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The Progression of Women from Suppression to Self-Assertion in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Urmila Pawar's *Mother Wit*

Abstract

Different facets of subverted women's identity in India and USA are splited because of the way race functions in USA and how the caste operates in India. Black women are burdened from racial, sexual and class disadvantages. They are strained to live in a much oppressed conditions in a male dominated society. Similarly a nascent Dalit Feminism evoked in India. Dalit women were spoiled of their honour, dignity and identity. The responsibility of bringing them back, their discarded humanity and their independence falls on the shoulders of black women writers in America as well as Indian Dalit writers in India through their writings. The systematical attempts were done by the writers in the respective nations, with the living experiences of struggled and questioned to mitigate the inescapable subordination.

Key words: Gender, Race, Class, Suppression, Self-Assertion

Introduction

Alice Walker is one of the exponents who trust in the black feminist movement. She, African American novelist, poet, activist and short story writer, was born on 9 February 1944 in Georgia, United States. There are many to her credit as *Every Day Use* (1973), *Meridian* (1976), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) etc. One of the works Discussed in this paper *The Color Purple* (1982) is assessed as the magnum opus among all of her works. She asserts: “Black women now offer varied live varied, live models of how it is impossible to live. We have made a new place to move” (73). It portrays the story of Celie, a mule-like girl and illiterate, In spite of illiteracy, poverty, mental and physical oppression surpasses her fate through self-consciousness and tries to measure the very sensitive facets of womanist consciousness. Harihar Kulkarni rightly describes how African American women have been economically robbed and suppressed: “The American slavery that was basically embedded in capitalistic ideals exploited black women as an essential part of labor force”. (57)

Urmila Pawar , a literary personality, familiar for her short stories in Marathi Literature, was born in May 1945 in Adagoan village of Ratnagiri District, Bombay. She is an esteemed Maharashtrian writer, and considered to be one of the acclaimed writers representing Dalit culture and gender issues. She is known for her short stories, which reverberate with her self-statement that is a Woman, a Dalit and a Buddhist. *Aaydaan* is an auto-biographical and much celebrated work of Pawar, translated as *The Weave of My life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* by Maya Pandit. *Mother Wit* (2013), one of the works discussed in this paper, is a collection of short stories, translated by Veena Deo, who gave the introduction to the book, asserts: “Pawar’s Feminism is evident. Think of the presence in almost story of strong and clever woman (pp.x). Her fiction surveys to terminate the power of caste, class and gender, in achieving that she tries

to show the realities of women in Dalit community through bold and powerful stories. Each of her stories deals with women and their fight against the societal margins and boundaries.

The present paper is an attempt to observe the struggle of women against the suppression through self-assertion in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Urmila Pawar's *Mother Wit*.

Suppression to Self- Assertion

Black women are oppressed from racial, sexual and class disadvantages. It traumatized them in different levels: physical, mental, moral and also intellectual. Patricia Collins, women's existence is structured along three interdependent dimensions which all operate through oppression—economy, polity, and ideology” (6). While suffering from the terrors of the enslavement black women struggled their best to keep hold of their self-individualism. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a clear evidence of socio-political forces that repeatedly pass on over individual's aim of self-identity into projects of national alignment. This is an epistolary novel exploring the damaging effects of male dominance upon Celie's spirit and her final absolution through the love of her husband's mistress, Shug Avery. Celie oversteps her troubles through self awareness and strives to point the sensitive angles of womanist consciousness. Her life is portrayed in an epistolary way, first written to God and later to her sister Nettie. She writes to God to guide her survive the physical and emotional abuse from her suffering at the hands of her step-father. This novel is the journey of Celie from powerlessness to the state of full empowerment from self-denial to self recognition.

Celie's very first letter to God shows the sorrowful way. She becomes a victim to sexual assaults and the brutalities of her step-father, Alfonso, subjugating herself to forced rape. Celie becomes pregnant. The social bond of the father and the daughter has been changed into a defying relationship. Her father threatens her not to tell his brutality anyone Celie is afraid of revealing her torture, worries, and burdens. She believes God only can release from the clutches of evil hands. She writes, “I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. May be you

can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (3). It is noted that Celie’s initial gender subordination is the consequence of a brutal masculinist, through beatings and rapes, and then marries her off to his friend, Albert, known as Mr. ----- by Celie. A wife means to be inferior, slavish and polite and the punching bag for the man. She feels herself as a tree, when she is in moments of severe physical pain. This is a striking example of black woman’s vicinity to the passive and grief of nature. It can be as new standing point of life is attained by Celie when she meets Shug Avery, Albert mistress and Sofia Butler, Harpo’s wife. Sofia butler teaches to Celie how to live with one’s husband as a self-respectable person. When Harpo marries Sofia, Harpo’s father, The Mayor hates that marriage. The Mayor tries to take revenge on Sofia, ordered the police to apply third degree punishment to torture and destroy Sofia. She is represented the black woman who wants to fight for her self- respect even though she was defeated by the Mayor. Her struggle for self constitutes as an individual who is both black and woman. However, her struggle is not successful; it gives a personality for her to show her fearlessness and dexterity to beat her racist and sexiest oppressions.

Shug’s love for Celie is very profound and developed in an constant physical relation as in a strong emotional association. As a result Shug influences Celie to celebrate her individuality. Shug becomes not only an ideal for Celie but also a mother who Celie never had. “Shug forces Albert to stop brutalizing Celie and Celie develops a pleasing and mutual relationship with Shug” (96). She secures Celie from Albert and gives understanding of her body, the vital spirituality of the world, helps to recover back her lost sister, Nettie. Shug helps her to find the letter of Nettie about her whereabouts from Albert and changes celie’s life as self- sufficient. Additionally, Shug for the first time in Celie’s life, gives her identity by naming a song as “Miss Celie’s Song”. Earlier to this Celie was never recognized as an self-reliant and was always uncared, avoided, scorned and abused. Celie moves from Chidhood to the position of adulthood, the position of real human being in the companionship of Shug. When Alberts

tries to stop her from going to Memphis with Shug, Celie is more than a tiger now and roars, “You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong I say, it’s time to leave you and enter into the creation. And you dead body just the welcome mat I need” (100). Through her letters to God, she remolds her internal which are remained hidden from her life of working acceptance.

Letters are climatic points of a series of individualism which Celie creates to contemplate between herself and her subjugating environment. When she explains Harpo how she survives with Alberts abuses, she reveals her strategy for shifting and thus protecting herself: “I make myself wood, I say myself, Celie you a tree.”(78). Celie endures the compulsion to rebel by becoming lifeless, which damages her entire world. She understand clearly that she has lost all emotions. “patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It more like patting another piece of wood not a living tree”(68). Shug doesn’t believe the concept about God, because the portraits of God and Biblical illustrations, and the pics of divinity, Christ is a white man and other fellows are described as whites, not black. Shug satirizes Celie’s image of God as: “A big and old and tall and grey beard and white who wears white robes and goes barefooted and has bluish gray eyes” (186). Shug tells Celie that the inception of God Arises from a white ideological structure which is portrayed into the Bible through the church: “when I found out God was white and a man, I lost interest” (190). Both Shug and Nettie tries to make false the image of God. She tells god is inside you and inside everybody else. Don’t look like nothing. It ain’t a picture show. It ain’t something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself, I believe God is everything” (167). Thus the function of her writing changes as her conception of her own body. Celie slowly begins to protest herself expressing her hidden thoughts and opposing her position as slave to her husband. Alice walker addresses *The Color Purple* to the spirit: without whose assistance neither this book nor I would have been written” (400).

Letter and body therefore become effective opposite elements. The body now permits her to change. For she initially has been collapsed by an external force, rape when she holds control of that demolition by displacing part of herself into her letters, she is able to rectify herself. As she changes her thought of her body from ugliness to beauty. She learns to rename the restraints that had silenced her. *The Color Purple* portrays long lasted journey. At the end, she could find the light. She gains self-satisfaction in achieving her goal which takes place to be her destiny as well.

Urmila Pawar is an applauded Maharashtrian writer, known as a feminist writer and leader of Lib movement. She has accustomed her after Daya Pawar, Baby Kamble and Shantabai Gokhale as a dalit writer. Her recent work, *Mother Wit*, is a statement to her valiant, vivid stories, which played an important role of Indian Dalit Literature and Indian Feminist Literature. It has been translated into English by Veena Deo, who gave the introduction to the book. Each of the short stories in *Mother Wit* deals with women and their struggle against the social obstructers and limitations. The women in her stories engage in various roles each short story very concisely reveals gender identity and gender struggle. Urmila Pawar's protagonists are very illustrative of real people, letting the extent of empathy leak through her very sensible plots and settings. Each story of pawar surveys identical aspect gender discrimination and the protagonists of Pawar's stories represents and identifies a specific role which a woman plays within the setting of the Indian society, and different levels of discrimination facing of her gender.

Maharashtrian Dalit Literature is characterized by angry and self-assertive voices. It recites the historical iniquities and the way social structure has discriminated the people on line of caste. The movement is about self-assertion soundly affected by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's work. Within Dalit Literature, women's writing finds more sheets of protest and conflict. Maharashtrian women's Literature is a result of double oppression, women face from their own

community and from the upper castes and classes. The plight of Dalit women was abused by the upper caste men and women as well as their men. “Woman is Dalit from beginning to End” (Shiv Kumar 356). Urmila Pawar’s *Mother Wit* suggests the wit and strength of these women, holds and exercises when they faced with different situations. The stories of *Mother Wit* are written by a woman who write with the spots of the past she has lived through the real stories of the people around her that struggle opposed to their sharp facts. Pawar’s short stories are a spark into the lives of Dalit women. Women are portrayed with self-assertive voice, protest in the light of their own will. They have intensified sense of their condition and always make efforts to defeat the inevitable suppression.

The story called Mother (Aaye) is the story of a widowed mother, struggling to survive the domination of the people, who are trying to oppress her. She fights with the all advantages of the patriarchal society, tries to command her life and take away her freedom of thoughts and decision. Tatya, the brother-in-law of the Mother, after the death of her husband tries to kill her children and sells the property. Mother grasps and recites

“My dear husband....my master....my love....You left your children behind and your gone. You told me not to trust your brother, Tatya. You were right my raja. He poisoned your son at night, raja. He made him unconscious. All the crows have gathered like birds of prey, arey. They are waiting to sell your land. Now what should I do....Oh God! (Pawar 10)

Mother’s words beat Tatya’s cruel intension and he was stunned. He lost his valour and get off the house like a cat without looking at Mother at all. Another one, called Sixth Finger(Shav Bot) portrays the story of the woman, being childless at first, has to face the forceful pressure and continuous attacks on her character, leads to the cause of depression by the fingers being raised at her. The story called The Odd One (Vegli) shows the life of a working woman to overcome the caste and gender subordination which have imposed upon her, while she gets rejected and abused by unknown and her-in-laws. “Like mad buffalos, the

neighboring women glared at Nalini. Her father-in-law performed to the audience too and started insulting her in every way he could” (Pawar 67). Armor, another story of *Mother Wit*, the protagonist of the story is Indira, belongs to very lower caste, and defeats the harsh teasing of the men with great wit. In spite of the divergent conditions the protagonists identify themselves as self-sufficient and the theme goes on to all the stories in *Mother Wit*: how a woman is suppressed by many different agents around her, mostly because of her gender, and her refusal to bow down to the inequalities of the society.

Each of Pawar’s short stories ends in a straight-talking and dumb-founded way. Each story represents pointedly the gender balance. All stories have collected a beauty and life of their own, attaching efficiently to the indigenous Feministic Literature and Dalit Literature in the country. Pawar tries to show the lives of strong and clever women who drive the audience to laughter and anger by using the classic short stories form with its stunning endings to great outcome. As critic Eleanor Zelliot observes, there is ‘tucked in every story, an inscribe about a Buddhist Vihara or Dr. Ambedkar.... All of her stories arise from the Dalit world, showing the great variety of Dalit life.

Conclusion

It is evident that the divergent lands like those of United States and India were having the challenges of feministic standpoints. The lands were affected by the elements of historical injustices and marginalized the populations on the basis of race and class and especially women are strained by the additional devastating line, gender. The women writers of respective nations tried to awake the society to make it realize the atrocities on women and educate the women to overcome the patriarchal domination. Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* and Urmila Pawar in *Mother Wit* project their thoughts of women’s suppression with obvious proof and their struggle to defeat it with self-assertion.

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