baskets. Dalit women faced many difficulties in life; they were affected to a greater extent by poverty and unemployment and caste violence. Most of the men in the family didn't take the financial responsibility of the family. Their major portion of earning is always spent on drinking. Every house had its own share of drunkards. In such conditions, women were responsible for running their homes and for taking care of children and old people. It is a woman who runs the family. The group of women goes to the forest to collect the bamboo and other firewood daily. They keep them dry for and weave the basket from the bamboo which was brought earlier. They carry those baskets and other firewood to the city to sell. They walk barefoot miles together. The regular food in every house is Bhakri, ambalee and dried fish. Only a few people eat rice daily. Urmila mentions that there was separate food items were cooked for the male members of the family. Though the responsibility on women they were ill-treated, especially daughters-in-law were scolded for everything. Only at the time of festivals they prepare and eat good food. Every child of her community waits eagerly for the festival just to eat good food. Urmila tells the food was always scarce in her house. Her father died very early, the responsibility of the family with five children was on the shoulders her mother, who was much miser. Her community people eat the flesh of dead animals, but it was forbidden in her house. Coarse rice grains brought from the ration shop for the lunch was their regular food. She writes, "We ate this rice with pithale, a cooked flour of pulses called kulith. Sometimes we had some leafy vegetables, from our backyard. Sometimes we had bhakri made of milo that is red jowar, a kind of millet or sometimes even of husk. ....we ate with bhakri with small inexpensive dried fishes with onions, red chilli powder with salt". They never used to eat fresh fish, unless they were tiny and

cheap. In rainy season her mother used to cook pot full of leafy curry for both rice and bhakri. Her mother used to tell her children stories related to food and made her children to eat food with interest. At the time of festival special sweet dishes were made from the rice flour. When Urmila's father was alive her mother used to make modak and kheer at the time of Ganapati festival but later she has left cooking all those food items. Urmila came to know about to her food items like ladu, karanjya and waran etc only after her sister's marriage, At the fish season, her mother used to buy small fishes by fishermen and dried them and stores them for lean days. Urmila mentions the names of the items cooked of fish by her mother such as, kaat, saar, and katyacha motal. They used to eat mango and jackfruit excessively because they are easily available to them. She tells ironically the mangos of Ratnagiri have reached Arab countries but not to us. They used to eat ordinary mangos that too fallen and dried up mangos. Her mother used to bring jackfruit, but they have to eat it before meals, so that they can eat less and that much of food was saved, whenever her mother brings jackfruit she used to cook less than usual. Her mother used to cook curry by using jack fruit seed or serve them boiled with salt. Urmila never carried Tiffin box to school because in her house they never cooked the food worth carrying outside and she didn't want to face the embracing situation in the school because of her food moreover her upper caste friends didn't allow her to sit with them and share the food with them. But she used open their box and smell the food from the Tiffin boxes of her friends when they were out of the class. Once all her classmates decided to cook a meal at her friend's house, whose parents were away. They discussed the things to be brought, Urmila was very eager with that idea and she was asking enthusiastically, what she has to bring, but they were trying to avoid her, finally, they said her to bring money. They cooked tasty dal, rice, and vegetables. Though they all eat together, they didn't allow her to touch anything. Next day she was horrified to hear the gossip of the girls. In Urmila's words 'she ate like a monster,' 'God she ate like the goat,' 'She ate so much of everything'. It was so humiliating that I died a thousand deaths that day'. Other such incidents happen in her life. Urmila never attended the wedding with a grand feast. She has attended the marriages of poor people of her community where only rice is served and guests would have to be satisfied with whatever is served because they can't offer more. Once she attended the marriage at her sister-in-law's place along with her cousins. There they were enjoying the food and asking the cook to serve again and again. The cook said, "whose daughters are these? they are eating like monsters". When Urmila was in school she used were uniform, she never felt humiliation with dressing, but when she joined college she felt ashamed. She has only two sets of clothes which she wore alternatively for three or four days. She got her first scholarship of Rupees 12 (twelve) in the fourth standard and for the first time in her life, she could see the Ten Rupees note and one rupee two notes the teacher had asked her to buy two new frocks for herself from the money. But immediately she gave it to her mother. Urmila Pawar was much sensitive about her caste as well as her poverty so during school period onwards her conscious mind was aware of the limitations of the person of lower caste and meaning of poverty not described in the books but in reality. She started doing part-time work after completing her matriculations so that she can support her mother. After her marriage, she came out of poverty, but in the second part of her

autobiography, she explains the poverty of the Dalit people in the slums of Bombay. Her autobiography covers three generation of her family and exhibits three pattern of life of her community people First the life of Dalit in the villages, there pitiable conditions, how they were caught in the web of various religious and social practices and superstitions, crushed by poverty and hunger and weight of their suffering. Secondly is another face her community. As result of modernization, urbanization and industrialization a new Dalit middle class came into existence, which was facing double alienation; alienation from their own caste as well as their new found social class. These Dalit middle class didn't want to show other middle class people their origin, from which they wanted to disconnect; the other side middle class communities to which Dalit want to associate didn't accept these people because of deep rooted caste system. Thirdly is the inhumane life of Dalits in the slums in the cities struggling to get basic needs of the life. They were human beings but had to live like paltry hens, victims of their circumstances. Their human energy was reduced to nothing but dust. But all these have faced scarcity of food, poverty and hunger in their life at one or the stage. Bama in her autobiography gives the details of pathetic conditions of her community. She tells about her community and her people and their lifestyle. Most of her people are agricultural labourers when there is no call for work in the field; they go up to the woods on the mountains and make a living by gathering firewood and selling it. In the rainy season, they do fishing and sell them. Bama explains how she and her family worked for daily meals. She used to wake up very early, pour some millet porridge into a calling vessel and run to the field. She tells 'we would go here and there all over the fields where the groundnut crop had been pulled up and use our shovels at random to hammer into the earth and rake it, so that we could pick up all the stray groundnuts, sell it to the tradesmen there and buy some rice or a little-broken grain. You couldn't put the broken grain gruel in your mouth. It stank so much, but if we had no money broken grain gruel was all we could eat. Sometimes I sold my groundnuts and brought the money home to my mother. Sometimes I just gave her the groundnuts' (P.No.50). Her people work hard to get daily meals because they live on gruel. There only desire is to get sufficient food, cloth, and shelter. They never thought of luxuries in life. She used to work hard to earn money, she goes out to collect shells and nuts and carry them carefully without cracking the nuts. She used to go to the mountain jungle to collect the firewood. She with her friends climbed the steep mountain slopes one by one; pick up the dried pieces of wood that fall here and there and then tie them together into bundles. To collect swings and file in the forest, they have to give money to forest guard. If they get sufficient fuel they will sell it, if they get less bring it for the fire at the house. When Bama was a girl she used to enjoy the tasty food brought by her grandmother but she had always the question why her granny mix the food she brings, later she realized that her granny brings the leftover food of her higher caste people and the witnessed the way how the higher caste people used to throw that left food in the basket of her granny she stopped eating that food. Bama tells both men and women do the same work, but men are always paid more, even though both husband and wife work whole day, they used to earn the money which can fulfill their basic needs. Bama explains she did not remember when she played with friends, for them play means go to the lake or well to catch fish, go to orchards to collect

fallen fruits, collect twigs in the forest, but they used to play every month whenever they were taken to the church. She tells about the innocence of her people and exploitation of authority at the time of Christmas. Her people bring a variety of fruits to offer priest, she tells we have never tasted those fruits but every year we offer them to priest to please him and get a blessing from him. In those days Bama really thought that by the touch of the holy cross to the forehead and saying something in confession box really solve all the problems and make us free from worries. For this, these people push themselves and try to please the priest and offer their gifts to get his blessing. They were eager for the touch of holy cross and showering of holy water. They knelt down in front of the priest. At that time they have to give money to him to receive some holy pictures, New Year calendar, and fruits. If money was not given, he used to scold them like children of whores. Bama's father was an army. He used to send little money to the house. Her mother and granny always worked in the field there life was considerable. But at the time of India-China and India-Pakistan war, her father wasn't able to come to the home or he didn't send money to them. Her mother managed household by coolie, sometimes they ate boiled drumstick leaves only. After the school, Bama also used to go to work, at least to collect dry cow dung for fuel. The same situation was continued till she reached the 8th class. After that, she was sent to boarding school. She felt very uncomfortable there and decided to leave the hostel, but she had fear of her brother who was studying in the city. In the hostel, she felt very inferiority complex by looking at the dress, hairstyle and other belongings of the remaining girls in the hostel. In the hostel, the warden used to insult them by telling these children became fat in the hostel and became thin when they go home for holidays. She always feels hesitate to mix with them on the contrary they also didn't want to mix Bama with them because of her caste. At that time she realized that 'as per my community was low-caste; I had no money either. At the same, I thought, I would study hard and make good. So I worked really hard....Study do well and gained lots of marks. Friends used to ask 'why aren't you wearing anything in your ears and what about neck? You don't even have chappals on your feet? In her house, they used to bring new cloth twice a year, once on Christmas and another at the time of Chinnamalai festival. They have to manage them for the year. After her school her parents oppose her admission to the college, they don't have money for fees and they have the fear that they may not get proper groom for her. Her teacher who was nun gave Bama her earrings by selling them Bama took admission to college. In college for a whole week, she went in the same skirt, jacket and davani. All her classmates looked at her as if she outlandish creature. Some of them asked did she possess one set of clothing. Didn't she have any other? Bama felt deeply humiliated. She told them her mother was bringing her belongings went to the hostel and wept, because she was

completely departed from the house her parents told her not to come back home because she has taken admission to the college in opposition to parents opinion. She has completed her college education in two or three dresses. On the farewell day, all her friends decided to wear silk saris. They said Bama to bring silk sari from the house. But in her house there not even good saris and silk sari are out of the question. Bama said she will wear silk sari on that day. On the day of function, she hid in the bathroom the whole day came out after all the function was over. She faced lots of problems because of caste and poverty. She faced poverty and hunger until she joined into convent. But when came out of the convent it was again difficult to set her life. She managed it with the help of her friends. Major part of her autobiography gives us details about the food, poverty and hunger of her own family and her community.

Like this these two writers through their autobiographies presented how they faced scarcity of food and being a low caste women never seen verity food till they reach the considerable position in the society. Hunger, food and poverty has become constant partner in their life. It was best presented in the autobiographies. When we study any Dalit autobiography these three things play very vital role in their life. Because their basic struggle of life is to get sufficient food, good cloths and considerable money. When these basic needs fulfilled they will think other comforts in the life. Therefore we can say that basically Dalit autobiographies are representation food, hunger and poverty of Dalit community than the personal stories.

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