



Social consciousness in Laxman Gaikwad's Uchalya (The Branded)

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7

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Laxman Gaikwad's autobiography the Branded or Uchalya received literary award i.e. Sahitya Akademi Award in 1988 for it narrated the plight of Pathrut community which has been ironically branded as thief by the main stream society. In doing so Laxman Gaikwad refuses to go along with the oppressive thinking patterns that branded the Uchalyas socially and legally. British government labeled this pathrut community as criminal tribes by passing a criminal tribes Act 1871.

Due to crushing poverty and the stigma of belonging to a criminal community, they are left with no choice but to resort to steeling or theft. Laxman Gaikwad discloses, the story of his early life almost smashed by poverty, hunger illiteracy. Superstitions and indifferent attitude adopted by society towards his community being free in Independent India. Having educated Gaikwad narrates his experiences disclosing the lives of the Uchalyas he argues for a human treatment of the branded as well as advocates on equal space for them in the existing order. Belonging to the literature of protest known as the dalit literature that emerges on the Indian literary scene in the 1980s, narrative in the Branded exposes the injustice inflicted upon caste hierarchies. Just like all other dalit-writings, it subscribes to dalit aesthetics, consciousness and secular values which pave the way for a just order.

Laxman Gaikwad born in 1956 in the Uchalya community at Dhanegaon (Tq. Latur, Maharashtra) he is a social worker and writer by occupation. His writing visualise a process of fundamental socio-political transformation as he raises his voice against a



oppressive and unjust social environment boosted by the emancipator efforts under dalit movement initiated by Dr. Ambedkar since 1930s.

The autobiographical narrative presents the struggle of Gaikwad to get education and respectable job. He gives a stark picture of the abominably unhygienic living conditions of the trine. Moreover centuries of oppressions make them believe that their community would be doomed if the children from Uchalya community go to school. In fact these members believe that professional thieves can guard themselves against starvation they train their children for stealing. They also train them for the beating of the police (the branded 15-17) Gaikwad's grandparents Lingappa Gaikwad and Narasa bai, brother Manik daada, Anna Bhau and Harchanda Solely depend on thieving. However Gaikwad's father and mother earn their income by respectable means (The Branded 1-4). In fact Laxman's father, martand encourage him to acquire education. It is only education helps him to get a decent job and also encourages him to fight the oppressive practices.

Gaikwad's mother Dhondabai rejects the Uchalyas traditional ways of earning livelihood. Beaten by the police for thefts committed by her sons, and also by her husband, Dhondabai supports her family by selling milk. Dhondabai's ways of earning suggest other ways that the uchalyas could adopt to earn their livelihood with dignity. Gaikwad remembers his childhood habits indicating the most disadvantages condition of children in society.

"On getting up in the morning we never washed the coverlet but spread it on the roof to dry. The piss smell filled out nostrils with a strong odor, yet we used the same sodden coverlet. Our sense were dead and we were beyond tellings. The coverlet teemed with lice. When we killed them Harchanda and I kept the count mostly up to hundred or two hundred and then gave up.... I did not take a bath for months, nobody from the house hold ever told me to take a bath washing clothes was not even thought of. (The branded 11-12)

When Laxman skips school to search beehives for honey Pigeon nests for eggs to satisfy his hunger, he is beaten by Guruji, Though his caste, his unhygienic habits and his poverty bring embarrassment and humiliation to him, he does his school work regularly. It is education that gives this pathrut boy the confidence to write letter to the prime minister of India Indira Gandhi, "When is Gandhiji's is (Mahatma) dream going to



be fulfilled? Please take steps to see that the poor get on square meal a day at least. (The branded 79)

Education initiates the process of transformation in Laxman's life. His dirty and slovenly habits undergo a sea changes after learns the importance of cleanliness (The Branded 33) The fear of punishment by the teacher made him brush his teeth and take bath daily. Laxman Decline to consume liquor following the advice of his Guruji Gaikwad recollects his new habits at school.

"When I was in the fourth standard, My Guruji and many other people advice me not to drink. So I gave up drinking since I began to study in the forth standard. In such conditions I somehow managed to pass the board examination for the fourth standard" (the branded 70)

Laxman Gaikwad fought for the rights of mill worker at the starting period of his job he feared for a dismissal from the job that why he did not form a union against the indifferent behavior of the supervisor but lastly he decided to fight against the injustice behavior of supervisor and he raised the problem of worker and he organized the union. The worker's elected him their leader and which gave him direct access to the manager. But after few days due to slight mistakes, inflict fine and later expel him from the job.

He struggled against all odds but never thinks of stealing or going on a theiving mission. He starts the 'District pathrut samaj sanghatna' and carries out the work of the organization with the earning from the grocery shop and his cycle repair shop. In order to improve his financial condition, Laxman worked as a peon at the octroi post here he observed the anomalies of the municipality officials who earn by underhand means. He wonders why these officials are not labeled as thieves whereas his community members who steal for daily meals are branded as thieves. Through the pathrut samaj sanghatana he raised many problems of pathrut samaj and corruption of respectable figures of society. When the protestors are beaten by the police, Laxman brings out the whole incident in the daily Godatir samachar. As he knows that neither the police nor the political leaders could solve the problem of the tribes. Laxman himself warns the S.P. of Osmanabad. This scares the police patil and helps Laxman to win some justice for the wandering tribes (The Branded 196).

Laxman's organization and their welfare programmers make them realize the



insecurity of the thieving business. This struggle against the oppressive order brought a change in the perception of not only the land lords and policemen but also among the excluded Branded people. For the imperative change Laxman Gaikwad said.

“If all Indians are brothers and sisters why are not my brothers given jobs? why do we not get lands, decent houses. If we are all brothers, why are my brothers forced to resort to thieving in order to feed our people at home.” (The Branded 62)

With the help of all these above explained experiences by the narrator we can understand how Laxman Gaikwad created educational and social consciousness among pathrut community only because of education his living standard improved as well as when he was expelled from his job he never think of stealing or thieving mission. His mother Dhondabai also proved his community that we can live a respectable life with a decent work Dhondabai supports her family by selling milk. This suggests other ways that Uchalyas could adopt to earn their livelihood with dignity. This autobiographical work raised the condition and problems of pathrut community in front of world.

Reference

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