Upara: An Outsider

_Upara: An Outsider_ by Laxman Mane was published in December, 1980 under the Marathi title _Upara_. Later it was translated into English language by Kamat A. K. in the year 1997. The autobiography received attentions from readers across the regional and national boundaries for its revelation of unnoticed livelihood patterns of De-notified tribal community in particular- Kaikadi- a communal group that thrive on seasonal wandering lifestyle. It is an account of awakening spirit of an individual who, owing to education, gathers courage to break away from conventional lifestyle of wanderers.

In ‘Upara: An Outsider is recounting of troubles and agonies of Kaikadi nomadic community surrounded by traditional insecure lifestyle of wandering in search of food and employment, cheap economic means of income sources such as weaving of baskets, playing music bands etc. superstition, extremely biased Jatpanchayat and above all despite calling themselves Hindu, adoring Hindu deities they are not regarded as valid part of society and hence ill-treated by Village chief, moneylenders due to caste system. This book is all about desire of an illiterate individual who succeeds in getting educated his son up to graduation despite lacking permanent dwelling, source of income, when saw hope in educational, reforms suggested by Dr. Ambedkar through Indian Constitution, that relieve from begging, thieving life style for next generation. The book was written when writer was young and dynamic social activists engaged
in awaking his de-notified and nomadic community members to take benefits of schemes in democratic society.

The word *Upara* in Marathi language means - an outsider i.e. a communal group not included in the Chaturvarna system of Hindu Social order, and hence they are outsiders. However, the communal group identified in the book assumed lowest rank in caste system alike untouchables. Having been denied entry in prevailing order they are termed as de-notified and nomadic tribes for they have to move from one place to other in search of food and shelter striving vulnerable climatic conditions, far from normal village life, pride and prestige as civilians. Despite many decades these societies have not given up the wandering lifestyle owing to unaltered, suspicious outlook of mainstream society towards nomads halting at in the periphery of village.

However, the ongoing awakening environment initiated by Dalits in Maharashtra made it possible for many men like Laxman Mane to overcome the bruised mentality to accept the ill-fated wandering life as embark upon a true civilized life amide lack of opportunities, facilities conferred by government agencies, want of support-shelter-safeguards. After getting educated Laxman Mane gathers sense of social work in order to attract the attention of mainstream society towards the factual condition of other members from Kaikadi and other nomadic tribes who often lead a life of misery due to unnoticed, purposefully neglecting attitude of mainstream society. The gook achieved massive success as it has been taken as guiding force for social activists, individuals sensitive to wards social cause who tread on practical illustrations delineated by Dr. Ambedkar for emancipation of all the sections of society.
Laxman Mane opens the book by recollecting minute details of wandering community lifestyle from childhood up to graduation. Thereby he depicts poverty, hunger stricken Kaikade community. His parents lead a wandering life. They earn living by selling weaved baskets and articles made out of stick of a tree. Often the family members, children starved in the hut in want of food to eat. To appease hunger his parents usually had to beg for food from the villagers which had become a routine. Laxman remembers:

Mother had brought lots of bhakari. Three of these were given by the village chief’s wife. She had also given the leftovers of the night before. In addition, the women whose baskets mother had mended had given her something or the other which she had packed in the loose end of her sari. ‘Mother had borrowed some buttermilk from somewhere. She had also brought some flat loaves, drum stick curry, sauce, pickle all stale and of course collected as alms. Mother would sell some baskets in the village, mend the old ones and in exchange acquire all this food. We ate all it. This was our everyday meal.’ (Upara: An Outsider: 3)\(^1\)

The above quote indicates some of the characteristic features of Kaikadi community sustaining in dire economic conditions: lack of proper food, clothes, and permanent dwelling. *Jatpanchayat* in Kaikadi community is yet another feature. *Jat panchayats* was responsible to solve all sort of internal problems or disputes among community members. Laxman Mane’s father’s decision to enroll him in school was a revolutionary stance to get ride off beggary. But the community won’t allow such an act of breach to send wards to school, for Laxman Mane says, “from our Panchayat’s point of view, the very writing of this book is...
crime and I am aware of the provision of the punishment or such wrong doing. I am prepared to face the consequences’ (Upara: An Outsider: 6).

Owing to its wandering lifestyle nomadic groups such as Kaikadi community was always taken as the first suspect for any theft and crime occurred in village premises, regardless of their involvement. They were picked up by police for no reason and put into jail for many days. Many incidents recovered by Laxman Mane reveal how the community had to under go exploitation and suppressing by village authorities. Dagdya Ramoshi- one of the village watchmen stopped writer’s parents while their onward journey to next village. Laxman’s father requested Dagdy begging to forgive as he began claue the bags and luggage. The whole family is taken to be suspect for no certain reason. Dagdya said, ‘I have to search all your bags. What do I know about you? Beggers that you are! Mother-fuckers! Who knows whether you have stolen anything from someone in the village!’ [Upara: An Outsider: 29] As a result, father had to give him a hen and money to get ride of any charges of blame and theft.

Whenever the Kaikadi community entered a new village they had to inform the village-chief of their arrival and provide all the information of their members. Alike untouchables, these outsiders too were treated indifferently. Any incidental or accidental touch of Kaikadi brought defilement, impure feeling among upper caste people. Women served them water and food by keeping distance; they were not invited to ceremonies like marriages, engagements, birthdays, etc in village. Laxman Mane recalls one incidents when he, among other friends, was received humiliating treatment when he went to attend marriage ceremony. There he was forced to leave half-eaten meal because of his caste as Kaikadi. “The row was full of Maratha children. Then there came
a bearer who happened to be from our village and an invitee to the wedding. As he approached me, he opened his eyes wide, bent down and thundered- Son of a Kaikadi low caste! Have you taken leave of your senses? Get up and get out!’ [Upara: An Outsider: 2] When Laxman’s father came to know that his son had attended a marriage of a high caste friend and polluted the whole ceremony, instead of consoling his father slashed him cruelly. The caste system, as depicted by writer is deeply penetrated among main stream society and those who wander in search of food and shelter such as Kaikadi community, that each one of them never dare to break the communal code of conduct prevailing ever since time unknown. The Kaikadi’s too believed that they were like untouchables and had no right to participate in any functions of high caste people and dine with them.

Through the autobiography the narrator discloses insidious view of economic sustenance of nomadic tribes. The economic system called Balut system is one such a practice where it was the tradition among Kaikadi community to sell their wares in a particular village, which was given them in form of Baluta. During harvest days, Kaikadies go to the field and thankfully accept whatever the farmers gave in exchange of service rendered throughout the year. Laxman sys: ‘As mother begged the village women to buy her wares, she had to sell them very cheap. She would feel distress. She had to take whatever was given to her. Then she would tie the bhakri and the rest of the things in a bundle.’ This is Hindu social order in India. Laxman recounts an incident about his mother when she confronted a shameful event: ‘… caught red-handed cutting down the canes, she would be cursed and abused held by the hair and even mercilessly beaten up by the peasants. Even Father would be beaten up in such a situation. They called themselves lucky if they were allowed to go
home after being beaten. For, at times, they were taken to the village chief and then to the police station and then before a magistrate.’ (Upara: An Outsider: 60-61) Thus, such was the daily routine to endure the humiliation by villagers and upper caste people.

However, the writers says that he grew up amidst “the social movement, it is what made me successful. My life has been shaped by the thoughts of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the great Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Karmveer Bhaurao Patil. Upara’s success lies in the trail blazed by these great men.”(The Outsider: Upara:14) Changes began to take place in such a routenized daily humiliations, begging food for survival and harassment from villagers when the writer’s father insisted for school education. The writer’s father determined to send him school so that he shouldn’t “be pilferer and lead the miserable life of beggar.” (The Outsider: Upara: 20) His family members had no idea about what would happen after getting education for children. Though writer’s father wanted his child to become teacher or government servant. But most important thing that thwarted school education was the temporary dwelling place of the Kaikadi community. At first some how his father managed to get entry into school without any registration on account of teacher’s charity. But this was not going to help him at every halt in different places. Some time the writer had to sit outside the class room or was completely denied to enter the school premises. Every time the family shifted to other village premises, his father pleaded, requested the teacher to let the writer sit and read. In this way the writer gradually got acquainted with school education in the company of other boys. The writer recollects,

I went to school everyday. All the other school children sat inside the classroom whereas I sat outside, in the verandah,
while the lesson was on, father begged the school master to admit me, but he refused saying: You funny guy! Do nomadic beggars go to school?... if thy study, who will weave out baskets? Nothing doing! You wan to study, Huh!.. The school master scoffed. I looked father’s eyes. They were full of tears. I too was crying. I wanted to go to school, I wanted to become a teacher.. That was the dream I cherished. And so, I continued to study sitting outside the classroom. (The Outsider: Upara: 36)

The writer attended school regularly but as the family had to move to next village again his father had to ask and request the teachers of different schools. Though, the writer continued his study sitting in varanda for at least four to six days in a village. But when the family reached to their native place called, Nirgudi with the help of Akuba- the village school teacher writer’s father enrolled his name in the school and bought a slate, pencil and clothes. Thus, the writer says “my school was moving on the donkey’s back. In whichever village we made a halt, father took me to the school, sometimes, outside. But my schooling went on.” (The Outsider: Upara: 68) Writer showed positive results as he himself managed to read, memories lesson from book. When Akuba told improvement shown by writer in his annual examination, father took it seriously and took straight to the gods. The writer relates the incident in most pathetic words. He writes, “He lifted me under his arm and took me straight before the gods in the basket and made me stand before them. He joined his palms in reverence and applied vermillion to out foreheads. What was going On? No idea. Father was weeping in front of the gods. Tears were running down his cheeks. I couldn’t understand anything...My cub has passed in his exam...passed. To be sure! (The Outsider: Upara: 91)
Thus, his parents were so delighted to hear the progress shown by writer in study. They managed all troubles whatever the could get; worked whenever there was work; they worked hard and saved money so that the writer could read and write. Somehow the writer managed to get cleared IVth exam. By then the writer developed resentment towards wandering from place to place in search of food and employment. He realized that accompanying parents meant loss of school education. So, with intervention of Rambhau- a well wisher, writer was allowed to stay at native place to continue further study. In school he met teacher named Kamble. Kamble sir helped Laxman Mane to get food and education regularly. Gradually, Laxman Mane developed a liking for study. Now he could write, read and passed fourth class. When father came back, writer also joined his father in music band. He grew up and shared family burden in earning and helped father in cutting canes.

At this point of time, when the writer started contributing in family income, his father wanted to stop schooling but Laxman Mane insisted for school education and passed fifth class. Whenever his father intended to withdraw him from school Akuba intervened and encouraged his father for continuation of education. When his father showed reluctance towards school education, he managed to buy book, notebooks, clothes and everything with the money gained from playing music band. At last he entered in seventh class on his own. In this way, education enabled Laxman Mane to earn and learn.

In the mean time his father wanted to get him married but he began pondering over the matter without anybody’s help. The sense of achievement in education enabled him to think over his abilities and responsibilities. He says, “There are people in the world who live alone…
I’ll leave my house.. I’ll be able to earn my livelihood. I made up my mind.” (The Outsider: Upara: 114) And decided to get out of house in dark hours. He began to think over consequences on either sides.

My mind was split: one side said: “Do as father tells you-don’t go ahead.. Return.. What will happen to mother and Kisnya?... Father will be unhappy. The other side said: You’ll get married. You’ll have to loads like a donkey. You’ll have to fetch canes, weave baskets, take them out to sell and you will spend all your life like your father. That’s not good. You won’t be able to cope with this hard work. You won’t survive the donkey work. (The Outsider: Upara: 115)

Thus the writer developed deep disgust for wandering and hardship of Kaikadi community as he was educated and saw a good prospect. Owing to such a troubled mind set he could not clear seventh class but was allowed to sit in next class. At this point he took all his decisions without anybody’s support or guidance. He enrolled himself in high school at Phaltan. At last his father accepted his decision saying to one of his teacher,

“Sir, I’ll go away now to earn my livelihood...you will be both mother and father to my poor boy. If he does something wrong, please, forgive. Him. I tried my best to dissuade him but he is determined to study. I cannot afford it. what do I do? Even this morning we have not had anything to eat. There was nothing to eat at home. (The Outsider:Upara:122)

Thus, hence forth the writer continued his educational expenses on his own earnings. Everyday he walked five miles of distance from Somanathali to Phaltan. Here at school Laxman Mane experienced a complete change. Being left alone to study he “felt happiness and freshness of a new born. Nobody talked about caste-low or high...[but] the people at my village called me names, tried to demoralize me.. and
treated me like an outsider. In this school, there was nothing of that sort. (The Outsider:Upara:123) Later he hired room at Phaltan with other students named Narayan, Ramdas etc. from Nirgudi. Despite many people tried to dissuade him from school but Laxman Mane never gave up school. He earned his living by working in restaurant – washing dishes. His honesty earned him free meals. But at school he could not clear Mathematics and English to enter tenth class, though he was promoted to tenth standard. Now the writer realized what sort of life his family he belongs to. He used to narrate his family conditions saying,

You see, Narayan, we stay where the people come and defecate. We take our meals on the dunghills. And when the child who cannot yet wipe his nose, orders us to play the band, we play it. I have got fed up. I live among friends like you. I feel ashamed. I don’t feel like following this way of life. up till now ignorance was bliss. I didn’t know if I had any choice. But now I can’t put up with this servility and this frustrating way of life. (The Outsider: Upara:131)

The above quote explains change brought about due education in the life of downtrodden classes. At the age of sixteen or seventeen the writer began to realize what he can do with the help of education. His family members bear the burden of outsider and had to undertake cheap economic activities to support family needs. Now being outsider they had to undertake predestined works designated to Kaikadi community i.e. playing music band or weaving basket. However the writer saw better prospect after getting educated. He began to compare the state of livelihood after getting into school and firmly determined to go with new way of life….life of educated man.

Now in tenth class Laxman Mane is friended Narayan, Ramdas and Popat Jagtap from Mahar community. He undertook business of selling
bread and butter which gave him ten rupees to support all expenses. Daily working for expenses, working with music band in vacation resulted his weak performance in Mathematics and English in tenth class. But, Laxman Mane notes certain changes after going to school at Phaltan. “My manners had improved greatly. I had begun showing a certain respect to my parents, my language and expression had undergone a sea change.” (The Outsider:Upara:149) He made up his mind to get cleared Mathematics and English subject. At last in October he cleared matriculation examination. After spending three month with parents he thought of going to Kolhapur for further education; but his parents wanted him to get married and support the family income. ‘For them marriage was the only significant thing in life around which everything was centered’, however Laxman Mane resisted and went to Kolhapur and enrolled in Kirti college. His friends Narayan and Ramdas took responsibility of food and shelter. He cleared the pre-degree examination in all the subjects with 50% marks.

By now the writer become accustomed with college routine in Kolhapur. But

Whenever I saw the tents of the nomads or saw them weaving their baskets by the roadside, I stopped and talked to them for a long time without any purpose. I talked to them in general without disclosing to them that I was a Kaikaadi. The clothes I wore and the college atmosphere in which I move made me feel shy of disclosing my caste to them. (The Outsider:Upa:160)

The above quote expresses the state of mind of a educated man when he confronts his society reeling back to old patterns when some of them are leading better life. It also suggests the sense of compassion and sympathy and most importantly an outlook to observe the community
objectively as what type of life the nomads used to live. By being educated it enabled writer to deplore over the condition of other community members too. This is the true outcome of education, for it generates an objective outlook in the learner so that he can check for all the wrong done to him or his society without succumbing to situation.

In college he met Porf. Patgaonkar and other teachers, with whose encouragement Laxman Mane took active participation in curricular activities and attended ‘Seva Dal’. He happened to read all books by Bhausaheb Khandekar and felt liking for some social work. He began understanding traditional thoughts which made the Kaikadies beggar. In the meantime he witnessed the debate opened by Dr. Kumar Saptarshi and Dr. Baba Adhav. Through these thinkers Laxman Mane came to know the issues and nature of caste and religion. He was moved by their speeches delineating demerits of ‘Chaturvarna’ promoted by Shankaracharya. Gradually he became part of social movement motivated by Prof. Malgaonkar, Baburao Paritekar and Nanasahebe Mane who were the members of the ‘Dalit Youth Association’.

Being befriended with the enlightened members Laxman Mane gathered new sense of self-dignity and self-respect. He says:

Thanks to Buddhist cult of its chairman Gautam and his associates and also because of the internal dissension among the ‘Dalits’ themselves, we were so annoyed that I and some of my friends were constrained to start a new association called ‘Dr. Ambedkar School of Thoughts’. Under its auspices, we started a primary school for children in the settlement of the nomadic tribes. (The Outsider:Upara:163)

The feelings expressed in the above passage indicate Laxman Mane’s fascination for Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts and work. With the
educated people he learned about many thinkers and with the chairman of Buddhist cult he wanted to open new institution to promote Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts. He was annoyed to hear the promotion of Chaturvarna that deliberately sidelined people like nomads. So to promote thoughts of people like Dr. Ambedkar- the man behind generating unprecedented sense of self-realization as whom the shudras, untouchables and outsiders are. Thus, we find Laxman Mane getting engaged in betterment of his society. He determines to educate his people by opening a school at settlement where most of the nomads reside. But due to poverty he had, for time being, to leave the enlightened thoughts. Another incident of publication of Raja Dhale’s article in *Sadhana*, generated hot discussion. With Bapusaheb Patil and Suresh Shirpurkar and friends decided to organize a long march in support of Sadhana. Laxman Mane arranged meeting of all backward class students and took up the cause of the Dalits against the orthodox Hindus. The long march received massive support from all Dalit associations and parties and became hot topic for many days in Kolhapur.

In college, he thrived over scholarship. Through this scholarship and money received from job he help his friends. The thought of marriage disturbed him whenever his father tried to explain the importance of caste. His father used to say, “My boy, keep this in mind: “one may even eat the dust to preserve one’s caste.” There is on salvation without caste. Don’t think of bad things. I’ll arrange your marriage.” (The Outsider:Upara:167) But Laxman Mane had made up his mind. He determined, “come what may, I wouldn’t go anywhere until I finish my college studies” (The Outsider:Upara:171) His determination for continuation of education was the result of enlightened thoughts of social work for the cause of community at large. This is how education
completely altered his mind set despite constant hammering to get married by his father. We can sense that his father was dragging him in age old traditional life of begging and wandering for a boy who is half-educated. But having encouraged by good friends Laxman Mane unhesitantly had resolved to not to go with his father’s decision; for leaving studies meant life of hardship with donkeys.

Meanwhile, Laxman fell in love with Shashi, who belonged to Maratha community. His many friends tried to convince him not marry her because she belongs to Maratha. His friends Narayan, Ramdas, Maruti, Kalokhe, Bankar and Kumbhar were not happy and they left the room. Their friendship came to an end. Then Laxman befriended Matkar. But Laxman experienced the casteism while sharing meal. Finally, with the help of Prof. Patangaokar, Prof. Dhoble, Sursh, Bapusaheb and Prof. Deshpande, Laxman married Shashi.

Getting married to Maratha girl draws the writer to the much hated traditional life- life subsumed with caste barriers and binding customs. Because he had married a girl from other caste the Jatpanchayat had excommunicated his family members. Unable to bear the hardship to his parents and lured by relatives Laxman Mane had to succumb to Jatpanchayat decision. Later his wife named Shashi too is converted to Kaikadi community by undergoing rituals. At the end of the autobiography we learn that Laxman Mane start new life within a traditional framework of nomadic communities. However, as an enlightened educated youth he excelled in life to note down his experiences in the form of Autobiography in order to relate the insidious view of nomadic communities.
Such is the life of Kaikadi community. People from this community too observed strict rules of their caste and never allowed any other their members to evade it. In the whole book experience that Laxman Mane’s father at first tried to get his son educated but cannot gave up the thoughts of getting ride off caste. On the other hand we learn that by gradually being aware of educational spirit and courage gathered out of it Laxman Mane himself undertook education, befriended with social thinkers and thereby developed a new outlook of social work to up lift his caste members from old life of wanderers. Had he no educated he would have easily, like other uneducated body’ have succumbed to beggar’s life but education gave him sense of freshness and a new born, liberated individual responsible for his betterment. Being educated he broke out the old tradition of child marriage, and opted for inter-caste marriage. Thus, he tried to wipe out the stigma of being downtrodden and realize his identity as a liberated human being. Later we come to know that influenced by the humanitarian values put forward by Dr. Ambedkar he converted to Buddhism along with many members from Kaikadi community.

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AKKARMASHI: THE OUTCASTE

Caste based discrimination has been one of the most hated topic among Dalit writers, poet, artists and students in recent past. Each one of them has a different story to tell about their struggle in caste biased society. Their literary expressions have been instrumental in revealing their deep seated moral agonies after realizing self-respect, dignity, sense of pride and social consciousness owing to Dalit movement initiated by
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In present conditions too Dalit movement preserved the emancipatory message of Dr. Ambedkar who sought a formal strategy to fight back any form of discrimination in a democratic set up instead of restoring to arms. Dr. Ambedkar’s social work emanates most feasible form of agitation to claim one’s civil rights. And this adds to moral wellbeing of a society. As a result many Dalit writers, activists have taken is as foundation of thought process which has enabled them to dare to give vent to his/her dismantled and subjugated, perplexed awareness in paradoxical society. One the most popular and appreciated attempt in this line of thinking is an autobiographical work *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* by Sharankumar Limbale.

*The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (2003) is a painful account of an ‘outcaste’ or *Akkarmashi* - often neglected section of society who is not given place among four major castes due to attributed mismatch of two or more castes, hence to left to be exploited, tortured robbed, rapped and untouched even by Mahar, Mang communities. Sharankumar Limbale, in first person narrative, opens every corner of his heart driven by paradoxical conditions in life. At one time he knew that he is born to upper caste father but at the same time his mother belongs to Mahar caste- an untouchable community, and hence left to bear mental torture of being outcaste- belonging to none of the scheduled castes in fourfold caste-system in Hindu society. In this process of recounting life patterns of outcastes the writer particularly makes us aware about the demerits and damning conditions being born in lower castes. Thereby he opens a window to his familial history, traditions, compelling behavioral patterns subjected to poverty, hunger and most importantly the venerable mentality lured by upper castes.
Sharankumar Limbale begins to disclose his heart wrenching experiences from the point of view of an untouchable boy. He is not allowed to sit with Wani, Brahmin, Marwari, Muslim and Maratha but had to manage study, play and dine among Mahar and Mang students in school. At very tender age he realizes rampant discriminative practices: the untouchable boys are asked to sit apart from other upper caste students; had to eat leftover food of upper castes students; being born in low castes had to sweep the walls and floor of school building by dung, sit on the floors away from other students etc.

In childhood Sharakumar Limbale lived with his granny Santamai. She sent him to school and was most proud to have seen him shouting slogans on Independence Day and republic day of India. While recollecting childhood Limbale remembers many things that characterize living conditions of untouchable communities, particularly Maharwada dwellings surrounded by ‘heaps of garbage, tin sheds, dogs, and pigs’. For him school was the only clean and tidy place meant to be part of civilized life.

His reflection about the children from untouchable communities highlights the way they are brought up and made to accept caste biases ever since childhood. For instance, he gives an account of how they used to get excited whenever there was wedding in upper caste family. At such functions, they used to linger around the house until and unless they are asked for food. The main reason for surveying around wedding parties was not the attraction of pendal, lighting or jewelry in true sense but hunger. Untouchable community children run as fast as they can to get leftover food in such wedding. The writer showed reluctance towards going to wedding parties just to eat, but lack of food and hunger compel the parents to send their children to bring feasts so as to appease at least
one or two days hunger. Hunger forms the core issue of sustenance of untouchable families. The writer strongly remembers the days of hunger and in order to feed family, how his granny adopted the weirdest tricks to collect grains.

“During the harvest when cattle grazed in the fields, they passed undigested grains of jowar in their dung. The grains were yellow and swollen. Santamai picked up such lumps of dung an on the way home washed the dung in the river water, collecting only the clean grains. She then dried them in the sun. As they dried they shrank. I felt the grains should not be washed as washing shrank them back. We went home when the grains were dry. When Santamai came home she ground the jowar grains into flour. Santmai was used to eating such bhakaries [made up of flour from grains taken from dung]. It was like pushing garbage into a furnace, feeding its fire. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 10-11)²

Similarly, another source of collecting food was dead animals’ meat. Whenever an animal died in the village, the maharwada was asked to remove the carcass. Without hesitating the all people from untouchable community would adopt the filthy work. Immediately they would appear with vessels or plates to collect their share of meat. But the writer, when he was in seventh standard, began to feel ashamed of flesh eating when he was teased by students calling ‘base born who swallowed ox’.

The writer introduces his family members. In childhood he was brought up by Santamai. Santamai had another six sisters. Santamai got married in Teerth and gave birth to one daughter Masamai. They lived in Hanoor until the author’s mother Masamai got married. Other family member for instance Duttumama, eldest son of Dhonda- one of the sisters
of Santamai, had no permanent occupation. They mostly earn their living by thieving.

Many events touched the sensitive mind in childhood. The incident of offering water to one of his friend Arjay - a boy from Mang community trigged many basic questions about caste and its deeply felt impact among lower castes. While playing the two friends entered the house and immediately started drinking water. But at same time Santamai stopped Shankar Limbale from giving water to his friend. The reason being, “if he touches it [water pot], he’ll defile it”. ((The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 20)

Then the writer recollects his upset mood on refusing water to his friend. He tries to find answers to questions, “Is one’s caste more important than one’s friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Wasn’t Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it? (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 20) denied from drinking water at home, the author and his friend went to reservoir meant for the Mangs to drink water from. But to his surprise, his granny beat him because he had gone with the Mana and drank water there. She became so angry that threatened to stop feeding him food. One of the striking reasons behind such thrashing was evermore different: she said he was son of a wealthy man- Patil from village.

On the contrary the author remembers incidence of untouchability at barber’s shop. As school boy he first time went to cut hairs. But after the barber came to know him as Mahar refused to cut hairs. Instead he had to walk distant village to get their heads shaved. One of the member, Shrimantanna reported complain in police station against the refusal and ban on cutting hairs of untouchable. Since then the barber started cutting their hairs too.
Santamai and her daughter Masamai run a liquor business. They had installed liquor extracting utensils in house itself. Therefore there was constant fear of police raid. At one time the police caught whole of the liquor extracting equipments. As result the family had to suffer great financial loss. So they bought liquor from nearest village. Drinking liquor was common thing among all family members including the author, Santamai, Masamai, and Nagi- his sister.

So far the author tells up about his granny, but now onwards he deliberates about his birth. Santamai-author’s mother is the only daughter of Masamai. Santamai was married to Ithal Kamble. Ithal Kamble worked on the farms of Hanmanta Limbale, as a farm worker on yearly contract basis for seven to eight hundred rupees. Limbale points at poverty of the family, “Ithal Kamble’s poverty was his sad lot, like the yoke-inflamed shoulder of an ox. He worried perpetually about his food. His ribs looked like marks of a whip on the skin of an ox. His stomach was so shrunken that it seemed to such his back like a lap fly. His life had turned into a cattle-shed.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 35) In hard times, Limbale Patil helped Ithal Kamble but with different intentions to abuse his wife. It completely ruined the Kamble family.

For the Patil used Masamai, as the caste members’ meeting Masamai was forced to divorce. Hence the family got separated. Masamai had to leave her two children- Dharma and Surykant with Ithal Kamble. Due to poverty Masamai could not got re-married. After some days she accompanied Dadunya- a folk singer as female partner. Meanwhile, Hanmanta Limbale enticed her again and offered her a rented house at Akkalkot. He used her to appease his desire whenever he felt. Consequently, Masamai gave birth to a son. But Limbale refused to own
the child. He tried to neglect Masamai and the son. He even didn’t acknowledge the author as is offspring. Here the author reveals a bitter truth that underlies the pomp and prestige of being upper caste members in Hindu society. He points out that:

People who enjoy high-caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion, and inherit property, have exploited the Dalits of this land. The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patil. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patils whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 38)

Again the writer discloses a harsh truth about his family. “Nigi, my sister, was born after me. Then Nirmi, Vani, Suni, Pami, Tamma, Indira, Sidramma, so many children! We were all of one womb and one blood. We shared a common mother but different fathers…I was born from her affair with Hanmanta Patil.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 38) Except author, rests of the children are born from Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil- the leader from Hanoor- a distant village. Now all the children born to Masamai were named after Sidramppa’s caste Hindu Lingayat as per official records. Hence they are Lingayat. But as Mahar community doesn’t accept them and at same time nor did the Lingayat community. Consequently, this family live in a ‘semi-Maharwada’ neither belongs to Mahar community nor Lingayat community. The writer finds himself in great dilemma of being born in such conditions. He feels suffocated being disowned by upper castes and negated by lower castes. He raises a series of questions about social order, caste system, ethical values perpetuated
in varna system. His benumbing questions directed at conditions of Dalit woman shakes the foundations of belief in sanctity of women in Hindu society in general. If woman is said to be the treated like god in society in but women in untouchable are forced to go under humiliation every day. In fact it had been tradition of certain downtrodden communities to entertain the bed of upper caste leader. Writer’s mother falls prey to such tradition. He cannot understand:

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I, really? (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 37)

Up till now, at first having divorced from Ithal Kamble, Masamai went with Hanmant Limbale. Then deserted by Limbale she gave birth to other children from Sidramappa Patil. Finally, when disowned by the Patil, she is with Santamai- the grandmother. From father side he is Lingayat, hence he claims to be Lingayat and from mother side he Mahar hence he considers himself Mahar. Moreover, in his house lives Dada-Mahmood Dastagar Jamadar who lives with Santamai. This again confuses him for being Muslim too. It poses biggest riddle in front of the writer. He desperately seeks answers for genuine questions that its anwers lie deep in the caste system of this society. He asks the social order prevailing now:

“They can’t the Jamadar’s affection claim me as Muslim? How can I be high caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am an untouchable, what about my
father who is high caste? I am like Jarasandh. Half of me belong to the village, whereas the other half is excommunicated. Who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected? (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 39)

Thus, somehow the family consists of Santamai, Masamai, Dada and other children with the author. They stay nearby Maharwada. He befriended Mahar boys rather than Mang boys. Masamai run a liquor business and Santamai did sundry jobs in village. Dada, after losing the job of watchman in village council worked in bus-stand as porter. Dada is the only earning member. But most of the time the family had to sleep without food. The author gives stark portrayal of poverty and hunger. He remembers,

Sometimes there was only one bhakari in the basket. How could this one bhakari be enough for me, Dada, and Santamai? Santamai’s face would then look as if she was staring at a graveyard. She made me eat and went hungry herself. I was the cause of the worry on such days. I would give just water to my hungry Dada. He drank it as if he were pouring water in the radiator of a bus. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 41)

Soon the family got split after fierce quarrel between Santamai and Masamai. Santamai left the Maharwada and started living at bus stand. Santamai took the writer with her as Masamai treated him like stepson. With very few utensils and household things Santamai, the writer and Dada settled down in open space back of the bus stand. Clutched by hunger and poverty three persons lived in open space vulnerable to all calamities. Dada worked as porter and Santamai sweep the bus stand in early morning.

Meanwhile, the writer received his surname as Limbale. Bhosale headmaster enrolled the writer in school registering as son of Hanmanta
Limbale Patil from Baslegaon. When Patil came to know about this, he tried hard to persuade Bhosale headmaster. But the teacher didn’t give up his courage and finally Limbale was made to accept the name. After seventh class the students had to go to Chungi- a nearby village to continue high school studies. While filling the form for freeship the writer didn’t like to add name ‘Masamai Hanmata Limbale’. He felt it as curse and shame inflicted by a tradition- a tradition of legal whorship. In his words this tradition runs in every village where “A patil, always a big landowner, has a Dalit woman as his whore. There is at least one such house in every village. Children born to such a whore have no legal father because there is an unbridgeable gap between such a father and son.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 58-59) When author went to the sarpanch for signature, a new dispute erupted as the Village head refused to sign the form. Bhosale guruji intervened and settled the matter. Here, as naturally the village head took the side of Limbale Patil, and denied and such name Masamai Hanmanta Limbale. The author again found himself in jeopardy. His concerns for identity of human beings stirred our consciousness. He asked, if the system doesn’t accept him as human being, then “what else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither father’s name, nor any religion, nor, caste; I had no inherited identity at all.” Annoyingly he thrusts stirring questions in front of social system, “can everybody guarantee that he is the offspring of the father whose name is added to his name? Has anyone seen who sowed his seed? Has anyone seen the intercourse of his parents that resulted in his birth? (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 59)

From this moment onward Shankar Limbale became more conscious about his identity. He realized his true condition. Now became
bolder to face people around. When asked where his father and mother are, he would directly say, they are dead. At another incidence his bold thinking comes forward when he observes the untouchables are not allowed to enter a temple. He ponders over the socio-religious system brought up by society. He points out discrepancies in worship of God and the morals, ethics practiced by society. Even he dares to reject such a religion, caste system and country where there is no place for untouchables. He says,

God discriminates between man and man. He makes one man rich and the other poor. One is high caste, and the other untouchable. What kind of God is this that makes human beings hate each other? We are all supposed to be the children of God, then why are we considered untouchable? We don’t approve of this god, nor this religion, nor this country because they ostracizes us.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 62)

This kind of sense generates in the mind of an individual who had been conscious about falsehood of ethics nurtured in the name of religion. Moreover, disheartened by ill treatment how can one believe in the prestige and honor for being part of such a religion. With this suspicious outlook at the ethical values being brought up in society, the writer starts negating the culture, customs and deities.

Sharankumar Limbale, after completing high school education at Chungi and then was sent to boarding school at Chaplgaon. At Chapalgaon boarding the writer happened to come in contact with Dalit students and with them he came to know about Buddha’s teaching. Here in the good company of sincere students, he showed improvement in English. Santamai admired his progress. She was the only relative who had belief in school education for her grandson. Her admiration for
school going grandson can be assessed on her visit to the boarding at Chapalgaon. Sharankumar Limbale writes, “That day Santamai walked the distance just to see me. She brought me a pair of old chappals. Someone had forgotten them at the Hanoor bust stand and Santamai had found them while sweeping the place. She didn’t give the chappals either to Nagi or to Nirmi but to me. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 75)

Learning to be honest for a downtrodden student seems to be taboo from an upper caste individual’s point of view in those days. The writer developed an attitude towards honest when he returned thirty rupees. He says that the joy of being appreciated as honest boy was more valuable than the thirty rupees. This is how the we can gather that a person who had no parents to name after but education gave him sense of pride in being civilized to the core. Moreover, such bold actions also encouraged his self-respect. He says, “We hated the very idea of untouchability. With our education, there grew is us a sense of pride. Casteism made us bitter.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 76) The boys realized their actual place in society. More they came to know about discrimination, damnation and condemnation imposed by upper caste, with educational awareness greater they became tense to reject it. Thus, a massive alteration of mind began to take shape with education. Moreover, education enabled them to generate an unusual sense of self-esteem.

Now, having realized the self-esteem and a strong repulsive sense for discriminative treatment at tea stall, what a Dalit student did is very important to note here. Any illiterate person, if happened to arise self-pride would have solemnly rejected by adopting violence. But in case of Dalits students is it different case. Sharankumar Limbale and his friend
Parshaya decided to take on task the tea stall discrimination practice. It was sort of experiment against untouchability.

The author and Parshaya entered the tea shop. Parshaya, plucked the tea cup meant for untouchables and asked to pour the tea, then one of the worker poured tea into it. As soon as both of these friends began to run with the cup and saucer towards police station. At first time the police showed strange reaction towards untouchability practice at tea shop but arguing that if the police constable is not taking action, then they will write to chief minister or prime minister. Immediately the tea shop owner was called upon. If he allowed other untouchables to drink tea with same cup and saucer his tea shop may be closed. However, the tea shop owner offered tea to these boys in fresh new cup and saucer. But, the tea incident brought harsh treatment from Maharwada and mangwada. They were beaten out of superstition and enslaved, subjugated mind-set.

This was the first beginning against untouchability in the life of the writer. The source of his inspiration and fighting spirit lay in Santamai’s stories of injustice when she told at night before going to bed. The writer contends that his feeling was not limited to himself or family, but he felt sorry for injustice inflicted upon his community people. At later stage when he read history he came to know the roots of injustice deeply spread into distant antiquity. The writer even dares to equate his agony of being tortured for thousands of years with Lord Buddha.

Amid hunger, starvation, injustice and applied knowledge of social issues the writer acquired first class marks and second rank in twelfth class. Before enrolling further education in college, poverty, hunger and starvation had already encircled its venomous grip on the inflamed career. As Santamai went to borrow money from an upper caste person, the humiliating staring at the exposed body of granny stirred the embers of
resistance in the writer’s mind. Before entering into college life, Sharankumar Limbale, thus had determined to put an end to disgrace inflicted upon his family.

Somehow he managed to get admission in Dayanand College, at Sholapur. But during college days, the writer experienced fearfulness as he was worried about his caste, because as he says,

I couldn’t claim my father’s caste and religion. In a sense I was not a Mahar, because high-caste blood ran in my body. Could I drain this blood out of my body? My own body nauseated me. The agony I live though is my own as much as that of my village. The life of my village was min. I was wounded by this landlords’ mansion. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 82)

However, inflamed with the aggressive thoughts of being born to a Mahar mother and upper caste father but cannot openly declare the truth the found solace in ‘new environment’ during college days at Sholapur. This environment was created by nothing but enlightened Dalit students such as Mallya, Dupargude, Dolare. From this time onward he became more and more sensitive towards social Dalit consciousness. As he records, “I was growing amidst a conflagration. The roots of the [Dalit] Movement were settling more firmly; injustice under a new consciousness which was becoming more pervasive day by day.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 83) Since, poverty didn’t allowed taking part in luxurious life, the writer continued college education under great financial shortcomings. But a new ray of hope persisted in hostel where most of the students belonged to Dalit community. They realized that all of them sailed in one boat of poverty which was vulnerable to the tortures treatment of dominant castes. But being follower of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the hostel it gave the writer a sense of ‘respectful’. He
confesses that the salutation ‘Jay Bhim’ gave him ‘new meaning and significance.’ He further says,

The blood flowed like hot lava through my body. My mind burned with myriad thoughts in silent protest. Babasaheb filled me with reverence. If felt I was meeting my mother of the last seven births. I burned within myself whenever I heard news about the atrocities against Dalits. It made me very impatient. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 87)

Such revulsion against bruised past and happening past sought after terrible analysis in the mind of the writer. He began to tear off rituals like Satwai- who, it is supposed to write his/her fortune on the forehead of new born on fifth day after birth. Once it is written, one cannot remove or smear it, its permanent stigma. None other but the social order and caste system laid foundation of perpetual tyranny or perpetual fortune for individual in society. And unfortunately, both of the sections: the upper and lower castes are hegemonized to stick to. However, to break this hegemanized mental state, the writer proposes solution to skin the forehead and wipe out smeared message of tyranny if it be. But as we know it is myth, it is nothing but conjured up tradition of caste system that must be rooted out from mind and morality of Hindu social order.

The writer thus became more and more concerned about social problems. Most of the Dalit students were offered reservation facilities. But rumor about its cancelation would trigger shock waves of terror as it was the only source to continue education in city. He accepts that:

We are educated only because these facilities exist; they were like a father to us. If there were no facilities we would have had no such education, would have been at home grazing cattle and helping our parents. Instead we were living in cities away from home. Out parents were
toiling to death there. I often thought of their hard labour, hunger, and hopes for our future. On every page of whatever book I read, I saw pictures of Santamai begging and Dad’a hard work as porter. Whenever we heard news that our mothers and sisters in the village were tortured we couldn’t concentrate on our studies because we were so angry and frustrated. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 89)

Family members never showed negative response toward education. In fact they felt themselves to be the most fortunate members of community to allow their wards to attain education that was ban and could not think of it even in dreams. On return journey to college, the writer’s granny and Dada’s blessings represent the courage and moral spirit that stood behind in study during college days. The writer reminds the farewell scene at bus stand when Dada who was getting more and more old to load heavy luggage on top of the bus, used to say, “Don’t worry about us. Keep studying hard. I will never let you fall short of money.” At last in 1978, the writer got his graduation completed.

He happened to become part of Dalit Panther in its march to demand name of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to Marathwada University, where most of the Dalit students were studying. This march gave new directions to the students in Sholapur district to get organize and demand for justice.

After the agitations the writer encounters odd contraries: he says he cannot recognize his brothers and sister. The reason behind is that though the Akkarmashi community individual knew his/her mother, but don’t know who is father. All this is because we are controlled by caste: the outcaste. The contrast became more visible and weird when we are told about the dwelling place of the writer. The writer says,

My house was our village bus stand. I asked my friends to be seated on the benches inside the bus stand and treated them to tea. They said, ‘let us go to your hose
now’. But I had no house. My father lived in a manson, my mother in a hut in the Maharwada, and I on the streets. Behind the bust stand my grandmother cooked food in the open. We all ate food from a single plate.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 97)

The writer felt most conscious of his poverty when he was visited by his friends at bus stand house. Lack of food, in extremely hungry condition the family passed days.

In Sharankumar Limbale’s life one more event displayed a terrible contradiction in the mentality of people even though they claimed to followers of Dr. Ambedkar. Limbale had yet not married. So one of his friend’s relative Maryapa Kamble, who was Mahar by caste agreed to get his daughter named Suman, married to Sharankumar Limbale. The most important attraction in marriage preparations was the photographs of Dr. Ambedkar and Siddharth Gautam Buddha, Mahatma Phule; since the writer had determined to get married according to Buddhist rituals instead of Hindu religion. The marriage took place in the presence of in-laws only whereas his mother prepared to serve liquor to the customers at home and rest of them- Kaka, Santamai didn’t visited the ceremony.

After knowing the family business of liquor the in-laws refused to send their newly wedded daughter with the author. This again ignited the sense of being lowest community among the untouchables- Mahar. For the in-laws contended that, “you are rotten people. We have purified you. You were lying on the garbage”; and drove away him without wife. But somehow, in fierce scuffle he got his wife back.

Later, he discontinued education and took a job of telephone operator at Ahmadpur. Meanwhile, he was much concerned about events happening regarding renaming of University in Marathwada. There were
riots, agitations, marches. He shares intimate concerns with the movement saying, “In my blood, echoing like a foetus was an agitation. The shoots of this ferment in my blood were bright like the sun. The intense hatred between Dalits and high castes was engendered in the mind of both groups. The government was indifferent the leadership of Bapurao Jagtap and Jogendra Kawade was inspiring.” (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 103)

The author analyses the factual reasons behind the rejection of renaming of Marathwada University at Aurangabad after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He observed that the Hindus were jealous about Dalits, as erstwhile untouchables were getting excelled in social-political spheres only because of education. Education aroused sense of self-pride and awareness about rights. He has very pertinent views which focus on the real issue of hatred generated among Hindus or upper castes:

The Hindu community was hurt, because with the facilities given to them, Dalits were getting education and becoming aware of their rights. A generation of militant youths generated by the movement also threatened the Hindus and the thought of untouchables living contended lives with jobs made available to them, irritated them. Dalits refused to do the lowly jobs that they once did for Hindus. Such changes in the Dalit community occurred with their conversion to Buddhist. The thought that the community which had lived the life of cats and dogs for the thousands of years was now behaving as equals was unacceptable to the high-caste Hindus. (The Outcaste: Akkarmashi: 103)

But the author was worried with a different issue. As of now, when he got job as a telephone operator, he began to avoid being identified as Dalit. He felt insecure that if he reveals his original caste he would have loose the job. Thus the prevailing conditions made him keep his caste
secrete and adopted identity of a Lingayat. A sudden reflection can be noted after shifted to such a position. The author confesses that he felt ‘ashamed of Santamai’s and Dada’s utter poverty’ when they visited the author. Even he told lies presuming surnames from upper castes instead of actual names. But an incident at Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar made him to deplore on his real identity when the Mahars took him to be upper caster. The thought of being born in a impure caste drove him into whirlwind.

So far in Ahmadpur he was taken to be someone from upper caster but when he got transferred to Latur, he couldn’t dare to presume false name to acquire place and prestige in society. He surveyed every building, but he received a frank reply, that they don’t want to let the room for a Muslim or Mahar. He attributes this dehumanization to caste restrictions. Even though he lived a neat and tidy lifestyle but none of the upper caste localities offered a room to stay. At Ahmadpur he learnt high caste mannerism and had turned almost Dalit Brahmin, despite dislike for high caste values. But this trick lost its vigour when he found himself in whirlwind of high caste and lowest caste.

At last he got room in Bhimnagar situated in almost Marwari graveyard area, where the erstwhile untouchables, mostly Mahars reside. Here in Bhimnagar area he resides by funeral pyre. He internalizes the scene of burning dead body as if he is on fire from inside: even if educated, having good job the caste system doesn’t recognize him as a human being. There seems no hope of getting freed from the cage of caste system, which is locked from inside and its key is thrown into unending future.
The author then helplessly narrates dealings of his relatives who have succumbed to the age old life style: his sisters Pami and Indira got married to brothers from Akkalkot and Vani another sister’s marriage failed. Their mother-in-law was Muslim. After wedding, on their way to Akkalkot the author’s sister Vani got involved with strange worker in the bar. But the marriages came to an end since the in-laws discovered that Masamai was a Mahar. After some days, again a strange man from Jangam caste got married with Vani…Nagi another sister was left by Nandu- a upper caste boy etc. Santamai, Masamai, Dada whole of the family was still submerged with rotten system of Akkarmashi- the outcaste.

With the awareness of education the village the community showed signs of changes. A friend named Mallya- worked hard and got freed from poverty. He had gone complete intellectual alteration. His mother once used to wear tattered clothes and went around village and farms to collect dun but now they live in furnished house. The author names his child, Anaarya- a name connoting revel against Aaryas- the upper caste groups who claim to be of pure blood. Indicating his determination to forsake inhuman caste system and adopt distinctive identity as a free being detached from outcastes.

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The Branded: Uchalya: Irresistible Desire For Social Justice

The Branded: Uchalya one of the most popular Dalit autobiographies by Laxman Gaikwad who wrote it in the year 1987. It received Sahitya Akademi Award in the 1988 for revealing the predicament of Uchalya tribe, the ill-famous thieving community branded as ‘born criminal’. The autobiography, in its true sense, is “an attempt of
a sensitive mind to pen what it has felt and experience. (The Branded: Uchalya: viiii) In other words it is an honest refusal of oppressive thinking against the Uchalyas provoked by coming in, directly or indirectly, contact with and supported by revolutionary thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar through many of his contemporary writers like Laxman Mane, Sharankumar Limble and research scholar Sri Balkrishana Renke.

In the opening pages the writer indentifies himself belonging to the Uchalya community amongst de-notified tribes and the plight being termed as born criminals by the erstwhile British government. Ever since or even “for hundreds – nay- thousands of years this man-forsaken community, denied its innate humanness by all and sundry, has been force to life a life no better than that of a godforsaken animal.” (The Branded: Uchalya, p. vii) Laxman Gaikwad is desperate with the condition of all the de-notified tribal communities; for they are subjected to ruthless treatment from society and administrative agencies: police administration. Evidently abusive ill-treatment has become code of conduct against all the members: as every small or older member of the society is drawn into suspicion irrespective of non-indulgence if any sort of stealing or pillaging act breakout in village.

Taking the note of unjustified accusation leveled by the British Act the Indian government labeled them under de-notified tribes. But it could not alter the outlook of mainstream society towards the tribes. Consequently, on the one hand being constantly forced as thieves and abandoned from civil rights as free civilian the members from de-notified communities like Pathruts, Takari, Bhamta, Uchale, Girnewadar, Kamati, Ghantishor and Wadar had to survive grime effects of poverty and disgrace in day-to-day life. In fact, they succumb to thieving in order to fill the belly. How can one, in such situations, be aware of fundamental
rights to live freely? A sensitive mind such as this writer must come forward claiming their rights. Thus this book, pointing at intellectual strengthening of tribal movement, underpins an irresistible desire to wipe out grave injustice imposed upon de-notified communities as criminals.

Born in 1956 in the Uchalya community at Dhanegaon in Latur district of Maharashtra, Laxman Gaikwad is well known as writer and social activist. He realizes that the ‘different ethical values and notions of honesty’ as only the deprived, “branded, rejected and forsaken are ruthlessly exploited and denied any opportunity of living an honest life, however strongly they may desire to do so. I yearn to change all this.” (The Branded: Uchalya: ix) The tribesmen are compelled to adopt thievery as means of livelihood as since they are intentionally deprived of any respectable means of employment opportunities or ordinary jobs offered in civil society owing to criminal laws passed by British government.

The British government branded us 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, pick-pocketing. The higher castes and classes have fully exploited this miserable, helpless situation of ours for their own selfish purposes. (The Branded: Uchalya: vii)

Notwithstanding, the measures taken by Indian government to improve the lot of de-notified communities, Gaikwad has lot to uncover extremely unusual community and family background in which he, somehow managed to educate and give voice to branded communities.

The autobiography relates firsthand account of disturbed livelihood of Uchalyas from very tender age. The writer’s family had no permanent
source of livelihood for being an *Uchalya*—a community completely compelled to survive on stealing, pick-pocketing, lifting household and sundry things from market and communal gatherings. There is nothing less to put forth than tattered dwelling hut, shabby clothing, poverty, hunger, exploitation by police administration. The family has long history of thievery from grandfather Lingappa and grandmother Narsabai—both once the most popular thieves during the then Nizam rule.

The Uchalya community followed extremely unusual customs of offering prayer to *pass*—permission to move from one place to other given by village *patil*, as God and the blade as Laxmi— the goddess of money. Gaikwad particularly mentions the customs, rituals when the family and other community members set out on thieving task. He writes:

> Whenever my grandfather, grandmother and others in my family set out on a thieving mission, they bought a cock and sacrifice it to the blade, sprinkled some drops of its blood on the blade and the pass; and prayed: O God! Grant us success; let our thieving operations be blessed with success, save us from the police.' Then everybody, in turn, bowed in obeisance before the blade and the pass just as people do before gods in temples. (The Branded: Uchalya: 03)

The community had evolved professional thieving skills as source of income that would enable them to meet the daily needs and expenses. For the purpose special group of community members had taken to impart the skills of thieving and tricks from one generation to other. Manikdada is sent to Bhargaon to acquire thieving skills as well as hard core training of bearing the torture if caught by police. Ironically, in this community the teachers teach students different thieving skills such as “*Khistang Matne*—Picking pockets, *Chapal, Muthal aanane*—stealing footwear and bundles of things, *Paddu ghalane*—deception and
Uthewaari—deception by sleight of hand while engaging persons in conversation, e.g. substituting spurious gold for the genuine.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 10) Similarly, writer remembers surviving skills of the community members. For example, maternal grandfather- Sayabu Tata— a shrewd old man:

Tata’s ways of thieving were different…there were plenty of rats in our hut. Tata used these rats in his thefts. Tata and I used to keep traps in the hut and catch the tats. Then, Tata would set the rats free at night in a field with full-grown wheat. The rats would gnaw and cut off the ears of wheat from the stalks and store them in rat-holes. After the farmer had harvested and garnered the crop, Tata and I would dig the rat-holes with a panchkola and bring up the ears of wheat that the rats had hidden. I would quickly gather them in a shoulder-bag. (The Branded: Uchalya: 09)

This is how the community engaged in thieving business. It is the only source of income for the members like Tata who had gathered lots of wheat which even supplied money to arrange marriages in family. Strange enough, how anyone in civilized society would believe funds for marriage came from wheat gathered out of rat-holes.

The writer recollects several incidences of hunger and poverty conditions. He cites most extreme incidences of hunger. As the community was labeled thieves none in village premises offered any sort of work to the writer’s father Martand and mother Dhondabai and elder brother Manikdada. Hence, to feed children, the only alternative left with the family was to:

“Roved around and stole corn, chilies, groundnuts and sajure from distant farms at night. Till they returned, we children starved at home. Even in the dead of night, we used to beat the stolen ears of corn, gather the grains,
grind them coarse, boil them and eat. (The Branded: Uchalya: 05)

But this doesn’t ends here; the extremity is farfetched in living conditions of children too. The writer remembers his hut in following words:

As it was, our hut was a dingy affair. We were crowed thick in it like a cluster of fleas. Harchanda and myself slept beside our sheep in one and the same hut. We shivered and froze in winters. Harchanda and I had only one coverlet between us. Even the dogs snuggled down in our coverlet. Lambs were tied nervy. The lambs pissed and the hot water trickled under our bodies. The lamb’s hot piss felt comfortable warm like a warm covering. We wished lambs kept on pissing so that it warded off the chilly feeling. On getting up I the morning we never washed the coverlet, but spread it on the roof to dry. The piss-smell filled our nostrils with a strong odor, yet we used the same sodden coverlet. Our senses were dead and we were beyond feelings. (The Branded: Uchalya: 11)

If wants to come out of such conditions, one cannot expect acute changes. Slowly the conditions began to alter in the life of Laxman Gaikwad as he saw cruelly beating and torturous treatment by police. It made his father and mother to not to send him on thieving expeditions of family. Meanwhile, the writer’s father got work at Chamle- an upper caste farmer. Here, Martand realized that his child must attend school and read and write rather than acquiring skills of thieving with Bharat Blade. Thus, despite the accusation from neighbors the writer was enrolled to primary school. Engulfed by superstitious mind the Uchalya community members took quarrel with the family for they believed that it was because of enrollment of one of the son to school the other children were suffering from loose motion and vomiting. However, with the
intervention of a teacher named Kulkarni Guruji the writer started going to school.

As Laxaman Gaikwad began writing ‘one...two...’ everything began to change from thieving to cleanliness and mannerism. He received utmost courage from father and mother. His mother didn’t like any other member of her family to teach wild arts of catching fish or crabs. His father was amazed to know what the child was learning. In fact, he was the ultimate source of motivation as he used to say ‘My boy has become very wise. He’ll be a teacher.” His father had firmly resolved to send him to school. The writer says, “That was how I came to be educated, otherwise I too would have been a thief and led the usual life of our community.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 35) At school seeing other children neat and clean he realized his dirty and carelessness. Gradually, he adopted good activities like- taking bath daily, wear clean shirt and shorts, teeth, sweep up house and wash drinking water pot. In schools he not only learned to be neat and tidy but also asked his house members to be clean. Seeing the improvement one of the teachers Dhimdhime admired his efforts and allowed him to deliver speech on 15th August. When the writer’s father came to know this he encouraged the writer saying, “Now go ahead with your schooling, I shall buy you a cycle, if I can pay off the advance I have taken and if I can save some money after the payment.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 37)

However, frequently the writer had to miss school because of yearning after food. He remembers a touching incidence of collecting food in village programme organized by Mhaskes and Chamles in Dhanegaon. As soon as the children from writer’s community came to know the programme they used to approach the site as early as possible.
They used to stand by the meals being served looking greedily at full-loaded plates, begging and wailing,

“Karbhari, give us some food...give us some food...dogs barked and we wailed. Dogs also crowded with us for food to kick the left over from the thrown-out *patravali*. When the dinners had their food and left the hall, someone from among them would say, ‘Oh there, throw these Pathruts some food’. Then we use to get half a *roti* and some vegetable in a bowl. Sometimes they would throw us the leftover from the *patravalis* of the dinners. We collected the *patravali* and ate there right on the street. But sometimes they attacked us, brandishing sticks and abused us and drove us away. (The Branded: Uchalya: 46)

One can deduce from the above lines that even if the downtrodden class children pine for education but their parents cannot provide them with proper food or stationary. So the children had to adopt the traditional methods of collecting food and having left thieving. The writer, however, when he was in forth standard realized the ill-treatment. He determined to study hard and clear the education to secure employment into government service.

Meanwhile, the writer had to accompany his family member on thieving expedition to Pandharpur. But being educated and true to his mind, back home the constables happen to caught him and asked to disclose names of his partners. In panic he revealed all the names- Nayra, Mankya, Ghagwanya and Manikdada. The writer discloses one of the brutal treatments inflicted upon whole of the family members irrespective of engagement in the crime. He writes:

“The police entered the hut and searched around. They found nothing...then the police shouted at me, eh, you son of a Pathrut take us to your hut, come, let us meet
Mankya.’ They took me to our hut…as soon as the police entered the hut they pulled at mother’s sari… They began to wallop mother. I began to weep in a loud and shrill tone. I thought my mother never stole, even then whenever the police came to our hut they thrashed her, and all just stood around and watched…she fell at their feet and touched their feet repeatedly, praying, ‘Saab, we’ve not stolen anything…the police kept on kicking her. The police alleged, ‘A large containing five hundred rupees was picked at Latur yesterday. It’s been picked by our sons, we know it. Tell us where’s that money? Either return the money or face arrest and imprisonment. The police warned, ‘Look, you better bring five hundred rupees.’ My father went to his employer and begged and borrowed a full year’s wages. My mother borrowed some amount from a money-lender at the interest rate of rupees five for eight days. The police came back, full-drunk, with a ramoshi and ordered him to take all of us to prison. They took a few brass utensils and one chaddar in good condition. My father begged and entreated, ‘Saab, my child has committed no theft. Please do not charge-sheet us.’ It was only when my father offered money that the police did not arrest e, my mother and father. They would descend upon us like a pack of wolves, beat us, search our huts, threaten us with arrest and imprisonments depart after extorting money from us.’ (The Branded: Uchalya: 61-62)

The police then extorted five hundred rupees and good utensils from the hut. He mentions that it was not the first time that the police ravished one or the other family thus. However, in such conditions the writer manages to get pass in forth standard. To continue further education he had to go to another town- Solapur. He got enrolled in government Ashram shala at Songaon where boarding facility was provided with meals. Here he learned about Gautam Buddha; “how did the Buddha feel when he found a corpse in his path? How did he get enlightened under a peepul tree?” (The Branded: Uchalya: 78) Such questions would perplex his mind. Moreover, faced with contradictory
poverty conditions, his education enabled him to gather courage to write a letter to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi pleading her to take steps to provide food for poor people in country.

Belonging to lowest class, in fact out of the chaturna Varna system, the Pathruts too were considered to be pollutant if touched. The writer mentions that he was not allowed to enter temple, use water from wells or touch any public property. One of the incidents is symptomatic to cover this grim reality of untouchability.

On one occasion I had made a fire and I was sitting before it warming myself in front of the temple of the Goddess in winter. Isvya came there and sat before the fire to warm himself. My had accidently brushed his body. He had a brass bowl in his hand. Instantly he said, ‘Lakshya, you’ve polluted my bowl’ and he curse and abused me. He put the bowel in the fire which was made by me. Then he pulled it out as if it was now purged of my pollution and went home. I used to be sad and crestfallen on such occasions. (The Branded: Uchalya: 82)

Further he also realizes that the Maratha’s are very strict about untouchable’s touch. If happened to be touched by an untouchable they bath and drunk cow’s urine. The writer was constantly reminded of his caste whenever he tried to touch any sacred book. After a while, due to mismanagement in family he is shifted to Babhalgaon boarding school. His brother, Harchanda left thieving and his father got old to work. Now he was able to feel the poverty. So he decides to look after the two. But his father pleaded him not to abandon school. His father realized the plight of being uneducated. In order to continue education, he offered to sell the sheets from the roof of his house and collect money to buy books, bag, and notebooks. But sense of poverty overwhelmed his mind and he
determined to stop his brother from begging instead of asking jobva in
temple since he had forsaken the thieving.

Meanwhile when he had no money to pay for boarding fees, so
took to a job in a spinning mill at Latur with help of Keshavrao
Sonavane. He shows active spirit in learning spinning. Very soon his
salary was increased to 60 to 75 rupees per month. After some time he
appeared for the ninth standard examination in Shivaji High School at
Latur besides working in mill. In 1972 he thought to leave Latur and go
to Aurangabad mill.

At Aurangabad he got job as a sider in the mill which paid ten
rupees a day. In mill he enjoyed goodwill on account of his thoughtful
discussions with the managers. Meanwhile his lifestyle changed
completely. Visiting his home town he realized the change brought about
by education and new jobs instead of traditional stealing in community.
He expresses his gladness when he visits Dhanegaon:

If I met a Mahar boy or a boy from our community, who
was my classmate, he would speak well about me. The
reason why I went to Dhanegaon wearing decent clothes
was that as a child I had wandered in the village begging
for food, passed my days starving. I deliberately went
round just to show them that I was living well now. I had
purchased terrycot pants for twenty rupees at
Aurangabad. The shirt was also second-hand. I had
bought second-hand shoes in Shahaganj. Everything was
old, but fitted me well. I looked handsome and attractive.
(The Branded: Uchalya: 115)

But this change bought no alteration in the mind set of upper castes
in the village. However, this ignited anger in the writer’s mind. His
education and respectful earnings aroused a sense of pride and dignity.
He would resolve, “Once at least once I would come to this village as a
dignified person and make these people greet me with humility. With such a resolve I used to assuage my anger”. (The Branded: Uchalya: 116)

While visiting his old friends he sought a job, in order that he could take care of his father, in Latur instead of going back to Aurangabad. With the help of Kokane he got job in the Mill on temporary post. He hired a new room by pretending Maratha caste. After some time he got married to Lingappa’s daughter Chhabu. He started his married life with ‘broad-brimmed plates, carafes, some bowls and a wooden vessel for kneading flour’ under the great pressure to pay back money. To meet the family expenses he thought of doing business besides job in mill. He opened vegetable shop. As he found supplementary business in Latur, the writer observed worsened condition of workers in mill.

The supervisors would beat and abuse the workers for unclean machines, late coming from mid-day meal. Many of them thought of forming union but threatened to be dismissed from job, nobody dared to take lead. The owners favoured only those people who ‘curried favour with him and threw parties for him.’ This infuriated him a lot.

On many occasions jobber-supervisors had force me to wash their lunch-boxes. I used to get infuriated; but I was also helpless. There was always the lurking fear that if I indulged in anything rebellious I would be instantly fired. If removed from the job where would I live? I had no hut to live in even at my native place. As it was I was afraid of even going to Dhanegaon. I would either be force to work there as a farmhand or be compelled to resort to thieving and picking pockets. This impending fear forced me to keep my mouth shut, though my mind fumed and fretted against injustice. (The Branded: Uchalya: 147)

Some days later as his vegetable business was in profit, the writer gathered courage to retaliate the employers, if they tried to beat him. On
Labour Day and Maharashtra Day the writer happens to put forth his displeasure against treatment by the mill employer as he was very much aware of ‘all sorts of injustice perpetrated against the workers.’ Soon he became famous worker who could directly approach the manager and report to manager anything going wrong. Almost all workers had to work in such dreadful conditions just to fill the hungry belly. Everybody abused the employer and supervisors but nobody dared to voice grievances. On the 15th August he discloses all the worse condition of workers in his speech. He says:

Our motherland is free now. Mahata Gandhi and Jawaharlalji struggled and risked their lives for this freedom. Gandhiji had often said that the poor of this country must live in happiness. But today in our free motherland we workers are thrashed with thick sticks. It is not proper. The manager-saheb may not know that the workers’ cards are torn, if they are late even by two minutes. If a worker has put in eight hours of overtime, only four hours are credited to his account. Fourteen-year-old young boys are employed to work unpaid for more than two months. If inspectors visit to check the working of the mill, these boys are concealed in latrines. The treatment that the jobbers and the supervisor meat out to the worker is unlawful and immoral. Manager-saheb, get any amount of work done by your workers, but do not thrash us cruelly. (The Branded: Uchalya: 151)

Immediately, his speech received positive reply from the manager with the assurance to stop the beating the workers. But this speech bought troubles in his job. The jobbers started reproaching and took him to task for unnecessary reasons. On the other hand he received respect from workers so he felt to raise voice grievances of workers in front of managers.
Meanwhile the workers elected the writer to Managerial Board of the mill. Now slowly he came to know affairs of the mill as he was allowed to attend Director’s meetings. He came to know that the mill made lots of profit but the workers are ill-paid. Whatever the miserable wages paid to laborers was too small for them to run house. Many workers were affected by T. B. due to lack of medical dispensary. The mill made huge profit but announced a very low bonus to the temporary workers and apprentices. With Ramling Jagtap, Shivaji Patil and others Laxman Gaikwad decided to establish union in order to put forth their demands and go on strike. For the purpose they consulted Bhagwanrao Deshpande – communist party leader who was running Lal Bawat Union. B. Deshpande helped them to frame the statement of the strike, its intentions and demands. The union organized meeting to spread awareness and encourage workers to stand for their rights. The strike went for two weeks till the chairman and manager assured to the demands. But the workers had determined to get first demands fulfilled and then go to work. The union finally determined to go on fast until death. At the same the writer began to face difficult financial conditions. He had no food in his house to feed family. He endured starvation for the workers would not loose courage and give up the strike. He took no food for many days. As a result many of the workers had to be taken to hospital and on saline along with the leader. Meanwhile many people tried to persuade him from strike but he didn’t succumb to any arguments. At last the strike was taken off on the terms to forsake payment for the strike days. The workers and the management signed the agreement; so the workers started getting pay-package. Under the supervision of Bhagwanrao Deshpande, Laxman Gaikwad began reading many books related to labour leader. It made him aware about wide
knowledge and commonsense which helped in demanding many facilities for workers.

However, the Chairman and manager found opportunity to disharmonize and break the union of workers. In the Ganesh Festival the management seized the opportunity to create misunderstanding about festival accounts. It spread the rumor about credibility of representatives as thieves. Accordingly the management became successful in disrupting the union workers. Jagtap and the writer were issued notice of temporary suspension of service. To let join their two leaders, one day workers gathered for meeting, but meanwhile the police suddenly opened lathi charge to break the strike. Ironically the criminal case was lodged in police station against the workers. This weakened the courage of the workers as now the mill deployed ‘mercenary goondas’ to stop workers from strike. Consequently a hundred workers were removed from work with the writer. To claim the right to work, they filed case against the management in the industrial court at Pune. Management played trick by assuring Ramling Jagtap and Suresh Jagtap to restore service on conditions to withdraw the case against mill. But the writer determined to continue the case to secure justice for workers in Labour Court. The verdict took too many years to settle the matter.

Now, having lost work in mill, the writer opened a hotel next to Natraj Theatre. But he was not satisfied with meager income. So be closed it and started vegetable and grocery shop. Later, he joined his sister-in-law in Dairy Co-operative society at Aurangabad. Here too, seeing this sister-in-law engaged in deceptive business he left the dairy and got back to Latur.
All the while he was haunted with idea to do something or the other for welfare of poor. After the advice of Shaikh, N. N. B. – teacher by profession he started an organization named District Pathrut Samaj Sanghatana. But while running the organization, he lost all of his money and shop. He did not arrange enough money to take his father to civil hospital. In this struggle with poverty many time he thought of restoring to thieving but, “The fear of torture by the police, however, deterred me. One mind would urge me to go while the other would pull me back in apprehension.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 172) In desperate mood cried a lot with the feeling that:

Poverty took away my mother. She died a miserably poor woman. Harchanda was missing. Father was the only sustaining link with the rest of the family. Now, that too, was snapped. He could have lived some more years. But poverty deprived him of medical aid. Starvation killed him.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 173)

It is noteworthy that the writer didn’t succumbed to traditional away of occupation i.e. thieving. It was not just because of fear of cruel treatment by police but also he had gathered the courage from leadership in mill to find better ways and fight for won rights. So, up till now many times he excelled in life but his desire to do something for society never let his sprit down in dire conditions of poverty. Even thought the family had to go hungry for many days without food in house and there was no certainty of food he stayed away from thieving. However, he managed to survive by selling biscuits, lemon-drops etc. earning just four rupees a day but it was too meager to afford a cup of milk to their daughter.

At the same time Lok Sabha election dates were declared. The writer decided to seize the opportunity. He began campaigning for Manikro Sonavane- who was contesting election on the ticket of
Congress (I). His good campaigning attracted the political leader which bought hundred or two hundred rupees. Gaikwad made use of many acquaintances in gaining a job as a peon in the Latur Municipality; but his real interest was social work in improving the conditions of his community. Later, he got shifted to the Municipal Octroi Post. Here, in government office he began to face quite situation:

Even highly placed officers in the Municipality stoop to fraud and underhand dealings I often thought of how people of my community who stole only for their two daily meals, were punished as thieve. These big officers defraud their organizations and institutions in broad daylight; yet no one says a word against them I began to become conscious of such anomalies. (The Branded: Uchalya: 177)

At octroi post he realized the dignity of work as he had to run after sundry things. Very soon he felt that he would do nothing by working as peon since he was “destined to achieve great heights…this service was not giving me a dignified life, it was reducing me to abject slavery. I thought that political bigwigs offered us such jobs to ensure that we did not rise in life and pose a threat to them.” Soon he left the job and sat home, but his wife didn’t understand his inner suffocation. He was rather disturbed by ‘the yawning gap between poor. Rich tormented my mind; vermin were eating into my brains.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 178)

In the meantime, he met Prof. B. L. Gaikwad and D. S. Gaikwad. They discussed to bring people closer in an organization instead of imparting skills of thieving and pick pocketing. During the preparations for organization he happed to realize the importance of education which made him more and more conscious about his backwardness and immaturity due to lack of complete education. He judged the same condition of his community. But this community service again drew his
family into dire penury. At last he decided to sell his house for six thousand rupees. With this money he opened a shop and let his wife run it, then began preparation for registration of an organization.

With the passing of time he came in contact with many people from Uchalya community who wanted improvement in their conditions. Thus, he completely threw himself in the welfare of the Uchalya community in Osmanabad district. He observed that in Kawatha – a village where Uchalya community population was higher, people were degraded to such a stark poverty that after completing ten or twelve years of schooling, most of them were trained in skills of pick pocketing and thieving. So he “was obsessed with the idea of improving the lot of these people and making them change to respectable ways of living. I thought if the children of these people could be sent to school, the next generation of our community would come into the respectable mainstream of society.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 179) He determined to open Balwadi or nursery for the children.

He cites many examples from his community members who had to sell their children in order to escape the poverty. His question posed to the administration and government one ponders over what we have achieved being a free Indian. He expresses his worry saying,

“It is a pity even after thirty-nine years of independence, and people are fore to sell their offspring to feed themselves. If living with dignity and self-respect is impossible, what is the use of this freedom? This must not be so, Hence, the need to do something in this direction. Whenever I move through the people of my community and hear such tales of woe, I become restless; my brain swims with giddying thoughts.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 185)
He established the educational institution under the Pathrut Samaj Organization by somehow managing registration of the Nomadic, De-notified Tribes, at Kawatha in 1979 to impart education to the Uchalya community. But illiteracy and ignorance of the community people force created suspicion among the body members and the writers. So at last he had to forego the ambition to open educational institution for the Uchalya community.

Meanwhile, provoked by political leaders- Pradip Patil, Laxman Gaikwad again started taking active participation in politics. He became popular leader after the famer’s protest demanding ban on black-marketing. The movement directed at advancement in the livelihood of Nomadic and De-notified Tribes began to show positive results. Many social workers from the community joined the organization. Their organized efforts resulted into a strong force, due to which they can openly reject any illegal claims from upper castes. For instance, they collectively declared refusal for paying Fair Tax in Kawatha village. Whenever there was any incidence of attacking community people by police or villagers, the organization would visit the site and investigate the issue and then force for just action against the administration. Once he happened to warn an SP in outspoken words on telephone and got a police protection for community. Besides he organized processions, meetings gathering thousands of nomadic and de-notified tribe people from Bhoom, Ambejogai, Beed, Basmat, Kandhar Nilanga and Ausa in Marathwada region.

At the same time he became part of satyagraha for renaming Marathwad university as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University at Aurangabad. He was arrested and sent to prison for many days. There he
happened to meet many active Dalit leaders and social workers. Many incidents disturbed him to the core of heart. He observed that in India, the police administration was not taking apt action toward youth in his community. In reality they were robbed by alleging false charges against innocent persons in community. In its attempt to nab culprits from society, the police are inversely affecting life of people at very young age by forcibly labeling them criminals. Observing incidence happened with Hirabai’s infant he analyzes the factual condition of youth in community:

If a bird is confined to life in a house by clipping its wings lest it flies away, it is force to remain in the same house all its life. Even it is wishes to fly, it cannot. Absolutely in the same way once a person form these tribes is shoved into jail right at his birth, he gets inextricably bonded to it. Even if anybody tribes to retrieves such a person from his prison or the person himself strives to escape from it he cannot come out of that hell, because his wings are clipped in early childhood. He bears the indelible branded of criminal on his forehead for all to see. Even if a criminal tries to improve himself in all honesty and sincerity, he is not allowed to do so by the society in which we live. (The Branded: Uchalya: 200)

Thus, Laxaman Gaikawad was always engaged in bringing the people closer an strengthening DNT organization and Union in Marathwada. Naturally, he was very popular. He tried to take use of every opportunity to improve the lot of nomadic and de-notified communities. At a time BSP party offered him ticket to contest Loksabh election. Being poor he hesitantly accepted it but made his mind to secure seat in parliament. But, the party just took benefit of his presence and failed to comply with assured campaign funds. Laxman Gaikwad had to forgo all money he had gathered till date, ‘BSP did not come to help at
the critical time.’ He lost the seat and money too. He learnt an obvious fact in upper caste dominated society from this incidence:

In this country it is not enough to possess god workers and volunteers to win election; you must also possess wealth, social prestige and the quality of having been born in one of the higher castes. In addition, you must be well versed in the art of hooliganism, mobocracy and making false promises and assurance. Only with these accomplishments you are fit to enter the arena of politics. (The Branded: Uchalya: 230)

Having exhausted the loan money in campaigning, before three days from the election date, he extended his support to Congress and incurred displeasure of all of his community members. One thing became clear to him that: “If workers like me ever try to assume prominence in the political field, they are vilified, disgraced and reduced to worthless nobodies. Such workers form the lowest rung of society are publicly denounced as evil person and finally tied down like slaves just as cattle are tethered to pegs.” (The Branded: Uchalya: 231)

Hereafter he became cautious and careful from political leaders’ assurances in election campaigns as they did not take any step to fulfill it. In such conditions it is quite natural for a worker to feel insecure and no idea what to do. However, absorbed with strong feeling of doing something for welfare of Nomadic and De-notified community, Laxman Gaikwad once again decides to dedicate himself “with full vigour to the strengthening of the organization and unity of these tribes.” He asserts, “I intend to solve the vexing problem of securing a livelihood for the members of my family one and of all and then give my full time and attention to the people of the Nomadic and De-notified tribes and work among them.” Instead of elevating the financial conditions of community
members he strongly believes that complete transformation of community can only be achieved by education, by strengthening tribal movement intellectually. For the purpose he determines to follow his incessant desire to organize and voice the agonies of nomadic and de-notified tribes who have been robbed off by society as well as administration due to mutual misunderstanding.

Thus through this autobiography Laxman Gaikwad presents the inner life of Uchalya community. Having, at least half educated he realizes the importance of education when he got acquainted with other Dalit leaders, writers. Emphasis for education brought in him the sense of self-respect, dignity, civil rights in society, equality and liberty. This autobiographical demonstrates his fighting spirit to face the corrupt mentality of upper castes and suggests a formidable example for young social workers in De-notified and nomadic community who wish to work for betterment of branded communities.

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The Weaves of My Life - A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs: Exploring Doubly Enslaved Past

The present autobiography The Weaves of My Life (2008) by Uramila Pawar- a noted Dalit woman writer, recounts her struggle against conventional attitude towards woman in society owing to religious transformation. The event of conversion to Buddhism played vital role in attaining self-respect among Dalits; so does it inflamed desire among Dalit women to free themselves from doubly enslaved past: the restriction on women in Hindu social order and suppressive code of conduct expected from a educated Dalit woman. The autobiography first appeared in 2003, in its original form i.e. in Marathi language under the title ‘Aaydan’.
All the Dalit writers, we referred so far, attained enlightenment by restoring to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s message and thoughts. Each one of them, in his life, either in school days or college days or later as social activists in Dalit movement, tried to bring forth his community to the forefront of public discussions. Most of them, directly or indirectly received impetus to go further in social work by taking clue from Dr. Ambedkar’s life and mission, which is implied in their writing as discussed in this chapter. The present Dalit woman writer, despite treading on the same line of claiming herself as free woman in democratic society, had to undergo crises in social life and personal life: since she is woman- taught to be subordinate, and to stretch further this patriarchal-tradition-cord, a Dalit woman- presumed to be slave of slaves. Thus, this autobiography stands different from other such works so far discussed in this chapter in its focus. Male Dalit autobiographies stand out highlighting their struggle against casteism, hunger, exploitation and predicament of being outcaste. This autobiographer strives to claim womanhood both at social level and individual level. In her struggle she receives inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar and conversion to Buddhism. As a result, today she is referred to most popular social activists, and a strong feminist voice of Dalit community. Hence, it becomes imperative to identify her personality traits that boosted her confidence in raising Dalit women’s voice besides raging Dalit consciousness.

At the outset Urmila Pawar introduces us with the importance of the title and the meaning of word- Aaydan. For the writer the word Aayadan had different connotations other than concrete objects like utensil made up of bamboo and weapon as suggested by the writer. She informs us that Dalits in Konkan region weaved Aayadan out of bamboo. At communal level the Aayadan had been identity of Dalits who
somehow managed to survive in conservative society; at family level the only source of income out of which her parents nurtured children enduring ‘pain, suffering and agony’.

According to her the primary cause of enlightenment among Dalits in Konkan region was massive conversion to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. Although difficult at first stage, but slowly the conversion to Buddhism began to alter livelihood, customs and dress code, ideology and a ‘new way of looking at religion’ among Dalits. Similarly, the Dalit literature and Dalit movement played vital role in altering the sensibilities of being a Dalit. According to Urmila Pawar, “Dalit means people who have been oppressed by a repressive social system, and challenge the oppression from a scientific, rational and humanitarian perspective.” The word Dalit achieved new shades of meaning as “each and every individual” became aware about his/her status in society. The Dalit communities received this self-awareness from Ambedkarite philosophy.” (The Weave of My Life- A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs: xii) Thus, in the very opening of the book Urmila Pawar attributes alteration of outlook among Dalits to Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy of emancipation but this did not changed conventional attitude towards Dalit woman. Concern for Dalit woman determines the direction of her memoir which is intricately related to weaving of Aayadan: the enlightened thoughts and life of Dalit women.

Urmila Pawar begins her memoir by going back to her maternal village, Phansawale where she came to know “hundreds of stories about the history of family, across the generations,” from the women villagers who used to travel through “the steep climbs, with their narrow winding paths full of jutting sharp stones and pebbles,” to reach market and sell various things at Ratnagiri. (The Weave of My Life:12) The writer tells
us that the village had been under the influence of Mahatma Jotiba Phule’s Satyashodhak movement. As a result her grandfather and mother: Aai and Baba-Chimaji developed desire to teach their son- the writer’s father at Mahar-Christians school. After completing sixth standard her father became teacher and began teaching untouchable children in a school opened at Sinal Hill. The writers particularly mentions that the hills was called Sinal after sinner untouchable women; but conversion to Buddhism brought drastic change in the outlook that it was changed into Ambedkar Wadi. After the death of first wife her father got married to next woman i.e. her mother.

Her father educated all the sons and daughters and inspired them to be financially independent rather than relying on the traditional business undertaken by Dalit community. He managed to teach elder sister-Akka up to sixth standard: a revolutionary step in village where everybody complained saying, “Bah! What do women have to do with education? Ultimately she would be blowing on the stove, wouldn’t she?” (The Weave of My Life: 18) Even after his daughter- Akka got married he asked her to undertake a job in Mental hospital. But due to many difficulties her father decided shift and stay with her. There the rest of the children Achyut and Krishna were enrolled in school at Nivkhol. Once the mad women in hospital came to know the caste of the writer’s sister, since then “a mentally disturbed woman was not willing to take food from her hands. She abused Akka because of her [lower] caste.” None but her father consoled her saying, “In any case, they are mad people. But you are sane, aren’t you? So behave like a sane person.” (The Weave of My Life: 20) Thus, father became the ultimate source of motivation in the life of all the children in the writer’s family.
Her father was active man. He worked as teacher and also operated a business of supplying mangoes. Her mother too was industrious woman who used to wove cane things—baskets, closed tops, basket for locking hens, flower baskets and cradles in order the meet the daily needs and expenses to enable the children to undergo education. However, when the writer was in third standard her father died at the age of fifty-eight in the year 1954 and since then the house succumbed to traditional life of Dalit community. The writer mentions a Tersa Shimga festival—the festival of colors. The sister-in-laws, Vitha and Parvati would go around the village to beg food at upper caste houses of Kulwadi, Marathas and Brahmans.

“They would carry baskets on their heads to collect the leftovers that might be given to them…but if Baba [writer’s father] came to know of this he would get mad and shout, ‘these stupid women! When will they cease to behave like beggars? Go tell them, don’t go begging! At least don’t bring any such food to my house. And don’t ever show your faces to me again!” (The Weave of My Life: 51)

This is was the characteristic nature of Dalit society, but writers family attained self-respect due to their father’s awakened thoughts and teachings. After the death of father their mother became helpless. But before dying he had urged his wife to educate the children. Very soon she took the charge of situation and changed herself. Urmila Pawar notes, “Earlier she was thrifty, now she became sordidly stingy.” (The Weave of My Life: 64) She became backbone of family despite growing old after the death of her husband. As youngest girl child the writer recollects all sorts of efforts undertaken by mother to educate the children.

The teachings of father and mother began to reflect in their awakened thinking rejecting tormenting rituals. Urmila Pawar remembers a ritual related to Dalits in her yielder sister Akka’s house. Once, a poor
couple- the husband with huge gaping wound on his back and wife crying out of helplessness visited her. It was in fact a sort of ritual where in “an upper caste man would inflict a big would on a Mahar man’s back and his wife had to cover the wound with some cloth and go on walking around howling!” Akka and her husband strongly detested any such ritual saying it must be abandoned.

“You have to resist this custom! How can you tolerate it? This ritual is symbolic of some of old sacrificial rites! The Mahar symbolizes the animal sacrificed! I tell you, get converted then this will automatically stop! (The Weave of My Life: 86)

Here onwards we get the glimpse of sense of repulsing and solution among Dalits to get freed oneself from the age old rituals as a result of Dr. Ambedkar’s movement. It was the result of education that the writer, ever since fifth standard, adopted neat and tidy life style in school and house. Her mother became mirror as to reflect upon cleanliness. Biwalkar teacher insisted on the clean habits. Moreover, in school she realized the bad effects of bacteria and at home insisted upon cleanliness asking, “Bai, wash your hands before kneading flour for the chapattis.” (The Weave of My life: 89) One of the positive results was that the writer passed scholarship examination and received monitory funds for education.

At school Urmila Pawar grew more conscious about her caste as well as poverty. She realized the limitations and bondages imposed on the Dalits. The limitations reflected dire poverty and consequently identical eating habits of Dalit community. She remembers:

The upper caste girls always used words like Ladu, Modak, karanjya, Puranpolya. They brought such novel items in their Tiffin boxes as well as at times we went on excursions. However, I never asked myself the stupid question, why we do not prepare such dishes at home?
We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in a particular caste and in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly.’’ (The Weave of My Life: 95)

Dalit woman’s point of view made Urmila Pawar to trace livelihood of lower caste women and exploitation in the matter of food habits at home. As a Dalit feminist writer Pawar underlines the mistreatment towards women in traditional Dalit community saying that:

When the men-folk went out and women and girls remained at home, they dined at kata. A small quantity poured in water and cooked as a soup, with chili powder, salt and a piece of mango or maul. This was called sagar! Women ate their rice with the watery dish. The song we used to sing: Hey what is that funny dug noise, what is the foul smell spreading all over? Well, what they cooked was fish water! Someone has had a bellyful and how! She wears a short sari, down to the feet now to hide what’ trickling down from her butt. (The Weave of My Life: 100)

Meanwhile, conversion to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had been the most favoured topic of discussion among Dalits. A revolutionary change began to swipe the old religious faiths and superstitions from the minds of lower classes. Through the activists like Nathuram Kamble, Haribhau Aire, Bandya Chawekar and Gopal Mastaar the surrounding villages such as Shirgaon, Partavane, Kele and Mire the many poor people came to know about Dr. Ambedkar and what meant conversion to Buddhism. Whereas Urmila Pawar’s father and mother had, indirectly, already had begun to bring change mentality and accordingly their children were treading the same line of thought.

Almost all the Dalit community grieved at the sad demise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. After this event reawakening among Dalit communities got multiplied. As mark of abandonment of forsaking Hindu
religion people like Govindadada, Urmila Pawar’s cousin began to throw away idols and portraits of Gods and goddesses. Open meeting were held asking Dalits to abandon and discard the gods. Soon the Dalits started replacing god and goddess pictures with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in house as mark of salvation from enslaving caste system. Buddha Vandana programmes were organized place to place. Activists travelled distant villages to spread the message of Dr. Ambedkar. They insisted on commemoration of Ambedkar Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti, Nirvan Din- i.e. Dr. Ambedkar’s death anniversary.

Change of religions brought about vital change in mentality, rituals among Dalit community. Urmila Pawar notes many incidents in which Dalits insisted on Buddhist rites suggested by Dr. Ambedkar. “The older rituals to mark birth, marriage and death were given up and new ones gradually came to be finalized, according to Buddhist religion.” (The Weave of My Life: 111)

Amide this voluntary alteration of mind due to Buddhism and thereby adopting humanist values of equality, fraternity and justice Urmila Pawar points at most neglected section of society i.e. oppressions and exploitations of girl child and women in Dalit community. Her recounting of condition of Dalit women invokes pity and unease for the dreadful humiliation towards women. She relates one such incident of insult and hunger of the girl child as follows:

Once, I went to attend wedding at my sister-in-law’s place, along with two of my nieces. However, when we three spout girls set down to eat and begun asking rice repeatedly, the cook got angry, ‘Whose daughters are these anyway? ‘He burst out. ‘They are eating like monsters’ then someone answered ‘they are from our’ Sushi’s family! Daughters of Arjun master!’ On hearing this, the host came forward. ‘Oh! Are they? All right, all
right let them eat as much as they want! Serve them well!’ The cook returned with more rice but being called monster was not easy to digest and we politely declined. (The Weave of My Life: 117)

With the religious conversion activities undertaken by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and after his Maha Nirwan everything started changing. The Dalits community commonly declared in villages to give away all Gods and Goddesses and replace them by Dr. Ambedkar’s and Lord Buddha’s photo. Urmila Pawar states:

We put all of them in a basket. In fact, the silver and the brass would have fetched a tidy amount if we had sold the stuff. However, we have firmly resolved to discard the gods with all the accompanying paraphemalia. Therefore, we went to the river with the other people, the young children in row. On the way, people chanted the same traditional invocation but with a completely different set of words:

O ye Gods;

Yes that’s right, Maharaja,

Go back to your own place.

‘Yes that’s right, Maharaja

You never did well to us. (The Weaves of My Life: 110)

Thus, with pace of time most the family members adopted new outlook towards life and religion. Many of her daughters inclined to get education and get married to educated person. Meanwhile, Urmila Pawar got acquainted with Harishachandra- a Dalit boy. His father happed to attend Dr. Ambedkar’s public gatherings in Konkan region. As result he had resolved to give up filthy caste-specific duties of Mharki. This aroused the sense of self-respect in his son Harishchandra. He was SSC pass and got job in post office at Ratnagiri.
After Matriculation examination Urmila Pawar enrolled herself in college and side by side undertook temporary jobs. At the same time she decided to get married to her choice of man named Harishchandra who was lower educated than her. Her marriage represented an ideal Buddhist marriage with all new changes replacing traditional Dalit marriage ceremony rituals. The change of mind clearly reflected on invitations cards with ‘Neo-Buddhist’ ‘Namo-Buddhaya’ instead of family deity on the top of the invitation. She herself distributed the cards. Some of the people questioned the marriage ties because of same surname of bride and groom. “Hey, your surname is Pawar and your husband’s surname is Pawar too! How can that be? Is that allowed? Doesn’t it mean that your family and his come from the same ancestors? The writer replied, “Now we are Buddhists! Now nobody looks at the ‘kula’! We have discarded our caste-specific surnames now and taken on new names. This is a caste-neutral name”. (The weave of My Life: 175) This attracted anger and displeasure from relatives. The marriage took place at Harishchandra’s village in the presence of few guests and family members including Govindadada, Mama, cousins, Bhai Aai and Vahini from bride’s side.

The marriage ceremony took place in front of photographs of Dr. Ambedkar and the Buddha with least expenses. It was complete alteration of culture. The writer remembers how it was different to that of earlier rituals. “In earlier times, they would make the bride sit in front of the tulsi plant; wrap the sari pallav around her head and give her a new name. However, all that had changed now.” At the same time the writer received her new name Urmila. This even turned out to be revolutionary in her life which gave her courage to face Dalit community people while deciding one’s life partner.
So, far Urmila Pawar confronted age old thinking of Dalit community and appeared successful in family which had completely absorbed new way of thinking as Buddhist. But very soon a new chapter started in her life- the sense of being woman of a husband: falling prey to egoistic feeling of husband in a married life.

Alike Indian confessional feminist writers, for instance Kamla Das, Urmila Pawar too gathers courage in recounting her first night experience with husband. She discloses that in that night she “sense [ed] nothing except my husband’s terrible disappointment” (Weaves of My Life: 183) which earned her a label as ‘frigid’. Her husband expressed his frustration over the last night by pinching her arm and exploding into word ‘ugh…what a house! He started complaining about her mother. Urmila Pawar remarked that ever since, the shellfish bag had provided him a stick to beat me with.” (Weaves of My Life: 184)

At in-laws she received peculiar traits of a married woman. Being educated it was presumed that she didn’t know intimate mannerism after marriage to be practiced at in-laws. Her mother-in-law explained her two things: “One- Always address your dirs or brother-in-laws with respect, in the plural. Never call them using the singular form even though they are younger than you!” (Weaves of My Life: 196) What worried Urmila Pawar was not the mannerism but she was never directed at addressing daughters at in-laws. Thus, she realized that “A man always has greatness thrust upon him whereas a woman has to achieve it!

The Pawar family moved to Mumbai. Urmaila Pawar identified the place in Mumbai where most the people from Konkan reside and work. According to her, “the work helped them to survive and the Dalit workers movements helped them to live their life with dignity.” (Weaves of My Life: 222) Quite long time they settled down in Mumbai. While in
Mumbai, Urmila Pawar happened to give speech in health camp. This gave her new identity as activists began to identify her as a ‘woman who could speak in public programmes’. Thus, from here onwards she began to receive invitation on Dr. Ambedkar’s Birth Anniversary.

Both the husband and wife were brought up in social environment charged with Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts and philosophy. They read Buddha and His Dhamma and Dr. Ambedkar’s biography by Dhananjaya Keer when in Ratnagiri. While in Mumbai, the words ‘Leave the village and go to the cities’, by Dr. Ambedkar started generating new perspective in her mind. She got acquainted with many social activists and Dalit leaders, writers. Besides she discovered passion for writing stories while in office, travelling in bus or train, standing in queue. Gradually she received invitation to narrate stories at Asmitadarsha Sahitya Sammelana organized by notable Dalit writer Gangadhar Pantavne. She happened to read stories with Howal, Yashwant Kharat, Bhimsen Dethe in Dalit Sahitya Sammelan and Konkan Marathi Sahity Sammelan. Even some of the stories were adapted into plays on Radio, television. The Sahitya Sammelan at Vikroli gave different sense of being writer.

In Vikroli Sahitya Sammelan he witnessed the popularity and abuse. At that time Padmashri Daya Pawar’s autobiographical work Balut had become topic of discussion among Dalit writers. Bhausaheb Adsul had something different to say. “In this book,” exploded Adsul, “Had Babasheb Amedkar been alive today, he would have kicked this book out!” (The weave of my life: 229) This remark startled everybody present there. Urmila Pawar showed negative reply to this statement as she was well about, as woman, how a Dalit writer attains self-respect in society. For her a Dalit writer depicts social reality and not personal or ‘individual
life!’ According to her many of us don’t understand this while reading Dalit autobiography.

As a writer she happened to meet Vilas Kelaskar while attending Konkan Marathi Sahitya Sammelan. After listening to one of the friend’s story, Urmila Pawar was disturbed due to Kelaskar’s praise. He said, “Great! You write beautifully. You have lived abroad but it has not affected the excellent grasp you have on the language. How is it so civilized, so culture, so rooted?” On the other end Urmila Pawar began pondering over words such as ‘cultured’. She pointed at the dominant culture saying, “which culture were they talking about? Whose dominance were they praising? Patriarchy? Caste system? Class? What was it? [Moreover] Any why was our writing termed uncivilized, uncultured. How? (The Weaves of My life: 233) Her questions pointed at subjugation of Dalit sensibilities despite being part of culture, being woman, and part of civil society. Asking Kelaskar what he meant to be civilized, he replied that to understand civilized, culture one needed intelligence Quotient, which the downtrodden writers, perhaps the literate Dalits cannot grasp since they are by birth uncivilized. Urmila Pawar got angry over the comments that she wanted to break his head by smashing coconut on it.

One more discussion grieved her most i.e. reservation for Dalits in services. She observed that the people resented reservation policy owing to which she got promoted to next level as Branch Manager. She mentions how the Dalit employees were treated in office. As the “roaster system was introduced in government jobs and it became mandatory to appoint Dalit and tribal candidates. The resentment against the Dalits and
other reserved category people began to rise high. (The weaves of My Life: 236)

In the meantime, as the influence of English grew more and more any woman: housewife or working girl was addressed in plural form or as ‘Madam’. However, it was not the case of Dalit community. “The people from the Dalit movement, however, treated women in the same discriminatory manner as if they were some inferior species, as they did the ones at home.” (The weaves of My Life: 237)

At Urmila Pawar faced the same situation at home. She showed her desire to continue her education in Siddharth College which was near to her office. She asked her husband about it. He consented but asked to manage hose at first and then fulfill her wishes. She enrolled for M. A. course. At this point of time, Urmila Pawar noticed endangered ego of a man when any woman excelled in higher achievements. She writes,

It was at this particular point that Harishchandra realized that he had lost control over his wife that I had gone too far ahead of him. It was not going to fetch me any special benefits. Nor did I harbor any ambitions of teaching n a college or making a career in that line. But I still wanted to do an M. A. Education is that nectar which once tasted makes you feel thirstier still! I was intoxicated with the study of literature, the poems and stories! Our life together which went on smoothly until now received a serious jolt. Harishandra said, “Why do you want to do M.A.? Now pay more attention the children and the house.” (The weave of My life: 240)

This incident followed strong argument between the husband and wife. Meanwhile the movement for changing name of Marathwada University to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had became topic among Dalit household. As middle class members feeling the guilt for not participating in the
protest marches decided to be part of one. In 1988 she participated in protest march over Riddles controversy.

Urmila Pawar cleared M. A. with second class, but her husband showed no interest in her achievement. However, Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar felicitated her for being first woman from the Konkar region to have passed M. A. degree by managing house, office and children. It is pity that her husband grew more and more resentment due to her popularity as writer, her education, her participation in public programmes. In fact it irritated Mr. Pawar endlessly. So he slowly began to show antipathy towards her. Instead of achieving these laurels in public and individual life he wanted her wife to behave like traditional women in villages regardless of attainment of education and popularity. Urmila Pawar equates this situation in society with rest of households in Dalit community. She says, “It was representative of the way things were in most of the households. All were run like this. In addition, the woman had to behave as if she were a deaf and dumb creature.” Urmila Pawar clearly noticed what was going on in the mind of her husband but her husband was unaware about expanding horizon of hope for her wife. At the one hand she felt that “a woman was also an individual, just as a man was, and was entitled to all the rights of an individual. If Man has muscle power, woman has the power to give birth”, and on the other hand her own community members asked her to stay away from other caste women. They argued saying, “our community does not need their thoughts and values.” (The weaves of My life: 248) However, participating in protest march, writing about woman gave Urmila Pawar a new perspectives and this became her strength. Maitrini- woman’s organization gave her strength to perceive every man and woman as an
equal individual. The women’s group wiped away all prejudices in her mind.

Urmila Pawar became part women’s group under Maitrini group. They started support centers for women who needed help in dowry related issues, family violence etc. In the company of friends who committed to the concerns of helpless woman, she felt different spirit of freedom from bondages. One by one her prejudices ban to wan away as active participant of group. She refused to wear Mangalsutra thinking that she is Buddhist; she felt her religion doesn’t asks her to wear one and hence rejected this ‘ancient symbol of subservience’.

Gradually, she became active in Ambedkarite movement, Dalit literature, women’s movement, women’s literature; but could not decide on her role as activists because of household responsibilities. While participating in Dalit movement Urmila Pawar clearly observed that Dalit women are purposefully sidelined; Dalit movement had no agenda for women’s issues and both movements run in different direction. In order to find solution she sought answer in Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts about Dalit woman. Her notions about Dr. Ambedkar and Dalit women become clear when she replied to a argument raised by a professor, “Dr. Ambedkar did nothing for women. Hindu Code Bill was a political stunt! He never brought his wife forward like Phule, he did not educate her”. This argument received strong reaction from Urmila Pawar. She deduced that the upper caste women “did not know how Dr. Ambedkar had coaxed his wife into getting an education. And yet they were so critical of Dr. Ambedkar. Because of Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion, and Dalit literature’s attack on Hinduism, they had chosen to retaliate and attack
Ambedkar rather than subject Hinduism to a critical scrutiny and be self-
reflexive.” (The Weave of My Life: 261)

One day Hira and her husband, Mennkshi and Mr. Vasantrao Moon and Urmila Pawar’s sister had discussion over a Dalit Mahila Sahitya Sanghata backed by Phule- Ambedkar philosophy. They tried to convince each and every woman from nearby locality to gather attention towards issues such as ignorance, superstition, casteism, employment etc. faced by Dalit Community women. When they needed funds, Urmila Pawar took the lead and began collecting funds from her office. She did her best to bring forth issues of Dalit women. Further she adopted another method of writing stories to foreground Dalit women’s issues. Thus, she published her first short story collection entitled *The Sixth Finger*.

In family life she enrolled all of her children to school and intended to go for higher education. She felt that it would not have been possible if she had not taken to higher education, writing. She got her daughter-Malviki married to other caste boy named Ravi from Uttar Pradesh against the wishes of her husband. This made Mr. Pawar more furious and he finally exploded into words, “This woman has ruined my family. Because of her, I lost face in the community! She considers herself so intelligent! But she is plain stupid! She is selfish, useless, shameless” and many filthier words floated out of his mouth due to anger.

Gradually everything seed settled in family. But soon Mr. Pawar succumbed to ill health. The doctors told that he would live for not more than six months. In his last days everybody among relatives started blaming Urmila Pawar for her husband’s condition. Her education, writing, social work, programmes, and finally as a wife was taken to task
as the only reason behind Mr. Pawar’s ill health. But nothing moved her; she opens her mind saying:

“Nothing! Neither Harishchandra’s harsh words, nor his tantrums, nor our fights! All that I was able to see was a great wave of darkness, pitch-black as a coal powder, rolling towards Harishchandras who faced it with his back turned to me.” (The Weave of My Life: 317)

Moreover, she was terribly upset towards unjust treatment he gave despite born and brought up under the spell of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s philosophy. Mr. Pawar failed to recognize his wife liberated from subjugations of society just because it hurt his manhood. After the death of her husband she rebukes the ritual performed by wife. For her it is “no less than a drama, a big show. Moreover, it is also a insult to the woman.” Hence, as usual she refuses to perform it. This drew anger from many relatives, but all of them were compelled to hide it because Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy openly rejected insult inflicted upon Dalits and particularly Dalit woman.

Thus, this memoire urges to be faithful to Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy of equality right from one’s life. It succeeds in perpetuating message of equality of gender as perceived in Dr. Ambedkar’s life and mission.

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