



The Subaltern Lives of Tribal in Upara (An Outsider)



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Abstract :

The main rationale of academy is to establish the equality all sphere of life in all fields and among all human beings of the world. Today's lives have been changing drastically with modern knowledge and technology. Hence, society has tremendous transform in all ways of life. Whatsoever, the society can be modern, if the great masses are provided the opportunities to avail all the benefits of modernity. On the other hand, the well-established people have been availing the facility of modernity and technology, but the tribal people have still been living the life of subaltern. They have not been even at the margin of so-called Indian society.

The many tribes have been detached from the modern ways and facilities of today's technological world. The paper focuses on the socially, economically and politically oppressed, suppressed and marginal lives of tribal.

Keywords : Subaltern, Tribal, Dalits and women.

Research Paper :

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The word 'subaltern' has been using in the academy for the masses as subjugated, repressed and marginal people of the society after G. C. Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has firstly used the word for oppressed peasants of Italy. M.A. Habib claims 'the term was used by the Italian Marxist Antonia Gramsci to refer to the working mass that needed to be organized by left using intellectuals into a politically self-conscious force' (Habib, 748). But Spivak uses it especially for woman. She argues:

...*subaltern* is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for [the] [Other](#), for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie.... In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. (Web. 21 Aug. 2016)

However, the term 'Subaltern' is an umbrella one that covers all oppressed and marginal people like tribals, Dalits and women, etc.

The main concern of the paper is to draw a line in between all the subaltern groups of society. Taking into account the view of Spivak that all oppressed are subaltern but not all subaltern are oppressed. The point is that all the tribes are not found the place in brutal caste system of India society. They are outsider, alienated from society. They are kept away from all comforts of life. Even they are not treated as a social member but label as tribal.

Laxman Mane's Upara- 'An Outsider' is an autobiography of a tribal. It vividly portrays the life suffering and humiliation of a *Kaikadi* community. It also gives insight to see the problems of tribal people who have still been living life as outsider away from society. Because of unsettlement and poverty, they have to travel from places to places for livelihood. The tribes are acknowledged as criminals and thieves but at the same, it is an irony that no

one understands that their lives have been reduced to animal level. It is so because they have not been provided equal wages to their work and treated as alien. Besides, they do not have land to toil and proper place to settle. All these conditions keep them hungry and being wanderers.

Mane pens many experiences of his life and his community as being a social worker. The author accounts one of the callous incidents:

Mother a Pardhi tribal. About fifty years old. Her husband is sentenced to rigorous life imprisonment. At home, she has a young son. Well! The Panchayat had a session questioning the physical relationship between the mother and the son. The whole community was furious and this woman and her son trying to justify their relationship.At last, she was given the punishment: all the members of the Panchayat relived themselves on the ground. She has asked to make a paste of that soil and prepare flat loaves out of it with her own hands right in the front of the 'Panchayat'. In addition, she was sentenced to pay a fine of seventy-five thousand rupees which was to be paid by them and their future generations. Everything was stinking. I asked her, she said: "Brother dear! I planted the seed of a cucumber and ate the cucumber. What's my crime? Now, I don't want a fifth one. I have four children from the fourth. Now, I don't want to marry again. My first boy is my husband now".

(11)

Above snap-shot gives the clear vision about the status of woman in tribal community. The subaltern women are treated worse than animals. Mane minutely sketches the episodes in the life of tribal people so that the reader can understand the no-win situation of subaltern community. The author is doubtful whether the tribe can change their life style; it is more concerned for the narrator whether the dominated society allows them to change their lives. The main goal of the writer for writing his autobiography as :“If the readers succeed in understanding the sufferings of nomadic tribals, who have moving from one place to the other for generations, loading their hearth and home on the backs of donkeys, I would feel happy that Upara has achieved it's goal” (15). For him showing compassion towards the subaltern is not sufficient; he wishes the well-established people of the society should empathize for the betterment of the subaltern in active participation. He urges: ‘While we understanding the sufferings of these nomads, let us actively cooperate with each other, in lessening their sufferings. For this is a struggle of human liberation’ (15).

Mane's autobiography represents the life of many tribes. Mane gives credit of sketching his life story to Mahatma Jotiba Phule, the great Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Karmveer Bhaurao Patil. Laxman Mane's autobiography begins with the description of the colony of the tribal surrounded by filthy atmosphere outside the village where the villagers come that place for latrine. The tribal are not allowed to settle even at the village boundary. As the author describes:

Leaving the donkeys on the outskirts of the hamlet, we would play, loitering behind these poor animals grazing on fresh human excrement and brandishing out sticks in the air. We played mostly with marbles or flat pebbles piling them one on the top of the other and smashing them with a ball from a certain distance. A shirt, someone's charity, covered my body. Mended in several places, it was full of wrinkles. Shorts were a luxury. The shirt itself hung loose serving the purpose of shorts as well. Its sleeves too were long. They came handy blowing my nose now and again. My head was covered with father's cap. This too was a handout. A brisk breeze kept lifting it off my head. Khatriya, Indya, Martya and I usually played on the dunghills or in the places where the villagers came to relieving themselves. (19)

One can imagine the terrible life of the tribe that they have been denied the basic amenities like food, cloth and shelter. The author suffers throughout the life of being a poor, untouchable and unwanted as an angry man. The hunger is the main cause of his suffering. He does not get a full meal in a day. It is a howling condition of the subaltern; they have to do anything like begging, stealing and so on for livelihood. Laxman Mane's autobiography is a role model for representing the plight of tribal community in Indian society. As R.B. Patankar comments:

Suppose that we are reading Laxman Mane's book Upara. Before we had read it we knew almost nothing about Kaikadi tribe, whose life depicts. The range of our experience and understanding has been widened. But that is not all; more important than this is the fact that the structure of our customary emotional and ethical responses has been shaken. (405)

The protagonist senses untouchability and alienation first time in school where the journey of an angry hero starts:

All the pupils started teasing me in the way the hens do when a strange chick intrudes upon their privacy. Moreover, I had the look of a mongrel straight from a dunghill....No student would allow me near him. The poor schoolmaster! He was a

good man. He asked me to sit near the door. The pupils were afraid of any physical contact with me. (20)

The nomad has undergone the humiliation and satirical comments of the school master as ‘You fanny guy! Do nomadic beggars go to school?...If they study, who will weave our baskets? Nothing doing! You want to study, Huh! The school master scoffed’(36). The tribal tries to improve their life through proper means but the obtainable social system does not allow them to change their life style. It draws attention to the number of questions of the tribal about the education, poverty, and untouchability.

The writer explores the harsh realities of tribal life. The tribal have been denied proper education, food and shelter. Due to ceaseless hunger, the tribal have been robbers and beggars. The narrative also gives account of the social, political and economic upheaval of the tribal. There is no signal line in the narrative where the writer describes any equality, justice and liberty and so on. While reading the life-story of Mane, the reader has to conclude that the life of doubly marginal women in the tribal community is terrible than the life of the protagonist. One can sense the plight of women and their wretchedness, misuse, vulnerability, quietness in the narrative. The unlawful behavior of Pingla Joshi towards his wife about her chastity, the pitiable condition of Parumami as being a beautiful tribal woman whose fate is to suffer without her fault as author states:

“There might be two or four of them....I don’t know. They picked me up while I was still asleep. When I woke up, I found that my mouth was gagged. And two or four men lifted me up and made me lie flat on the ground and one by one pounced upon me and”

[...] “This is the limit! What shall I do now?” And she resumed her crying.

“It was terribly painful....The wolves didn’t leave me....My body has become a rotten log of wood now!” (83)

The result of this incident is that the typical subaltern woman is thrown out from the house by her husband and later on she becomes lunatic and dies. Besides, the episode of mortgaging the wife is shivered the sense of humanity. Punnappa mortgages his wife to Dharmea for five years. Here is a plea of that vulnerable woman:

[...] “Your honour! I submit before you that I am no better than a meek animal. When I saw the green grass, I ate it. What good are customs and traditions? My husband pawned me for four years for money. When I was pushed into his room, he naturally took me to bed. Why should he feed me free of charge! Moreover, women are like

dumb cows. My husband tethered me at his door. It's my husband who is the butcher. Oh men of Wisdom and Reason! Let me be judged by the goddess of Justice. How can I return now with this child and stay with my first husband? You are the very incarnations of Almighty. Don't cross-examine me further, I beg of you. I am like your own daughter." (57)

The tribal woman seems subordinate within the community and outside also. The woman plays a vital role in the family even though men are unconcerned about it. On the other hand, the Panchayat also treated her as the mean creature and gives the decision that her husband can claim her after offering the money to the Panchayat and also the marriage expenses to the parents of the woman. This is the dirge situation of women. The women are not treated as human beings. The women characters of the narrative like Gajra, Parumami, the wife of Pingla Joshi, and Ratna are the dupe of Dalit patriarchy. Hence, Spivak comments: "It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (284-285)

Thus, the life of tribal is pitiable, subjugated and oppressed and the tribal women are the ones, the most vulnerable, exploited and doubly marginalized. Hence, the academy has to look after the matter of the tribal people in a serious manner.

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