



The Upheaval of Tribal Women in Laxman Gaikwad's 'The Branded'



Suresh B. Deshmukh
Assistant Professor &
Head, Dept. of English
Majalgaon College, Majalgaon
Dist- Beed(MS) India

Research Paper :

Today's academic circle is hunted with numerous theories and criticism. Some theories have dominated literary field such as Structuralism, Deconstruction and Postcolonial theory. In such circumstances, marginal/subaltern literature is brought into focus particularly African-American and Negro literature. At the same time, the marginal/subaltern literature of Indian has been side line by critics and theoreticians. G. C. Spivak's translation of Jacques Derrida's preface 'Of Grammatology' creates storm in literary field. The critical essay of Spivak 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' makes readers and theoreticians to rethink and reassess the literary theory. This made the academicians and researchers to focus on subaltern and marginal voices of regional literature. The subaltern literature of India has been enriching in various regional languages that has been translating into

English. The most powerful impact has been created at international level by Dalit Literature particularly translated autobiographies.

The terms 'subaltern' and 'Dalit' have gained momentum to highlight oppressed voices of downtrodden.

Julian Wolfrey, et. al. says:

Term,[subaltern] taken from the work of Antonio Gramsci and used initially to define proletarian and other working-class groups, subaltern is employed in postcolonial studies after Gayatri Spivak to address dominated and marginalized groups. (Wolfrey,et al 80)

Sharankumar Limbale states the broad meaning of the word Dalit :

Harijans and neo- Buddhists are not the only Dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes--- people who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included. (11)

Whatsoever, the term 'subaltern' is especially referred to doubly marginal status of woman; and the Dalit is denoted to exploited masses of the society on account of caste, class and poverty. However, the main aim of exploring the idea behind the terms is to establish equality, justice and fraternity at all sphere of human life for the subjugated masses like Dalit, women and tribal, etc.

'The Branded' is a life sketch of an activist Laxman Maruti Gaikwad. It is translated by P.A. Kolharkar from Marathi- Uchalaya for world view. The text is a whole saga of suffering and exploitation of Denotified tribe that are branded in born criminals. Due to the same reason, the life of tribal has been reduced to inhuman level where there is no option left for them but to steal and live. The autobiography of Laxman Gaikwad gives insight to see the many problems of tribal community on account of poverty, instability, caste, and branded as criminals. All the tribal communities have been detached from the main stream of social, political and economic grounds from many years. On account of the same basis, they have been treated inhuman

manner; they have not been offered any sort of work for living. In such dejected condition, there is no option left for them but to steal for livelihood as the writer says:

'The British Government branded as born criminals and others following suit have always looked down upon us as criminals and still persist with the same parochial attitude. Denied of all decent and lawful means of livelihood the only alternative left to us is to exist by thieving, lifting, pickpocketing' (vii).

This condition of the tribal separates them from the other subaltern or Dalit masses that have been somehow associated with the so-called social system for menial work. But the tribal have completely been thrown away from social system and deprived of any sort of work. The same provision of society made their life shoddier than the other subaltern groups of society.

Going through the autobiography of Laxman Gaikwad, it seems to be the life story of an individual but at the same time penetrates many lives of people that are far away from the margin. The anguish of the protagonist is no doubt tragic one but the misery and torture of women are beyond the imaginative power of humanity. The women in the text are treated like commodity and pet animal. The lives of the women are more subjugated among the subjugated community.

The very first character of woman comes to sight is Narasabai, grandmother of the protagonist, who seems at centre of making the whole family affairs. The grandfather of the hero is a notorious thief due to the same the family has to endure torture and exploitation of police especially women of the family. Whenever the police visit to hut; they find women at home. In fact, the men of the family either run away or hide somewhere so that they can avoid the torture and direct action of police. Naturally, the women of the family act as defenders and protector of men of the family. Consequently, the women of the family face the anger of police. The author narrates:

Grandmother wailed piteously: 'See Saab, see yourself, there's nothing in the hut.'

'Your whore will know,' cried the police and grabbed our grandmother by the hair and thrashed her all over.

My mother, Dhondabai, had already slipped away into the woods as soon as she had heard of the arrival of the police.

The police were beating whomsoever their eyes fell upon- women, children. They squeezed grandmother's breasts, asking her to show the stolen goods. (2)

It shows cruelty and inhumanity of the police towards tribal women. What is fault of the grandmother? She is the innocent creature. It is the responsibility of the man of the family to look after needs of the family. The writer narrates incidents after incidents as if the thieving is the main business of his family. It is so because the existing social system never left any option to them. But most of the time the women have to face afflict of police. The grandmother tells the climax of torture and agony melted out by the policemen. She tells:

When the policemen catch me, they hang me upside down by the legs and lash the soles of my feet with a whip, thrust burning cigarette-butts into my anus. If I don't confess to the theft, they bring shit near my mouth and force me to eat it and keep on beating me (8).

It looks the police are unresponsiveness and lackluster towards the tribal; even the policemen handle the matter without women constables. Moreover, they are unconcern about the age and sex while torturing the convicts.

The status of woman in tribal community is the subordinate creature. The woman is used for commercial purpose; the polygamy is common practice in the community of tribal. Laxman Gaikwad gives another incident of Padamini that the brother of the protagonist keeps a woman despite being married. He deceived Padamini of propagating as a landlord. She comes out of blue when she knows the reality and endures wretched life. Because of the never-ending starvation, Manik somehow manages to get rid for her selling to another man:

On their return I learnt that they had sold Padmini to that man for two hundred fifty rupees. Kisan Patil took hundred fifty rupees as his commission in the bargain and Dada brought home one hundred fifty rupees (66).

It shows the callousness of the tribal men treating woman as a pet animal. The woman for them is a thing to be used and thrown away. The ceaseless poverty forced them to do the inhuman act. Their life cannot go and think beyond hunger. The whole and sole concern is to satisfy their hunger by hook or by crook.

The women in the tribal community are more vulnerable and timid. If the women lost their chastity, they would be divorced or ostracized from the community. Besides, the women do not have proper home to be safe. They are constantly in public gaze and be victim of lust of on lookers. Even, they have been raped but could not make the issue of it and be silence forever. Hence, the women are doubly marginalized. Here the author gives the account:

One day one of the sister-in-law and I were sleeping in the yard just in front of our hut. At dead of night somebody came and brazenly lay on my sister-in-law. He pressed a hand on her mouth and lay by her side. I was wide awake but pretended to be fast asleep, and lay quiet. The stranger with a rough mauling action pressed down my sister-in-law, had intercourse with her and run away. Then my sister-in-law began to bawl and shout loudly: 'Run! Run! Some bastard lay on my body and run away.'.....The sister-in-law replied that she did not allow him to sleep with her. 'The bastard was trying to lie on me and had put his palm on my mouth,' she said. She knew full well what exactly the truth was. She has prevaricated because she was afraid that Bhau, her husband, would divorce her. (86)

This is the more helpless condition of woman in general and in Uchalya community particular. On the contrary, the man can have affair with many women that is acceptable in the society, nay, that is prodigious thing but the

woman loses her chastity on account of this or that, it is a huge crime. The virginity of woman is just like a glass; once it is broken; it cannot re-mend. Such ideology has been propagated by the patriarchic society.

The author sketches many accounts of the tribal life; they can do anything for being alive like animals of dogs and tigress that eat their own offsprings. Laxman accounts the anguish of Ithi as a victim of patriarchic of selling girl child instead of son:

At last Ithi sold her pretty little daughter of hardly one and half years, whom she had borne in her womb for nine months and give birth to in pain, for 200 rupees in Pune. She kept her four years old son with her and sold her daughter, for the son will be an asset later on, he will steal and maintain the two (185).

This is really a dirge situation of the tribal who are forced to sell their children even in free India.

Laxman narrates another incident of Hirabai Kale, a Paradhī woman, who just gives birth for a child due to the husband's imprisonment; she lives only on water. For satisfying her hunger, she undergoes the Family Planning Scheme operation for getting 200 rupees. She buys a half gunny bag of grain (jowar). At the same time, there is a complaint about stealing a half gunny bag. The police arrest her without proper investigation despite that she shows the evidence of medical bill. The author depicts:

The police grilled her: 'From where did you get this half a gunny-bag of jowar?' Poor Hirabai begged and entreated piteously, 'Saheb, I've just delivered a child, and I've nothing to eat. My husband, thanks to you, is in jail. I got myself operated under the Family Planning Scheme. Out of the Rs. 200 they paid for it, I've purchased this half a gunny-bag of jowar. Saheb, I've become so weak that I've no milk in my breasts for my offspring. That's why I've purchased this jowar' (199).

Moreover, there is a debauchery of landlords in the *Laman Tanda*, where a young girl has been raped. While opposing the pitiless act of landlord, the landlords with help of hooligans beat the people of *Tanda* mercilessly in

which an innocent child is died. This is the authentic picture of tribal community neither they get help from police nor from the government. Such is the case with a *Masanjogai* family; the police do not trace the real thief so they accuse the family and torture inhumanly. Furthermore, a Jemadhar wants to buy land in low prize of a *Pathurd* but the *Pathurd* does not want to sell it. So the Jemadhar traps him false case because he belongs to one of the criminal tribes. The treatment of police is so nasty coercion, the *Pathurd* and his wife unable to stand the cruel beating and try to commit suicide. The narrator states:

At this reply the police Sub-Inspector kicked her with his boot. The poor, unfortunate wife of Jayaba crashed down. The Jemadar, who was with the Sub-Inspector, picked her up holding here by the bun of her hair, shouted, 'You harlot, you're pretending.' And again they thrashed her mercilessly. They threw her down on the ground and walloped her to their heart contain. Jayab could not stand the sight of such merciless beating. He felt that his wife was being torture in the presence. What was the use of such a life, he reflected....Finally he mustered courage and caught hold of his wife and run towards the well, thinking that they would jump in the well and commit suicide (210).

What sort of life is this, if the tribal do not live according to the expectation of the stake holder of the society, they have been crushed under wish and will of the upper strata of the society. In the tribal community, the subaltern woman is treated as a mean to use particularly by the *Panchayat*. Laxaman Gaikwad speaks about Sulabai, a relative, who is divorced and falls in love with the neighbor. The person who keeps relation with her assures the marriage. On account of getting married to another woman, he does not keep his words. Despite that the *Panchayat* does not give the decision in her favour. The author describes:

There ensured a lot of discussion and argument over this decision. Then on the last day my father-in-law declared, "Brother, look, Salubai is like a cow. She was sold once to one man and she remained tired to his

rope for some time. Then she escaped from that house and came to Kawatha and lived with another man, who was not her formal owner." The community Panchayat mulled over this argument and ruled that Ravan must dip his nose in Salubai's urine and pay Sulabai a fine of Rs. 251 (224).

The *panchayat* is prejudice about woman; there is not a single instance in the text that treats woman as a human being.

The autobiography is the illustration of the tribal lives; how they are oppressed on social, economic, and political ground. The narrator narrates his tale of woe simultaneously it penetrates the majority oppressed lives of the women of different communities of the tribal. The women particularly in the narrative have been like dumb cows. They have been sold and used as commodity. The narrator depicts the condition of his grandmother, mother, sister-in-laws, his wife, Padamini, Chandrabhagabai, Ithi, Hirabai Kale, Sulabai, etc. that are the victims of social cruelty. This shows the dark reality of society towards tribal women.

Works cited:

Gaikwad, Laxman. *Uchalya- The Branded*. Trans. P.A. Kolharkar. New Delhi: Sahitaya Akademi, 2009. Print.

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Trans. Alok Mukharji. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2004. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri C. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Sugata Bhaduri and Simi Malhortra eds. *Literary Theory: An Introductory Reader*. n. p. Anthem Press of India, 2010. 263-318. Print.

Wolfrey, Julian. Et al. *Key concept in Literary Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005. P. 80. Print.