

A CRITICAL STUDY OF UCHALYA : THE BRANDED

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Gaikwad has been the president of Jankalyan Vikas Sanstha since 1986 and of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Organization since 1990. He has received many prestigious awards including the Sahitya Akadami Award in 1988. He gained international recognition with publication of *The Branded* in 1998. *The Branded* is considered a masterpiece which for the first time brings to the world of literature the trials and tribulations of his tribe Pathrut. It means the pilferers. The British classified the Pathrut as a criminal tribe. *The Branded* is an attempt of the writer to provide an autobiographical account of a boy born in Pathrut community in Maharashtra. The British Government branded the community as criminal under the provisions of the Criminals Tribes Act first passed in 1871. The Criminal Tribes Acts of 1871 has been amended from time to time after independent. But the Pathrut community is still known as a thieving community by the so called sophisticated society. They still carry the stigma of being born to a criminal tribe and are exploited and humiliated by the main stream society. The caste hidden society doubts their work and does not give them any employment. Since they have no settled occupation, they wander from place to place to do some odd jobs such as cattle tending, stone-cutting, harvesting etc. Sometimes they hunt wild animals and depend completely on wild roots and fruits. The people of Pathrut community are deprived of every fundamental rights. They were supposed the lowest of the lower castes. They were blamed as criminals and exploited. These people were lodged false charges and humiliated by the mainstream society and police.

The people of Pathrut/Uchalya community are far away from the fruits of Indian Independence. These underprivileged people remains untouched the politics, education, religion, economics of the so called main stream society. Therefore, they have been living in their own world of superstition, tradition and ignorance. The established Hindus rejected human fundamental rights to the community in which the writer Laxman Gaikwad was born. These people are ostracized by the caste-ridden hierarchy. The dominant class always looked down upon the Uchalya community as

criminals. So these people have not remained any particular occupation to survive. They are denied of all decent and lawful means of livelihood. They have only alternative to exist by thieving, lifting and pickpocketing. The upper caste people exploited these people of down trodden for their own selfish purposes. The established social order caused the miserable and helpless condition of the community called Uchalya/Pathrut

The Branded is an attempt of Laxman Gaikwad to bring into notice the so called intellectual, important people and middle class society to the sorrows and pains of deprived community. The writer appeals to the established political and social leaders that they should come out from their prejudices and preconceptions about the subjugated community in which the writer was born. The writer also expects the betterment of his community from those who have acquired the benefits of modern education. The Branded is a sincere attempt of Gaikwad to reveal a realistic world of the Uchalya community. Gaikwad tried to reveal the oppressed world of Pathrut community through the present Dalit narrative

Gaikwad blames the reluctant dominant people and the Government policy towards the suffering of his people. Instead of giving these people opportunities to develop, the police and other offices of the Government bring false charges against them. The children of the community are accused of being criminals. They are sent to jail at the very outset of their life. The police often push these people to participate in thieving activities to get a share. The writer himself becomes reluctant against his community being branded while the so called educated people grabbed a lot of money from the public are released without any punishment.

The writer Gaikwad was born in the community which is known as 'Santmuchar'. The language of the community is Telugu. The term 'Sant' means 'Market' and 'Muchchar' means thief. So Santmuchar means one who steals from weekly markets or bazaars. They are also known as Uchalya means 'pilferer'. The community is identified by several names in Maharashtra such as Pathrut, Takari, Bhamta, Uchale, Girnewadar, Kamti, Ghantichor and Wadar. Gaikwad was born into a family of thieves. His grandfather and grandmother were perfect in their work of thieving. His father Martand, Mother Dhondabai, elder brother Manikdada were also thieves who used to steal corn, chillies, groundnuts, bajara millet etc. from distant farms. The writer has depicted the struggle for food to fulfill their hunger. The starving children wait for their elders to return. They used to beat the stolen ears of corn, gather the grains, grind them coarse, boil them and eat. Many time Gaikwad's father and brother use to visit other villages and steal a pig or goat which they cook and eat. The

stolen grains lasts only for a day or two and the same situation prevail from the next day onwards. The people of these community remained devoid of food frequently. Sometimes the writer spread salt on the grind stone and avidly licks it to satisfy his hunger. Such were the bitter experiences of writer to live without food for many days.

The community entitled Uchalya or Pathrut have no particular occupation to survive. So they train a person from the very childhood to become a skilled thief. The skilled thieves are demanded in that community. The people of the community prefer to give their daughter in marriage to such versatile thieves. Once, writer's father was an expert thief. He was caught red handed and severally beaten up by the police. The beating made him handicap for life. This incident affected the mind of writer's father. So he was determined to send Gaikwad to school to get a government job. The writer Gaikwad was the first child from the Uchalya community to attend school. While he started school some children from his community were suffered of loose motion. The writer and his father were blamed the community people for the causes of loose motion for the suffering of the children. Such kind superstitious belief was prevailed in this community.

The writer has come across number of problems in his life. His father was helpless to support him. Her mother also died earlier. He could not get any help from his two brothers after their marriage. So he became helpless in his life. In the course of time Gaikwad had to leave school. Later on he joined a spinning mill in the Latur. He worked in a day Shift and attended evening classes in school. He did well in his studies and passed matriculation. The writer thought that he could get job without any difficulty. But no offer came to him. However his education helped him to realize his self. The result was that he became an activist and supported the worker in the mill for their demand of higher wages and better working conditions. But the management of the mill felt threatened by his activism and threw him out of his job. In the meantime he got married and devoted all his time organizing tribes, Dalits, mill workers, wages labourers etc.

Gaikwad is working for the socio-economic development of the de-notified and nomadic tribes. He uplifted and strengthened the various tribe and Dalit movement for the complete transformation of the marginalized groups. The writer is unhappy with the present situation of his community. The upper class people are not giving justice to the deprived one. The writer Gaikwad lament for justice, rights, reformation and transformation for The Branded Community in the established social structure. He claims that a single problem of the Nomadic and de-notified tribes is not solved. The branded community is looked down upon by the dominant people. Gaikwad not

only attacked on the tendency of the upper caste people but also the orthodox practices of his own community. He criticizes the thieving act and Panchayat of his community. He also challenged the cruel way of punishment of his community. The writer sincerely admits his muteness before the decision of Panchayat at of his community. Thus the Pathrut community is victimized under various traditional old beliefs

Gaikwad is realized his own mistake of neglecting his family members. He regrets to say that he could not take care of his old father as well as his elder brother Hrachand. He also criticizes his elder brothers, dada and Anna who avoided their family responsibilities. Rajkumar rightly comments: “Gaikwad’s autobiography is full of introspection as well as self evaluation”. (Rajkumar : 2005)

At the end of the autobiography Gaikwad express his gratefulness to some of his upper caste teachers, friends, associate who helped him to settle down in life. He is also greatly thankful of his wife Chhabu who takes up the entire responsibilities of the family. At last Gaikwad is settled in Latur with his three children. The writer is always busy in his social work. He organized tribals, dalits and deprived class to bring change in their life. He inspired and motivated them to live with dignity and self-respect.

Primary Resources:

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