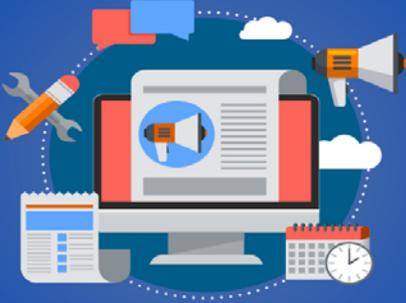


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Exclusionary Spaces and the Plight of the Dalit: A Study of Laxman Gaikwad's *The Branded*

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Abstract:

Dalit autobiographies maintain the difference with canonical autobiographies and major difference is about the narrator who does not have a strong self to narrate. Therefore, he always shifts his focus from his personal life to his social set up or a caste group. If a question is asked as to why one writes Dalit autobiography? It is a mere expression. It is more than an expression. These autobiographies raised voice against injustice, inequality, deprivation, deplorable situations of Dalits, insult, slavery, etc. Through these autobiographies the author is trying to create a sense, to show a path and to set up ideals. The select autobiography for the present study represents the Pathrut caste group along with narrator as an individual. The study emphasizes upon plight of Pathrut especially of kaikadis, Akkarmashies and Makan. However, one common factor is found in these communities that the similar kind of treatment is given to them in all spheres of life. Their plight is more or less similar to one another irrespective of their different customs and traditions. The problems these communities mostly face are those of lack of dignity, dependency due to paucity of resources, marginalization from the mainstream society, deprivation of several opportunities and inhuman treatment given to them by dominant communities like Maratha. These and many other such reasons make it necessary to study these communities together.

Keywords: Plight, Dalit, autobiographies, injustice, inequality, deprivation.

Introduction:

Dalits have been taking great efforts to create their own identity to be a part of the mainstream Indian society. However due to strong opposition and political strategies Dalits fail

to convert their efforts into reality. It also seems to be impossible to create a common ground to address their issues. Political power gets influenced through various traditions, facts, bastions and authorities in Hindu society in which subaltern groups of Dalits are strategically degraded on ground of their castes. Likewise, economical restrictions are imposed upon Dalits. Dalit literature is studied in terms of caste and religion as far as traditional approaches are concerned. The theory of social exclusion lays emphasis upon each and every element that excludes any individual or group. Social exclusion not only analyzes social issues and problems but also provides a firm platform to frame a policy for the inclusion. Rather than to raise voice against the injustice, it further looks forward to frame a mechanism for the sustainable inclusion and development of Dalits in almost all spheres of society.

Therefore, being a social animal, it is necessary for every human being, irrespective of caste, sect or religion to fulfill the five core social motives social motives identified by Michael S. North and Susan T. Fiske.

Theoretical Base:

“A synthesis proposes a set of core social motives or fundamental underlying psychological processes that drive people thinking, feeling and behavior in social situations. These motives comprise Belonging, understanding, controlling self, and trusting other” (Fiske S. T. 2010). It is necessary to read the literature with these core social motives to know the plight of Dalit especially through Dalit autobiographies. Dalits do not have long recorded dignified history. However, a Dalit autobiography provides the record of not only individual but also caste groups (community).

This narrative begins with “NO NATIVE PLACE, no birth date, No house or farm, no caste either.” This shows that the fulfillment of first motive i.e. belonging, is in question. It also shows that the narrator does not have strong attachment to any of place which can be called his native place, neither his family belongs to the strong nexus that supports him. In fact, the narrator was identified because of it. Whatever scattered belonging he has, he used to hide it, as it gives damage to his dignity or status. Many times, he hires the house by keeping the secret of his identity as being Pathrut. His identity is likely to be lost if he fails to maintain loyalty to the caste group he belongs.

Once Laxman said “On such occasion I wondered why god did not grant me birth in chamale’s home”. It is very shocking that small Laxman completely rejects his ancestral belongingness and that is just for the sake of food. There was an incident after which Laxman said, “Nobody was willing to shoulder the responsibility of looking after me”. It shows that the attachment and supportive nexus among the kith and kin is very poor because of their economic conditions. Laxman has expressed a complete exclusion when he declared “Nobody from our fraternity lived in Dhanegaon”. That shows Patrut families are unable to feed themselves at that village. Therefore, they exclude themselves from Dhanegaon. However, it is equally true that this village has treated Laxman and his fraternity with shame. Dominant caste group of the village exploited Patruts in every possible sphere. It can be concluded with the Laxman’s statement as “I had to call this place my village, because I was born here, because this village had forced me it starve and live a groveling ignoble life.” So, this is how, belonging causes shame rather than dignity, which is resulted into the migration of not only Laxman but also all the Patruts of Dhanegaon. “Ostracized people are more at risk for physical health problems and mortality” (House Landies Umberson 1988). Laxman lost his mother, father and one of the brothers in his premature age.

Another core social motive is to understand the social world around us. According to (Moscovici 1998), “At the individual level people share their theories about the social world with others in an effort to foster similar social representation or group meaning.” Laxman said, “This forced me take a bath every day.” It is the result of formal education and forceful punishment lodged on him such as sit ups. One of the very important outcomes, the force for the understanding of values. However, many instances were there but a significantly Laxman remarked, “Look at the ways of these people where they are and where we are. I often wondered if ever we would reach their level.” It shows that Laxman has understood the values, manners and etiquettes and he is very much interested to observe all that. However, this is possible when his friend, Dattu Sawant, invited him as a guest with all due respect and dignity.

Similarly, when his brother Anna died and after the funeral Laxman was forced to understand and follow the custom of Pathrut strictly. He said, “Before meal I was given liquor in a cup to drink. I refused but I had to drink a little to honour the community custom. All were united against me”. At the same time, Laxman rejected the custom of sharing head. He was also

advised that, "This won't do. You must abide by our community's custom if you want your deceased brother soul to rest in peace." A very important scene took place at Salagara when Laxman reached there to attend his elder sister in law's younger brother's marriage. The panch committee declared, "If the marriage were solemnized without their consent, there is the impending fear of ostracization."¹³ All these is because of girl's mother who was born of Maratha father. Therefore, the panchs decided to shave the woman's head.

'Control' is the third core social motive. Michael S, North and Susan T. Fiske said, "People need to have control over their social environment".

The police made Lingappa, the grandfather of Laxman, a state informer. Because of which, "it was resolved that he must be killed." It is equally significant to note that he had to obtain a permit from the Police Patil or sometime has to offer a bribe to leave the place. Police visits their houses as if the father of Yama has visited us to take my life away. "Laxman started to attend the school and all the urchins started harassing him as if a poor lamb had entered pack of wolves." Even selling of a woman is also a serious incident that individual like Padmini who was cheated by Manik dada and sold her for 250 rupees. Laxman reported, "the stranger with rough mauling action pressed down my sister-in-law had intercourse with her and ran away" Laxman even do not have five rupees when his father appealed him "Laxman take me to the cercal hospital". Because of scarcity of food, Laxman told his father to go. (Leary, 1990) Baumeister and Tice, 1990) has said that "socially excluded people are at particular risk for anxiety depression and loneliness all arising in part from a perceived lack of competence and control".

A Paradhi woman, named Mirabai Kale whose husband was arrested by police and she delivered a baby. On the very movement she underwent a tubectomy operation it gets 200/- rupees, under family planning scheme of and this is just to feed herself. She sold her pretty, little nine months daughter to bear the expenses for travelling and eating. All these crazy decisions are made out of depression and anxiety.

According to Susan T. Fisk, 'enhancing self' is the fourth core social motive. He said, "People continuously strive to feel good about themselves, maintain a degree of self-worth and raise then self-esteem". This group of Pathrut or individual among themselves does not feel

good about himself or herself or themselves. On the contrary, there are many instances where he felt ashamed. To some extent, panch committee maintains a degree of self-worth by posing an inhuman and insulting resolution upon the poor Pathrut. Police referred his grandmother as a 'whore'. Laxman's dada discloses the names to the police as a result of that "They took chili powder... put it in Dada's anus and eyes... when Dada exploded with shit and piss they let go off him." Even selling of boys and woman is a common thing. As Gopal of Salagara purchased Dhobi's elder son Dagdya for 150/-.....and Narya was bought by Tulshiram for 100\-rupees." Laxman family didn't lodge a complaint though his grant-father was killed by group of Pathruts. Laxman reported that I changed accommodation no less than Nineteen times in Latur. Many times, he claimed that he is Maratha in order to avoid the shift. Even the recurrent threat of beating and arrest by police does not allow the Pathruts construct their self. Self can be enhanced by those who have it. Pathruts due to the inhuman treatment, merciless beating, exploitative mechanisms and the labyrinth made by the moneylenders, police and Patils did not allow Pathruts to create the self. Even there are many instances that Dominate villagers have assaulted the Pathruts houses. However, Laxman somehow managed to create his self and the self of Pathrut by organizing their gatherings and by establishing 'District Pathrut Samaj Sanghatana'. Laxman along with fellow workers became the leader for workers. He also successfully provides supportive nexus to the people who were trapped by the police under fake charges.

Leary 2005 said, "Low self-esteem co-relates with various anti-social behaviours." This anti-social attitude becomes a part of their life because of low self-esteem.

The last core social motive is 'trusting others'. According to Susan Fiske, "It involves the need to perceive the social world as a benevolent place."

Laxman's Father blames his wife as "You spend your time with your paramour! Salu is not my daughter and beat mother severely." The more absurd incident took place when Laxman said, "the people of our fraternity were envious of us and sometimes they stole the utensil full of milk from our house at night." In fact, what is trust? The whole story is about thieving and exploitation and cheating where there is no place for trust. Except Laxman, none of the character is trustful to one another for example, Pathrut, police money lenders and Patils.

Dalits are discarded to such an extent that they dare not to follow dominant groups in society nor they are allowed to follow. Their voices are suppressed and silenced.

Exclusion as a Result of the failure in the fulfillment of These Core Social Motives:

Laxman the hero, belongs to his caste, village, parents, brothers relatives, etc. And in every aspect, he needs to trace or to claim his strong belonging, has scattered down. The Pathrut as a caste known for thieving and there are many instances that Laxman hid the fact that he fact that he belongs to Pathrut caste. On the contrary, he claims that he is Maratha. So, this disclosure of his belonging as a Pathrut puts him in trouble. In fact, where he was thrown out as soon as his belonging got disclosed many situations. Secondly, he was marginalized and treated as a beggar in the village. He lives not on the outskirts but on the borders of the village. His dark, unwanted memories are attached with the village. Therefore, he shifted from village to city to throw away the village he belongs. His mother died in his childhood; his father works on yearly basis at the landlord's farm. His brother thought Laxman was a burden on them. However, because of his schooling, many of his relatives didn't help him.

Exclusion as result of understanding the values:

Behavioural patterns, traditions, manners and etiquettes understood by Laxman has forced him to discard the traditions or just to follow it for the sake of being the members of the Pathrut caste group by drinking liquor at the time of his father's and brother's death. His schooling enhances his understanding as he lives in the village; he experienced the standard practices when Dattu invited him for lunch. This time he violates table manners but he understood too much eating manners. He used to sing abhanga by repeatedly imitating other singers. However, this imitation has included him into the mainstream of the village. Villagers touched him. Laxman feels that "I was no more an untouchable outcast."²⁵ Though he was trying to match and follow the end result is that he becomes a rational and begins the social reformation by raising voices against the injustice.

Exclusion as a Result of Controlling:

Police made Laxman's grandfather, a state informer that forces Panchayat to resolve that he must be killed. Beating and killing are common incidents among the Pathrut. Either police

beat the Pathruts for the thieving or thieving groups beat the group members for equal sharing or someone who informs the police. A woman named Hirabai Kale delivered a baby. There she underwent a tubectomy operation for 200/- rupees just to feed her. However, police took it back and arrested her. Once, the Pathrut caste group at Kautha rejected to pay the contribution of 'Mahadev fair tax'. As result of that vagabonds attack Pathrut community at kautha and police refused to register a complaint. The punishment given by the panchayat are so inhuman for example to kill Laxman's grandfather to shave woman's head, Salubai was not admitted in a school for want of father's name, popped out eyeballs of Laxman's father-in-law in police beating. Hemant Wadar's wife and children were rendered helpless without any one to protect and maintain them. The octri officer, who threatened Laxman "that do you want to retain your job or to go home"²⁶. His father didn't get medical aid due of poverty and many other incidents show that Pathruts not as an individual but as a cast group lacks the control over their plight.

Exclusion as a result of not enhanced self:

Pathruts are abused and alleged as a born thief. The dominant section / caste group treated then as a slave. They are not allowed to play an active role in social gathering or common practices. They are forced to follow without any argument, so this silence is reducing the Pathruts to non-living things that are possessed by the landlords or purchased or sold. Along with society, police mechanism is the worst to these people. For example, dhobi's elder son Dagdya, younger one Narya, Ithi sold her daughter for 200/-, Padmini young lady was sold for 250/- girls are rapped, attacked on Pardhis at Dhoke. Therefore, because of all these dominances, Pathrut remained excluded and self is fractured rather than enhanced.

Exclusion as a Result of Mis-trust on Others:

It remains a fact that money lenders, police patils, are exploiting the Pathruts Fiske rightly said, "the betrayed are more likely to lie, cheat or steal." (8to16)

So, this question that whether the Pathrut trust each other becomes useless in all, the five core social motives belonging, understanding, controlling, enhancing self and trusting others are invisible. Therefore, Pathruts are socially excluded but heroic characters like Laxman somehow took the advantage of education and boarding. His life is a struggle for inclusion. This autobiography is the narrative written for the argent plea to be included in the mainstream of

society with equal dignity, opportunity, resources and economic strength. These narratives raised voices against the depressive and riddles. The Pathruts are still far away from the benefits of welfare scheme. These five core social motives and their fulfillment is still a question. Social welfare systems, inclusionary practices and other initiatives by the democratic state will improve the situation.

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