4.1 PRELIMINARIES

Laxman Gaikwad is a social activist. Having been involved in the social work for a long time, he could understand the necessity of literature to raise the depressed voice of his people. As a result, his autobiography *Uchalya* appeared in 1987 in Marathi. It marched ahead to relieve his community from the stigma of brandedhood. It won ‘Sahitya Akademi Award’ and is translated into English titled *The Branded*, in 2005 by A. P. Kotharkar. The publisher explains “*Uchalya*, literary meaning ‘pilferer’ is an autobiographical account of the life of a stereotyped underdog but of a representative of a section of society thriving on petty crimes.” [Blurb] The publisher further states regarding its influence and intention-

*It is a poignant satire on social inequality and a candid account of author’s life account brought up in the Uchalya community. The novel has the freshness of rugged sincerity written in a style untamed by sophistication and therefore has become unquestionably valuable as a socially significant document besides being a powerful literary work.* [Blurb]

Regarding publications of such great works of literature, Sharankumar Limbale comments-

*After independence, there came a storm in Marathi literary world due to Phule-Ambedkaritet philosophy. From thousands of years, Dalit voice was suppressed. The right to express and the right to education were rejected to the Dalits. Dalits were seen as a means of exploitation. They were ignorant about their exploitation as the fatalistic philosophy was ruling them. Phule-Ambedkar philosophy awakened them of their slavery. Due to that, Dalits got inspired to fight against slavery.* [223]

Suppressed voices emerged and started an intellectual fight against the exploiter, untouchability, traditions, customs and religion. The thousands of years’ mute voices strongly emerged to tear out the inner domestic walls that separated man from man. Sounds reflected through literature proved landmarks. It initiated stormy discussions in all the spheres of society. It started slaves’ fight against the master and the so-called social setup of Hinduism. *The Branded* hit hard on the means of exploitation of the suppressed and started a journey of struggle for existence, identity and honour. It became a weapon to fight against cruelty and inhuman exploitation imposed upon *Uchalya* community.
4.2 INTENTIONS AND INSPIRATION BEHIND WRITING

THE BRANDED,UCHALYA

4.2.1 Introduction

Nothing takes place purposelessly. Every deed has a specific intention behind it. Literary works have multipurposes. Laxman Gaikwad’s The Branded has done a great work of awakening the society. His particular intention and inspiration would be justified here.

Laxman Gaikwad, being a dedicated social worker highlighted the suffering of his community through his autobiography. He runs on the path of a rebellious poet Sant Tukaram -

Drowning are these people  
It’s torturing to my sight  
I feel not well  
So I write. [Lad, 1981. p. 169]

Gaikwad in his ‘Reflections’ pleads to read his autobiography as “sociological evaluation rather than a literary one.” [2005, ix] Regarding his by birth branded unfortunate community, he comments, “This may be the only community in the world, branded as inherent criminal by birth. Why is it so? A sociological study of this dilemma has to be made or is bound to be made sometime.” [vii] This interrogation leads the author to express his intention-

I realized that the so called intellectuals, important people and the middle class had absolutely no idea of the sorrows of my community. Hence, this urges to write to awaken this bourgeois society to the sorrow and plight of my unfortunate community. [viii]

It seems the sincere advocacy of the community. He wishes to open the eyes of the society by showing the insult endured by his people. He wants to wipe out stigma of criminality imprinted on the forehead of his community. His intention is to bring his community in the main stream of social life, where they would enjoy the true democracy. He brings out the contradictions of Indian society where one is totally supported and one is totally suppressed. “These are people in the society who are well of and blessed with comforts in their worldly life, greedily indulging in immoral, unlawful and corrupt way just to gratify their craze for luxuries and pleasures. They are not branded.” [viii] It seems the initiative taken by the author to
bring justice for his people. It’s a strong attempt to expose bitter reality before the world. It is the mission of transformation in the community. Laxman Gaikwad writes with social consciousness and responsibility. Jean Paul states - “writing is not simply writing, it is an act and in man’s continual fight against evil, writing must be deliberately used as a weapon.” [Paul 1950. 233]

Being awakened, Laxman Gaikwad realized his responsibility and lifted his pen without hesitation to dig out evil that exploited and dehumanized his people. Because of total rejection of livelihood and means of happy life, his community starved to death. His harsh and violent sound is to be sympathetically understood; after all he is the citizen of this democratic nation. His plea for justice can not be unheard and uncared. In ‘Translator’s Note’, the translator of this English edition, A.P. Kotharker states the intention of the author as -

…an eloquent attempt to expose this prejudice and bring people round to the view that the people of these tribes are human beings and are in need of a helping hand from all to bring them into the mainstream of social life. [iv]

In his Reflection, Gaikwad writes -

What is needed is educated awakening, determined struggle and dedicated unionism on the part of the community and introspective rethinking and a fresh outlook on the part of higher strata in society. [ix]

### 4.2.2 Inspirations behind Writing *The Branded*

No doubt, Laxman Gaikwad, being a social activist of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes has wandered through out Maharashtra solving problems of his community. He understood the root cause of the suffering of his community in the brandidhood lodged upon his community by the then British Government before independence and his community got started suffering. The outside of the outside treatment was given to his poor and humble people who have no respectful means of survival. The only option of thieving was left to them and as a result a great deal of police torture had fallen upon them. They had no entry in the village without identity and prior permission of police-patil. Poverty, hunger and humiliation were experienced by him through out his life. He served and realized that his people are not looters but the real looters of this nation are different. The real looters are upper-
caste communities, officers, and the politicians. Gaikwad saw the poverty of his community, the stigma of criminality and decided to bring, to notice the pangs of his community. He tried to make the social system naked and shouted loudly against all the odds against his community. It remained the primary concern that motivated him. There were few other socio-cultural movements and the men of awareness a little ahead to him. He joined hands with them and shared his suffering. They directed him to lift the pain with the pen which is greater than any weapon. With a lot of reverence, he states -

This writing has been inspired by the stimulating encouragement of Laxman Mane of Upara fame and Shri. Bhalkrishna Renke, the secretary of Nomadic and Vimukta Tribes’ Association. [ix]

Reading, writing and speaking are the three activities that lead human being towards growth. The subaltern authors lately realized that and started mastering it. Craftsmanship is a skill, when acquired, one can’t stop creativity. Laxman Gaikwad was a good speaker but ignorant about skills of writing. When he came in contact with Sharankumar Limbale of Akkarmashi fame, he got inspired of him and got wholehearted support to write The Branded. Respectfully, Gaikwad states -

It was the support and help of Shri. Sharankumar Limbale of Akkarmashi fame, who enabled me to ride over the difficulties. …He gave a clear and concise form to it. It was owing to his guidance that I could complete this autobiography. [x]

This is how; the sufferers supported and highlighted sorrow and suffering of each other. These people, being social reformers and the gentlemen thoroughly at heart, couldn’t bear the torture of their societies and poured out their heart through autobiographies. It shows a lot of respect and chain of understanding each other. After all, their fight is against the evil which has been torturing their society in particular and humiliating humanity in general.

4.3 UCHALYA COMMUNITY: A BRIEF HISTORY

4.3.1 Introduction

India is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. As Jawaharla Nehru States, it has unity in diversity, which proves false after reading subaltern autobiographies. The Hindu culture setup of this nation has been continuously exploiting the poor. The marginal, outsiders, Dalits, and the most
neglected people of this land feel piteous and regret to be born in this land, where Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had himself declared to Gandhi that he had no motherland. *Uchalya* community relates to this description that has been living piteous life even though sixty years of independence have passed.

### 4.3.2 *Uchalya* Community

P. A. Kolharkar in his note explains – “*Uchalya* is the name of a tribe which was notified as criminal under the provisions of the Criminal Tribes’ Act first passed in 1871 and subsequently amended from time to time.” [iii]

Regarding the wandering nature of the tribe, he further states -

> They have been mostly wanderers shifting from place to place in search of odd jobs mostly seasonally available. Otherwise, they live by hunting wild animals and foraging for wild herbs, roots, fruits. They have been in a way outcastes lower than the lowest scheduled caste, on the bottommost rung of the social hierarchical ladder. The politics, education, religion, economics of the mainstreams-society never touched them and they have been living in their own world of superstition, of primitive norms of justice and of ignorance. [iii]

### 4.3.3 Brief History of *Uchalya* Community

Regarding history of his community, Laxman Gaikwad states “Our community is known all over India as a Santmuchchar community. We speak Telugu. ‘Sant’ means ‘market’ and ‘muchchar’ means ‘thief’. Hence Santmuchchar means one who steals from weekly markets or bazaars” [4] It is not known about the origin of *Uchalya* caste, tribe or community spread all over India known by the only two surnames ‘Jadhav’ and ‘Gaikwad’. There are many clans or *kulams*, “Gaikwads’ include - Ulonor, Bumonir and Kalpithnor. Those among Jadhavs’ are Kaskonor, Kapponor and Ionor.

In Maharashtra, the community is not identified by singal name. There are several names such as - “Pathrut, Takari, Bhamta, Uchale, Girnewadar, Kamati, Ghantichor, Wadar, etc.” [5]
4.3.4 Profession of *Uchalya* Community

The community has no profession of repute. The ‘social attitude pushed them to this degraded profession. They are thieves. They undertake training of thieving and survive. They teach skills of thieving to their children. Gaikwad states four kinds of thieving skills as -

*Khistang matne* – picking pockets  
*Chappal, muthal aanane* – stealing foot-wear and bundles of things.  
*Puddu ghalane* – deception  
*Uthewarri* – deception by sleight of hand while engaging persons in conversation e.g. substituting spurious gold for the genuine.

Six months training is given to the children and fully trained. [10]

4.3.5 Suffering of the Community

As the community is branded, they are treated lower than the untouchables exploited by the patils, sarpanches, police and the irresponsible. govt. The people have to migrate from one place to another with the permission and certificate of the police patil. It is inhuman the worst than that of the animals. “They are branded as thieves and treated with leprous disdain.” [viii] The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952 declared them constitutionally free. However the police administration and society never removed the stigma of criminality.

Unbelievable ignorance, suffering and pathetic poverty of these people, tear the heart of any sensitive human being.

4.4 UNTOUCHABILITY

Laxman Gaikwad is a pathetic figure humiliated on the name of caste. Brutal untouchability exploited him. On rural background of Hindu society, he suffered a lot as outcaste of the outcaste. His life was torn out of the thorns of Hindu caste structure. The upper caste always refused him on the name of caste. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his speeches says -

Hindu society is a house of castes. Hindus are not a people. They are aggregates of groups of people framed into caste.  
This autobiography justifies this definition and turns its effects into ugly slavery. For Gandhiji, slavery is a stigma on the name of humanity and for Dr. B. R. Ambedkar-

Untouchability is not only worse than slavery but is positively equal as compared to slavery. [Book – I, 1988. 14]

Subaltern class suffered a lot due to untouchability and casteism. They experienced cruelty and inhuman treatment. *The Branded* is the record of Laxman Gaikwad who witnessed bitter casteism and untouchability. As per his caste history, he is neglected, humiliated, branded, thief and untouchable.

### 4.4.1 Childhood Experience of Untouchability

When Laxman Gaikwad was a child and used to go to school, the children used to shout at him, “Here comes a thief! Here comes a pathrut.” [2005.62] it made him restless and angry. He felt as if a wild bird treated as untouchable by the hens. Though he was in the crowd, he was alone. This loneliness is a great suffering for him. The boys and the girls were the strong generators of casteism. They excommunicated him. As the other backwards, Laxman also became victim of casteism and untouchability.

### 4.4.2 Father’s Narration of Untouchability by the Upper caste Villagers

Laxman’s father, Martand always narrated stories of casteism to his son. The villagers of Dhanegaon, Laxman’s native, always insulted the poor pathruts on the name of their caste, dirtiness, thieving etc. They never allowed them to fetch water or enter into the temple.

### 4.4.3 Instance of Pollution: Isvyta Purged the Pot by Throwing it in Fire

Laxman shares his experience “I was just a pathrut’s boy. Nobody ever allowed to fill water from wells to touch anything” [82]. On one occasion, he had made a fire and he was sitting before it warming himself in front of the temple of the Goddess of winter. Isvyta came there and sat before the fire to warm himself. Laxman’s hand accidentally brushed his body. He had a brass bowl in his hand. Instantly, Isvyta said-
Lakshya, you’ve polluted my bowel and he cursed and abused me. He put the bowl 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. [82]

The fire was lit by Laxman. The brass bowel was polluted by the touch of Laxman. The brass bowel was polluted but not the fire. Here is how Laxman introspects upon himself and upon the social conditions. As it was not his mistake, he suffered. The greatest thing is the boy who treats so. Who poisoned his head with such inhuman ideas? Is he not the strong supporter of that rigid and inhuman Hindu setup? How is this inequality mixed in his blood and poured through tongue? This is how casteism runs through the veins of the upper caste Hindus.

4.4.4 The Unholy Attendance of Laxman Polluted the Feast of Patil

Pathruts always suffered due to poverty. They had to steal and survive. In the days of great difficulties, the whole family had to starve. Hunger remained the root cause of their humiliation. They had no profession of repute and no means of survival. So, stealing and starving remained only alternative for survival in their life. Laxman states the incident, which shows the pathetic condition of this community reflected from his childhood reminiscences. It was marriage of the son of Patil of Bhusni. The boys ate and kept little leftover for parents in their plates. The man who was distributing food saw the pathrut children and harshly abused and insulted them. Laxman records -

He cursed at me, fuck his mother, the bastard, don’t know what Mahar, Mang caste he belongs to! He has polluted the feast by his unholy attendance and came and ate through two-three rounds. [45]

The nation where offering of water and food is supposed holy deed, the small children were humiliated for that. The hunger burnt out the childhood of the pathrut children due to their parents’ inability to feed them.

4.4.5 No Room on Rent Due to Low Caste, Untouchable Community

The rural area is the store house of exploitation on the name of caste. The greatest humiliations for the poor untouchables dwell there. Not only had the rural but urban communities also observed strict casteism. Still the rural experiences are
the worst. So, Baburao Babul a scholar writer of Dalit literature suggests the untouchables to-

...leave villages to leave Untouchability, otherwise break economy based upon religious system. [Bagul, 1963.82]

Because of father’s continuous motivation, Laxman could hardly learn up to nineth standard and during those days witnessed evil effects of casteism. He realized necessity of earning to feed his family and searched for job at Latur. After frantic efforts, he got job in spinning mill at Latur and started searching for shelter. Everybody asked his caste and rejected him room on rent. He lied, told that he was ‘Maratha’, and got the room. He had to hide his caste, which never left him. Just because of caste, for nineteen times he had to leave the rooms. He was highly humiliated due to the stigma of caste. He writes -

I have changed living accommodation no less than nineteen times in Latur. Even though, I used to conceal my real caste, it would be discovered sooner or later. [2005. 138]

4.4.6 Villagers’ Disgust on the Changing Attitudes of the Author

The people in the Hindu social order always have biased attitude towards poor people. They always maintained Manu made hierarchy and ill treated the outcaste people even though they showed remarkable developments in all the sections of life. Laxman, after getting service in spinning mill went to his village in a neat dress and with self-respect. The villagers disliked and disgusted it. Their reaction was – “Fucking hell! This pathrut’s boy now moves about dressed like a Sahib…” [115]

Some others reacted-

What works! Fuck in hell! He is from the Uchalya community, will it ever mend itself. Lakshya must be in some thieves’ gang, we're so educated and yet we cannot obtain jobs. How will this pathrut’s boy ever get job?[115]

It makes the picture clear of the hatred for the poor and the untouchable. It is truly unreasonable objection taken against the hardships of Laxman Gaikwad. Even though he lived with self-respect, it was not digested by this evil-minded society walking on the footprints of Manu, the designer of Hinduism.
4.4.7 Demand of the Annihilation of Untouchability

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in him Annihilation of Caste strongly advocated casteless society. He dared to uproot Manu’s social setup that brought subhuman status to Dalits in India. Laxman Gaikwad actively supported for Renaming of Marathwada University proves supporter of Ambedkarite philosophy that brought days of honour to the subaltern society. Laxman Gaikwad devoted his life to bring justice to his community. His movement is based on the pillars of Ambedkarite philosophy that made him to involve into the large-scale activity. Regarding renaming of Marathwada University, he states -

I was arrested and put into the Yerwada prison. That was my first arrest and imprisonment as a political worker. I was in the jail for fourteen days, in which period I had an opportunity of meeting several political and social workers. [197]

It proved substantial spirit to fight against the injustice and harassment of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes in Maharashtra.

Laxman Gaikwad suffered a lot due to his low caste status. He faced evil casteism from the upper caste villagers, police and the evil-minded government that branded his community as criminals. Through out his life, Laxman Gaikwad fought for the liberty of his community against the fake records registered before independence.

4.5 SUPERSTITIONS

Superstition is “excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural. It is a widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially as bringing good or bad luck.” [Judy Pearsall, 2001. 1439] It is a blind faith existing in Indian society which remained responsible for the great humiliation of the subaltern class. These superstitions proved beneficial for those wise exploiters who designed this rigid structure of religion. The poor and the helpless became sheep-goats of this tradition. Illiteracy fertilized the superstitions. Laxman Gaikwad observed and felt prey of such ugly traditions based upon superstitions. His poverty made him to follow all these customs.
4.5.1 Schooling of Laxman Caused Loose Motion and Vomiting:
A Superstition

Laxman’s father being humiliated a lot due to ignorance and caste felt to admit his son in the school. He gave slate and pencil in the hand of his son instead of ‘Bharat blade.’ It was a remarkable change, which proved revolutionary in the life of Laxman Gaikwad. Regarding his childhood experience of superstition, he writes-

*Because you have admitted your son to school, our children are suffering from loose motion and vomiting. ... Since your bastard son has started going to school, diseases are visiting us. We are not merchants or Brahmins to admit our children to school. Has anybody from the thieves’ community ever gone to school? Oh Martand! School was never good for us. Has anybody from among our forefathers ever gone to school? If our children started going to school, our race would be doomed. Goddess Yellamma will be furious. Look Martand, if your son continues to go school, we shall call the panchayat and ostracize you.* [2005.16]

This is how, on the name of caste and Goddess Yellamma, the fraternity threatened Gaikwad’s father. It was Kulkarni Guruji, who visited the lane and convinced the pathruts. Guruji explained the real reason for epidemic disease. He brought reconciliation and the jat-panchayat agreed. Guruji invited the doctor and gave medical tablets to cure loose motion afflicted upon children due to the contaminated water and food.

4.5.2 O Goddess! Grant us Success: The Thieves’ Prayer to Goddess

*Uchalya* is famous for lifting, thieving and pick pocketing. They are always humiliated on the name of their stealing profession. They have no entry without their identity cards, certificates in the villages if they are to migrate. Therefore, the pass and Bharat blade are treated as their God and Goddess. The author narrates -

*Thus the pass came to be worshipped as God and the blade as Laxmi, the goddess of wealth, in our family. Whenever my grandfather, grandmother and the others in my family set out on a thieving mission, they bought a cock and sacrificed 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 people.* [3]

In Indian tradition, the tools of work are worshipped. As a matter of fact, the *Uchalya* community has Bharat blade as a weapon of stealing and pick-pocketing.
Behind this superstition, lies the ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, of this poor community.

4.5.3 Spit, So that the Ghost Runs Away

Because of utter poverty and no means of comfortable life, the poor pathruts are to hunt, fish, steal and survive. They eat almost all wild creatures. Fishing in the rivers and ponds was to meet the hands to their mouths. Once, Tata and Laxman had gone for fishing and when they returned near their hut, Tat spat and asked Laxman to spit. Laxman was curious and asked reason. Tat replied, “A ghost, an evil spirit, accompanies us; we should spit so that it runs away.” [19].

Laxman’s father did not like these things and would quarrel with Tat. He interrogates, “How do you teach these things to my son?” [20]. The villagers would also dislike the way pathruts survive on doing such things. They maintain their dislike every time and keep untouchability with them. The superstitious life of these poor people is one of the reasons of their humiliation.

4.5.4 Boils all Over the Head: Curse of Goddess

Filth never loosened the neck of the poor subaltern people. Their dirty life welcomed diseases in their lanes. They suffered and died but never realized that their filthy life is the root cause of their ill health. They always blamed their fate and felt that it is because of the curse of their Goddess, they suffer. Their survival in villages and that too is, with the strict observing of Untouchability caused their suffering for drinking water. Dirtiness, no bath, no washed clothes caused severe illness to their children. Once, Laxman suffered due to boils all over his head. Lice in the clothes and on the head maddened him. The parents were always running behind bread for family and had no time to look after him. The wounds on the head of Laxman frightened his mother and she exclaimed-

This disease seems to be curse of Goddess. Harlot that I am, I gave up fasting on Tuesdays and so my poor son is affected with dirty disease...Oh! Goddess Mother! Please cure my child of this disease. As long as I don’t sacrifice a goat to you, I shall fast both on Fridays and Tuesdays. [25]
This is truely a great misconception of the poor people that they are suffering due to their utter dirtiness, poverty and professions they have adopted. Because of illiteracy, they couldn’t understand the root cause of their suffering is in the Hindu social setup.

4.5.5 A Pumice Stone Became Goddess

Regarding the same kind of incident, Gaikwad family built the temple of Goddess in their village of Goddess of Tuljapur. In fact, it was a pumice stone brought for cleaning the feet and body while taking bath by grandmother of Laxman on her thieving trip. As she went near the village, she went into trance and in the trance; the Goddess of Tuljapur passed her and declared,

“I’m not a pumice stone. I am the Goddess of Tuljapur. Install me here.”

[26] In fact, it was wiseness of granny, who made the survival of her family a little bit easy by erecting temple and winning privilege of worshipping. The lambs were sacrificed and crowds gathered. It was a means of solving the utter need of bread and butter. Because of which, the traditions to fill the baskets with food to the Godess got started in the village. People used to sacrifice lambs and enjoyed mutton. Even, the upper caste people who observed Untouchability on the name of Goddess were frightened. When the basket bearer upper cast Patil said to keep only wet sticky meat in his basket, it wondered and cleared the idea to Laxman that Gods and Goddesses are the means to earn easy meal and money.

4.5.6 A String of Cowries Shell and Basket for Jogwa

Because of the epileptic fits when Harchanda began to suffer, he became burden upon Laxman’s family. So, he was offered basket of Jogwa, as it was believed that the basket of Jogwa should never remain empty. When starvation became unbearable, Harchanda begged with basket and a string of cowries’ shells. Out of superstitions, people from the village offered him a little bread and floor which kept him alive.
The author records -

In fact, the mother-Goddess’s Jogwa is determined only on Tuesdays and Fridays and on new moon days. Harchanda did not abide by this custom. He begged every day. Only we said it was Jogwa. [94]

4.5.7 Tumdi to Suck Puss from the Wound: A Vaidu Treatment

The author when living at Latur found a boil on his leg that swelled and rotted with puss. A lot of medicines were tried but it couldn’t cure. The author felt it curse of Goddess as he had abandoned Jogwa basket to limp round Latur on Tuesday. He was restless and feared that he might loose his leg and would go lame. The fear shivered him and he took help of Vaidu community. A Vaidu applied tumdi to his wound. The author narrates-

The Vaidu cut a portion from the skin of the leg and made a hole. He applied the tumdi to his mouth and began to suck blood out of my leg. I felt very weak. A bowlful of puss was sucked out. It was infested with vermin and clotting. [118]

The Vaidu gave him some herb to apply on the wound. It took two months to cure, during which he had also taken medicines form, the doctors. He realized his foolishness to believe in superstitions. He writes -

My leg was saved because I went to dispensary and got it treated in time. So, I can walk today; otherwise I would be begging in my native village. [119]

4.5.8 Superstitious Traditions Followed on the Death

Indian society can’t be freed from the clutches of superstitions. There are activities to be performed, even though some body is born or dead. May you be poor or rich; you are expected to obey, otherwise thrown away from the society. Even though educated or uneducated, you are tied to the setup of Manu who designed it in favour of exploiters. The poor people suffered a lot.

4.5.8.1 Laxman’s Father’s Death

Laxman’s father did hard work in his whole life. He remained half eaten but fed his children. He was highly humiliated till his death. It was Laxman only, who
could support and provide survival to him. Due to the starvation and no medicine in
time, he lost his life. It was a great sorrow for him. As a tradition, his community
drank wine and wept in sorrow in a ritualistic performance. To deliver his father’s
soul from earthly bondage, offerings took place. They managed some how a lamb
and sacrificed it. Regarding this observation, the author states—

Baba liked to smoke bidi; he liked to eat jeelebi, shev and bhaji in a
hotel. We carried all these things and placed them on the spot
where father was cremated. We bowed in obeisance before the
offerings, signifying that father had no more earthly desires left
and his soul was finally delivered. Then, they returned. [175]

4.5.8.2 Laxman’s Brother’s Death

Laxman’s elder brother respectfully called Anna died in young age. He was
also working at Latur and living with his family. Because of overdrinking, he passed
away. As his Children were small, all those post death rituals were to be performed
by Laxman. As a result of which, he witnessed the brutality and humiliation at
the time of rituals. He had to lift coir net, fire pot and to give fire. To be saved from
wicked souls, he had to carry axe and remain untouched as if untouchable. It was
believed that the dead one’s soul remains in the observer of the rituals till the day of
delivering the ashes in the river. So, Laxman who shouldered this responsibility had
to bear mute suffering. He yearned to get free from all those superstitious restrictions.
He regretted that he had carried the earthen jar. He suffered helplessly for the feelings
of his people. He says – “I could not hurt the feelings of my relatives and the people
at home by displaying any atheistic thoughts.” [218]

When the eatables were to be offered, the author filled with deep sorrow that
the things killed him were being carried as offerings to release his soul. He
comments, “They wanted to comply him with liquor even after his death.” [216]
Various rites made his condition piteous. He refused to be shaven but the clan was
firm and made him to follow the tradition. Now and then, they made him realize of
their customs. The writer consoled himself by reminding his boyhood shaving
experience. “That I should let them shave my head for the brother who used to shave
my head in my early boyhood.” [218] He had to respect the community customs. He
had to feed to a cow and a crow on the bank of the river. During this period, he
suffered a lot, realized a lot that the superstitions have looted a lot. As long as the
human being is alive, is to be saved, respected says Gautam Buddha’s philosophy. What is the use of observing all those rituals when a man is no more? Releasing souls etc. are baseless things which the author has thoroughly realized. So, he firmly resolved, “…that hence forth I would not carry the earthen-jar-in-coir net, no matter who was dead.”[218] This is the lesson learnt by the author after a lot of humiliation.

Superstitions not simply degrade human being but bring a lot of economic suffering. Laxman Gaikwad’s community suffered a lot against which he protested with firm determination to show its uselessness and exploitation of the community.

4.6 REJECTION OF SLAVERY

Subaltern literature emerged as a weapon for social change. Because of this, “Dalit literature has a rebellious mind to revolt against existing social value system.” [Mande, 10] It rejected the Manu made setup which inhumanly exploited the poor. So, Dalit writers are social activists and social reformers. As Laxman Mane in his autobiography Upara stated, “what ever I lived, experienced and saw, I poured into my writing.” [1997.6].

Subaltern society has been continuously fighting against slavery imposed by Hinduism. Fight for bread and self-respect is severe. Words proved a great weapon for their strong rejection to slavery.“Varna-system, casteism, untouchability, traditions, balutedari are all the types of slavery in Hindu religion.” [Surya.1996.187]

Regarding this, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar writes in his Writing and Speeches writes-

Slavery is a very ancient institution of Hindus. It is recognized by Manu, the Hindu lawgiver and has been elaborated, systematized by the other spirits, writers who followed Manu. [ BookII.1989.9]

Dr. Ambedkar further states-

It is enslavement without making the untouchable’s conscious of their enslavement. It is slavery though it is Untouchability. It is real though it is indirect. [14]

The subaltern autobiographers realized through the works of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to fight against casteism, untouchability, stinging socio-religious
traditions. In the same manner, Laxman Gaikwad who is awakened for social change, fights against cruelty of caste. He realized that the laws today and the social laws of the past have humiliated his clan. So, he runs social movement to bring law and order in his community.

4.6.1 Slavery Imposed by the Supervisors and Jobbers in the Cotton Mill

Laxman Gaikwad being awakened searched for job. In his early career, he suffered a lot due to the stigma of his criminality on his caste and poverty become as if the two sides of the same coin. Anyhow, when he got admitted as a worker in the cotton mill and he witnessed the cruelty of the system. The owners, managers, supervisors and the jobbers humiliated the poor labours and imposed slavery upon them. The author narrates -

Our supervisors would beat and abuse as if we were their wives. If a machine was found unclean, the worker working on it would be beaten and sent home. If we returned late from mid-day meals, we were beaten with raw sticks. We were allowed only fifteen minutes for lunch. Though by regulation we were given half an hour, we were often called back much earlier. [2005. 146]

It was a cruel treatment on the basis, that the labours were the poor caste people. They had nobody to ask the reason of their slavery on their behalf. The supervisors made the workers to wash their lunch boxes and used to do a great deal of corruption. The harassment of the humiliated is piteous which the author feels disgusted and prepares to fight against by forming labours’ union.

4.6.2 Slavery Witnessed in the Octrio Office and Municipality Primary School

Because of rebellious nature and love for justice, Laxman Gaikwad remained wandering from place to place. Stability couldn’t touch him. The poverty made lame to him, family needs broke his self-respect and he accepted to serve as a peon in the office of the Octrio Office at Latur. Laxman says-

I had to run whenever he rang for me and had to fetch tea and cigarettes whenever ordered. I had to take in water and tea for visitors. The change of duty brought with it a change of attitude in
others towards me. I found doing all this, undignified and servile. The officer would shout at me, ‘Go, and bring water immediately. Do you want to retain your job or to go home? I was disgusted with such treatment. [177]

He narrates his Primary School incident thus-

Though real interest lay in social work in my community, poverty forced me to accept that job of a peon... I swept the premises, even cleaned the shit lying anywhere in the school premises. Brahmin woman was a teacher. She had told me to wash the tiles with water every week... The lady teacher complained that I disobeyed her orders. [176]

Now and then, Laxman Gaikwad found suffering of the poor people on the name of caste, community and their rank in the hierarchy of official works. He realizes that the pinch of poverty is responsible for his suffering. People being dumb and deaf suffer because they have no other means of their honourable survival of which the uppers take disadvantage and impose slavery.

4.7 THE THIEVING TO QUENCH THE HUNGER: A CASTE BASED PROFESSION

It is really a horrible thing to know what professions people do to feed their families. Actually, it is poverty that makes people to bear insult and humiliation. It is hunger that spreads its hands and makes the people walk on the dirty paths. Women sell themselves for stomach and the poor Uchalya community survives on the stealing. There seems no respectable trade or profession for the subaltern people of this nation. People of this nation are to live on begging and stealing. Such a piteous community is Uchalya that has yet been living by stealing because of which it is witnessing a great torture of the community, police and the government policies.

4.7.1 Uchalya: The Lifter

Uchalya community is not a particular caste but group of tribes together that survives in the forests. They belong to Nomadic and Denotified Tribes. They have no typical respectful survival in the sight of society. They feed themselves by hunting, eating hearbs, fruits and stealing in the society. The major mass of this community dwells upon thieving. Their major activities are to lift the luggage, pick
pocketing and stealing. They do robbery and if arrested, receive severe harassment. The police and the Uchalya have become as if the police and the thief. Their custody torture is beyond the words. Even though, if they are not responsible, they are mercilessly punished. Because of which the suffering of these poor people appeals to any sensitive heart. The most exploited of this land would be these Uchalyas. Regarding the then British Government record that has been yet stigma on the forehead of this community today. The author states in his reflections-

The British Government branded us as born criminals. ... And still persist with the same parochial attitude. Denied of all decent and lawful means of livelihood, the only alternative left us is to exist by thieving, lifting, pick-pocketing. [vii]

As a result of this, the higher castes and classes have fully exploited his miserable, helpless community for their selfish motives.

Uchalya community has no other respectful means of survival, so they developed their community in mastering the skills and giving training to their children. They penetrate their children in such a heartless way that becomes unbearable to read. They are trained to be rough and not to crack up when severely tortured. The physical beating and torture is given, so that they will not disclose the names of their colleagues when police arrest them. They teach them tricks and techniques to be the expert thieves. Their men and women participate in this profession. Regarding Dhondabai, the granny of the author, he writes-

In crowded fairs, she removed gold lockets and earrings from children’s necks and ears, trinkets and necklaces from the necks of women cutting them loose with her teeth or a blade and sold them to money lenders and maintained the house. [2]

Uchalya community worships their pass as God and blade as Goddess. At Indian level, they are ‘Santmuchchar’, which means market thief, and in Maharashtra they are not identified by any one name. They are “Pathrut, Takari, Bhamta, Uchale, Gadiwadar, Kamati, Ghantichor, Wadar etc.” [5] Laxman Gaikwad being Pathrut, one of the Uchalya community members witnessed the humiliation and raised voice to be free from the torture.
4.7.2 Tactfully Stolen the Golden Ornaments in Tuljapur Fair

The places of crowds, bazaars, bus-stands and fairs provide ample opportunities to the thieves. With their skills and tricks, they steal and travel. Most of the times, they have tie-up with the police with whom they share the theft. It is police department that takes disadvantage of the people tobefool the society grab and accumulate the property.

Hunger made the *Uchalya* community restless to travel from place to place. Specially, a dense crowd carrying fairs proved most useful for them. Once, the author had gone with his Dada and Anna and brother-in-law Santram for the fair of Tulja Bhavani. They prayed Goddess Bhavani-

*Oh Mother goddess, Tulja Bhavani! Bless us with success in our thieving mission! Bless us with valuable things! We also prayed and bowed in obeisance before the basket and the beads of the Goddess and set out on the mission. [48]*

They stole chappals, purses, and bags in the fair. They were in search of a big stealing of ornaments and they got an opportunity. As a tradition, the women were taking bath. Their golden ornaments were kept under the basket on which the old woman was sitting. Santram, the brother-in-law played trick. He brought a kilo of *pedhas* and started to distribute. All the thieves gathered round Santram and received *pedhas* but the woman could not move. Immediately, he got another idea and began to drop currency notes one by one near the old woman. The old woman proceeded to pick up the notes and Dada and Santram’s wife quickly lifted the basket and picked the bundles of ornaments. When the bathed women came, the old woman told them that Goddess Bhavani blessed her and she received treasure. While changing their saris when the woman asked for ornaments, the old woman got up from the basket so that they could take their ornaments. The bride among them put her hand under the basket but the ornaments were missing. The author narrates their condition as-

*They began to beat their breasts and tear their hair and howl. The old woman began to put dust in her month and wail; ‘The bastard dropped five rupee notes and deceived me! They began to wail and weep lonely. [50]*
4.7.3 Kirtan on the Bank of Chandrabhaga by Santram for Thiving

Once, the author with his Dada, Anna, Bhau and the Bhadgaon gang went to Pandharpur fair. An extraordinarily large number of pilgrims were milling and jostling around. Almost all the members of their thieves’ community had gathered there. It was a grand Diwali festival for them. It provided an unfailing opportunity for treasure-hunting and substantial earnings. But the loudspeaker announced and warned the people to be aware of pickpockets as pretty thieves had come to Pandharpur. The pilgrims were alert. In such a tight situation, Santaram applied gandha, the religious mark on his forehead and tied cloth band around his waist and moved around like kirtankar. The others had worn beads of basil as if they were singers of devotional songs. The author narrates -

...at last Santaram bhuaji started a kirtan on the bank of Chandrabhaga. There was no veena but he had only cymbals in his hands. Some twenty-five people of our community had gathered and were beating cymbals and singing devotional songs. ... Santaram bhuaji sang the devotional song loudly and followed it by an explanatory sermon. While he sang, Dada lightly felt with his fingers the money that was tied in a knot in the stranger’s dhoti with a Bharat blade. He cut so forcibly, however, that the currency notes as well as some strands of pubic hair dropped into his hands. Dada signaled and vanished. [56]

Santram stopped the kirtan and the mob spread. When all the fraternity gathered, father found the notes torn due to razor. He shouted and explained-

Fuck your mother! Look at this wretched luck! Went to steal money and got this undergrowth, since all the notes were cut through, they were useless. [57]

4.7.4 Pissing before the Woman to Divert her Attention

Laxman’s father’s gang was almost tired, frustrated and hungry. In Pandharpur, they had yet not got success. No one had money. They were all sitting near Chandrabhaga bridge. They saw woman, boiling rice in a large vessel. Her companions had gone to holy bath. She was sitting near a cholah repairing meals. Some of the people threw challenge to lift the vassal from the strong custody of woman. They thought a lot and Santaram-bhuaji with one to assist, took the bet. The other was member from Jalni who went near the woman, pretended as if drunk and sat in front of the woman to piss. The woman turned her face away from the vessel and
began to abuse him. “Bastard! Harlot’s pimp. You lift your dhoti and piss in front of me!” [57]

When she turned her face, she had found the vessel picked off the fire place. She began to bawl and howl with all her might. It was Santaram who had quickly lifted the vessel and had run away. Taking all risks of life, the thieves survived themselves. Had they been caught, the pilgrims would have beaten them till death.

4.7.5 Spread Rumor of Flood in Chandrabhaga and Looted

The trip to Pandharpur was not much fruitful to the thieves. So, they finally played a risky trick of spreading rumor of flood in Chandrabhaga. Before that, they had collected information that the train would leave the station within half an hour. Sopan-bhauji addressed his comrades and directed to go to the bank of Chandrabhaga and went near the Pilgrims who were bathing in the river. He suggested them to lift chappals, bundles, what so-ever they can lay their hands on and get into the train. They decided to get down four-five stations later. So, all the gangsters went to steal. Exactly at quarter-to-four Santaram-bhauji and his companions began to howl and bawl till their cries reached a concerted crescendo: “Run, run, Deluge! Chandrabhaga in Flood! Run! Save your lives! The flood’s very near!” [58]

All the pilgrims began to run to save their lives. The thieves lifted bundles, chappals, shoulder bags and ran away to the railway station. The women stole necklaces and lockets from women’s necks.

These stealing tricks obtained by the thieves show their wiseness, intelligence, and punctuality. Had they been well educated, certainly a different picture would have come before us. But, the hunger and poverty made them to suffer. Thieving for filling up their stomach made them thieves, which later on got recognized as their profession and they got identified as branded.

4.8 ILLITERACY

Poverty and illiteracy are the roots of all types of exploitation. Laxman Gaikwad, with open eyes witnessed pathetic suffering of his clan due to illiteracy. “All this great wrong is due to illiteracy” says Mahatma Phule. [Keer, 2006.263]
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar advocated educating, organizing and agitating to the subaltern community. After long penetration, the social reformers advocated education as the only medicine to uplift human life towards dignity and social respect. Laxman Gaikwad realized it and worked for his Uchalya community to spread light of education. In the initial stage, his father who was thoroughly humiliated understood the need to educate his child to save from hazards of thieving. His father remained the inspiration for him to enter primary school and then lead the life with self-respect.

4.8.1 Gaikwad’s Father’s Plea for Education:
“Take a Good Education, Rise High in Life”

Laxman’s father Martand had witnessed beatings and tortures of the thieving groups. He was working as a casual labour in the field of Chamle. He had started understanding state affairs. He understood that his child must learn to read and write. The author narrates – “Instead of Bharat blade, he put in hand a slate and a pencil and enrolled my name in a primary class. I started going to school.” [2005. 16]

He wanted to shape the future of his son and didn’t want to spoil it for petty thieving. Once, Laxman’s grandfather took him for fishing which was disliked by Martand and he quarreled with his father. “Why do you teach these things to my son?” [20] This awareness made Laxman to go to school regularly even though children taunted him mockingly. “Lachiman Tata khekdyacha curry khato” [16] Laxman’s father though motivated to educate his son, had not known actually what use of the book and note-book was. He simply wanted his son, to be saved from stealing and exploitation. He dreams and happily says, “my son has become very wise. He will be a teacher.” [34] Father always boosted of the morale of his son and the community would advise him to send his son for training of thieving. Laxman involved in education, used to read and write. One day, his father took the list of books and provided him. He asked Laxman to take care of books and note-books. One day he saw the written note-book and started beating him with chappals. He questioned, “Why did you spoil the note-book? Were you given the pen to dirty the book?” [35] Father who was ignorant that pen and note-book are for writing, gave beating to Laxman. Father realized his foolishness and repented it later on. This
ignorant man’s love for education is out of the impacts of cruel thieving. Martand seems the first light bringer in the life of his son Laxman. He would say -“Take a good education, rise high in life.” [90]

### 4.8.2 Gaikwad’s Brother’s Awareness of Education

Thieving, being the profession, Laxman’s brothers got trained themselves and witnessed humiliation. As their young brother Laxman was admitted in school, they avoided Laxman to take on stealing trips. Their expedition used to make survival to the family. Once, they were prepared to go on their thieving mission and Manik dada suggested to take Laxman with them as his school was closed. But Anna, the elder brother of Laxman said-

**You are a school going boy. If you’re caught by the police, you’ll be removed from school. Your name will be entered in the police records as a thief. [48]**

This awareness of Anna kept Laxman away from stealing trips and directed him to go to school. The elders kept him away from drinking on the name of education when he was in fourth standard. He passed fourth standard board examination and his brother, Dada suggested -“Laxman should be admitted to the school in Solapur.” [70]

It was Dada’s literacy and awareness that turned Laxman to go to Solapur where he met Shyamrao Guruji who was the first leader of Uchalya community. Shyamrao Guruji used to run schools with Government grants. Laxman was admitted in ‘Songaon Residential School’ in a secinded place near Solapur but due to the home-sickness and the food hunger explanation there, couldn’t continue there and returned to Dhanegaon. On the requests, he got admitted to Babalgaon School, close to his village. Poverty humiliated him for making to and fro for education. He had to starve when schoolmates used to eat their meals. Piteously, they offered him bread. Having known of his poverty, he would console himself, “Let it be. We are poor; we must suffer meekly whatever is said to us.” [75]

When the expenditures of his education got increased, the brothers showed their unwillingness to shoulder the responsibility. They were married and were busy minding their activities. Sambha bhau lastly agreed to take Laxman’s responsibility and was decided that his all the brothers should share the annual expenditure on his
education. Out of all the odds, Laxman could continue his education up to nineth standard and left schooling. When nobody was ready to help him, he took the decision to take up some job and look after his father.

4.8.2 Timekeeper Mr. Patil’s Advice:

“Why Don’t you Go to School and Work as Well?”

Leaving Babalgaon School, Laxman returned home at Dhanegaon and witnessed utter poverty exploiting his family. His father had to work hard. Harchanda had to beg and survive. In such a situation, Laxman decided to go to Latur and work in a spinning mill. He met mill management member Keshavrao Sonawane and got employed. During the work, being younger, everybody called him as Barkya. One day, Mr. Patil, the time keeper, knew the true reason of his school drop out said -

L.M. Gaikwad, you’re still quite young, why do you work? You should be studying. Why don’t you go to school and work as well? [100]

On hearing this, Laxman obtained admission in Shivaji High School at Latur. During the day, he was learning and at night, he had a night-shift in the mill. At Latur, Laxman realized that it was badly needed to be well educated but his hard luck humiliated him and he couldn’t pass nineth standard. However, the education he received in an informal way was greater than formal education at school.

4.8.4 Laxman Gaikwad Maddened with the Necessity of Education to his Community

4.8.4.1 Started Community Hostel for Children

Throughout the life, Laxman Gaikwad saw piteous condition of his society due to ignorance. He realized the necessity and importance of education to leave stealing profession of his community. He understood that the only education can free his community from the harassment from the so called upper caste, class, sarpanches, police patils and the police. He found that the only education can free his clan from slavery. Once, he had gone to his in-law where he met Prof. B. L. Gaikwad. They had a hot discussion upon the necessity of education for their children instead of teaching them to pick-pocket and stealing. So, they convened a meeting and
organized gathering of their people. After being awakened, Laxman started a hostel for community children. He awakened his people of their misery and the agony remained in his speeches.

4.8.4.2 Idea of Starting a Residential School

Even though non-matriculate formally, Laxman Gaikwad tried to spread light of education in his clan. He was going to solve community affairs. He realized to start school for his community children. He established an institute to start a school. He writes, “Now I was obsessed with the idea of starting a residential school. But how? My wife’s bother living in Kawatha was a versatile thief. He was a good natured person. I made him a chairman of the organization.” [113] This is how, he was maddened with the very idea of education to be spread among his community even by making his thief brother-in-law, a chairman of his schooling organization.

4.8.4.3 Idea of Starting Balwadi in Kawatha

The thought of education made Laxman to think and take decisions. He, being educated and enlightened man, did not like that the children of his community are taking lessons of thieving. Almost half of the population from Kawatha in Osmanabad district was of Uchalya community. Laxman thought these children to be sent to school. He feels, “the next generation of our community would come into the respectable mainstream of society.” [179] The abject poverty of the people would spoil the children’s future, was his thought and he decided to start Balwadi there. He states, “Having been observed the miserable condition of our community in Kawatha, I decided to start a Balwadi and hostel there.” [180]

4.8.5 Reading Brought me Knowledge and Acute Commonsense: Laxman’s Confession

Unfortunately, Laxman Gaikwad couldn’t continue his further studies after nineth. His poverty chained him to do hard work for survival. Bread was rotating him and he being hungry, had to offer it. Still, the value of education was realized by him during his fight against the spinning mill management. His relationship with Comrade Deshpande developed his interest in the rights of labours. He better
understood his responsibilities too. He realized his mission of life as a result of wide reading, which truly is the best education. This informal education gave him rare sense, sight and awareness of brutal system. Regarding his development due to reading, he states – “Reading brought me knowledge and acute commonsense. I kept on reading labour laws in Marathi.” [162]

Had he been little more educated, he would have been a different case and a lot of help to the society in shaping his Uchalya community.

This is how, the necessity of schooling his community made Laxman to take decisions one after another though none of them would survive. But, it was Laxman who madly understood that education was the only key to free his society from the prison of poverty, inhuman suffering and thieving. It his dream to make his community educated so that they may get respected life. He feels regretted that he couldn’t continue his schooling but continued reading books and society which taught him bitter lessons to ripen his thoughts of social work. His continuous efforts to raise social issues show his equation completed from the wide and open university of society. It sharpened his sensibility and kept alive his responsibility that he never threw away.

4.9 JAT-PANCHAYAT : PRIMITIVE NORMS OF JUSTICE

Jat-panchayat is a community court where the cases of community are solved. Poor people come with their complaints and the elected panchas of the court listen and give verdict. It is obligatory to obey otherwise the panchayat punishes the disobeyer. Ex-communication is the severest punishment passed to those who disobey the panchayat. It is the place where community brings its ill health and gets cured. The disputes of theft and marriages are the major issues of Uchalya community Jat-panchayat. It is authentic means of submitting disputes of this community. There is a strong hold of the panchayat on its community of which, Laxman’s father was a respectable member. It never takes place in anybody’s house. It is as if a moving court. ‘Kafinath’ the place of pilgrimage is the supreme court of Nomadic Tribes of which justice remains binding. Ramnath Chavan, the authority over the studies of tribes, states -
Avoiding the rules and regulations of Jat-panchayat, one can’t marry. Rituals of religion, ceremonies of death and the activities there after, couldn’t take place. They excommunicate the people who disobey. So, to avoid Jat-panchayat is highly risky and hence impossible. [1989. 139]

4.9.1 Jat-panchayat: Nature and Function

Jat-panchayat is a community court where the disputes are heard and resolved. It is a system that keeps watch upon the community. It has judges known as ‘talange’ (patils) of the community. Such patils are from various villages. When the community calls panchayat, the patils are to be paid rupees hundred and one or hundred and fifty-one each, as honourarium. All the patils from the area used to attend it. The accused for whom the panchayat had been called into session, had to bear the all expenses of liquor, meat, valuable cutlets and other items of the panchayat meets. Regarding their dress-code, Laxman Gaikwad states- “The members of the panchayat would attend the panchayat session in white dhoti, white shirt and white uparna.” [2005. 52]

The panchas would listen to the petitioner as well as the accused. Arguments take place and final verdict comes, which remains binding to all. There is no further appeal. If the decision is disobeyed, the culprit is ostracized which is unbearable and humiliating punishment. Jat-panchayat seems supreme-court for the community people. Some of the conflicts and judgements would open the eyes and show far-behindness and most-backwardness of the Uchalya community. It would also expose their illiteracy, superstitions and wickedness to dismiss the disputes. It seems the wild ways of the primitive people passing judgment. Jat-panchayat is one more place to expose community people. It seems exploitation of the poor people on the name of Jat-panchayat.

4.9.2 Police Informer Lingappa Must Be Killed: Jat-panchayat Decision

Uchalya community Jat-panchayat looks after the welfare of the community in relation to its all the activities. No dispute of the community is registered to police or to court. Their community court listens to them and solves the problems.

It was understood that Laxman Gaikwad’s grandfather, who was a strong thief, due to his old age and police torture, suffered a lot. Police punished and
harassed him in such inhuman way that he had no way to disobey police. The police started taking has attendance everyday so as to keep him away from thieving and kept an eye upon the thieving trips. They made old Lingappa, their informer. It became difficult for the thieves to carry on their activities. Because of the informer Lingappa, they had to starve and suffer. After all, it was the matter of their survival. The community complained against Lingappa and Jat-panchayat was called. It collected all the information regarding Lingappa’s helplessness due to old age. The panchas knew the reality but it was necessary to move the obstacle on their way. The author states-

The panchayat came to the conclusion that Lingappa being old and weak had no strength to bear the beatings and torture by the police and that some steps had to be taken to stop him for good. Hence it was resolved that he must be killed. [4]

Getting the verdict, the community, one day broke into the hut of the author and hacked his grandfather to death with an axe. The panchayat took care that the matter was not reported to the police. The author states-

It is impossible in our community to go to the police against the Jat-panchayat. Our grandfather was cremated without anybody getting to know of it. [4]

Death of Lingappa closed the path of stealing profession of the community and their children’s starvation stopped.

4.9.3 “Martand Must Leave the Village or Lakshya Must Be Removed from the School”: Jat-panchayat Resolution

Laxman’s father Martand took the decision to send his son Laxman to school. Actually, it was a revolutionary decision, which unfortunately could not be realized by the poor illiterate Uchalya community. After three-four weeks, Laxman started his schooling. The children of the community got affected by loose motion and vomiting. The parents of those children quarreled with Laxman’s father. They accused and chided his father: “Because of you admitted your son to school; our children are suffering from loose motion and vomiting. [16] They threatened Martand to stop his son’s schooling. Their ignorance made them speak so. They always thought education to be the Brahmin’s activity and not of their community.

They frightened that education would doom their race. Goddess Yellamma would curse them. All the community shouted, cursed and called Laxman white-
footed wretch. Father asked Laxman to sit at home. But Kulkarni Guruji, realizing Laxman’s absentee, asked the boys to lift him by the hands and feet and bring him to school. It irritated the community people and they called panchayat that resolved—“that either Martand must-leave the village or Lakshya must be removed from the school.” [17]

The disobedience of Jat-panchayat resolution passes severe ostracizing punishment. It is severe untouchability within the community showing illiteracy. Such family had to suffer a lot, as the people do not keep any relation with the ostracized. Very cruel treatment is passed for such people. Thanks must be given to Kulkarni Guruji who awakened people of the reality of loose motion. He gave medicinal help to the people and kept Laxman in the process of education.

4.9.4 Shankarya’s Moustache Be Shaved with the Piss of his Daughter: Jat-panchayat Decision

It is a rigid case where a father put his daughter in a family way. It irritated the community. On the basis of morality, it was a crime and the culprit is to be punished. So, the community lodged complaint against Shankar from Salgara who used his daughter as his wife. The large panchayat made its three sittings at Salgara, Dhanegaon and Bhadgaon. It was difficult to pass the judgement. So, it was decided to take the case to ‘a master-kaka’ from Kawatha who was the first teacher of the community. The Kawatha panchayat was thought to be final and its decision was binding to all. The master kaka heard the case that Shankar has brought shame on the name of community and spoiled its name. The panchayat ostracized Shankar and his daughter for two years. The punishment was—“that Shankarya’s mustache be shaved with the piss of his daughter.” [53]

As a result of the punishment, he was served water in a coconut-shell. He became one of the untouchables of the Uchalya community.
4.9.5 Kashibai’s Grandmother Had Run Away with a Maratha; So, Kashibai Has No Right to Perform Rituals: Jat-panchayat Decision

Marriages in *Uchalya* community are always covered with clouds of fear. People used to drink and quarrel for petty reasons. The quarrels start with undue respect and not giving gifts of honour. The women perform major activities and that is supposed a great honour to them. The bride and bride-groom’s bathing ceremony had sacred ritual of thread-winding. The bathing bowl containing the vermillion turmeric-mixed water is to be given at first. The married women are to pour this water on the bodies of the bride-groom and the bride. Kashivahini, the elder sister-in-law of Laxman Gaikwad had participated in the programme. Suddenly, an old head man snatched the thread from her hands because:

Kashibai’s grandmother had run away with a Maratha. As long as her sons were not ritualistically purified and accepted back into the community, the married women from her family would not have the right to perform the thread-winding ceremony. [55]

It was a grave insult of Gaikwad family. The panchayat was called, which declared-

That Kashibai was untainted from her father-in-law’s side. Though a little tainted from her mother’s side, so, Kashibai should be fined twenty-one rupees and received in the community as purified. [55]

Laxman’s father paid twenty-one rupees and purified Kashibai. It clearly shows unbelievable complaints and their resolutions which were thoroughly followed by the people out of the fear of ostracizing.

4.9.6 Reimburse the Previous Marriage Expenses and Remarry

In *Uchalya* community, it was permissible for the man or woman to remarry by reimbursing the previous marriage expenses. If the claims of reimbursement create quarrel, the panchayat takes hold of it and resolves the dispute. It becomes obligatory to obey panchayat. Laxman states-

If a husband or wife is unwilling to continue marital relationship with his or her spouse, he or she is required to reimburse the marriage expenses in the panchayat settlement. [55]

It seems a little better when a newly married couple really mismatches each other. They may be permitted to be separated. But if children bearing couples deserve
so, it would really be horrible. Still then, Panchayat’s decision dominates the community.

4.9.7 Head of Bribe’s Mother Be Shaved

The Jat-panchayat’s decisions seem shocking, horrible, unlawful and insulting. Still then, as a tradition, the piteous poor pathruts follow it. The fear of ostracizing doesn’t allow them to disobey and the Jat-panchayat exploits and humiliates the community. One of the very shocking decisions of the Jat-panchayat is placed before the readers by the author.

It was the marriage of his elder sister-in-law’s younger brother at Salgara. The people were drunk and lying intoxicated. One of the relatives, Maruti of Holicha Majkura, took objection upon the bride’s purity and said- “The mother, of the girl who is to be married in Salgara, is tainted. She had not yet got purified in our panchayat.” [119]

The people stopped the marriage. Vociferously, people shouted that it would spoil the prestige of community. They charged-

The girl’s mother’s mother had lived with a Maratha. So, the girl’s mother was born of a Maratha father. Even if she herself had married a person of our community, the earlier taint was not there by washed away. [119]

Actually, these things were totally forgotten by both the parties. But, the panchayat objected to it and stopped the marriage. They threatened to ostracize them from the community. The quarrels began and finally the panchayat set under the mango tree. They argued-

Some said let the woman eat shit and some other said let her be fined 2000 rupees, while some other proposed that her nose be cut off. Finally, one of the Panchas proposed a viable middle course that the bribe’s mother’s head be shaved. [120]

The writer’s head was numb with all that he had witnessed. He pitied “How backward and superstitious would our community be!” [120] The obnoxious and disgusting functioning of the panchayat was in the hands of gigantic social monsters. Haunted with fear, the bride’s mother obeyed the panchayat’s verdict for the purification of herself for the sake of her daughter’s marriage. Her husband sat dumbfounded. She wept mutely. Author states piteously- “The sin of her mother was
visited on the daughter. Even while her husband was alive, the panchayat shaved her head clean.” [121]

It is a great humiliation of the womanhood. The writer was helpless as one of the judges was his father and yet he couldn’t interfere in the proceedings of Jat panchayat.

4.9.8 **Ravan Must Dip his Nose in Salubai’s Urine and Pay Salubai a Fine of Rs.251**

The community panchayat held at Kawatha was for the author’s wife’s sister Salubai, who was married to a man from Solapur but he had entered into a bigamous marriage. It was Salubai’s mother who released her daughter from the marriage by paying Rs. 251 as per the custom of the community.

Salubai who lived with her parents at Kawatha was young and fell in love with Ravan, the unmarried community boy. Two years, they lived as if married and they had a daughter. He couldn’t marry her and rejected. Ravan’s parents chose another match for him and the engagement was finalized. So, Salubai called for the intervention of the community panchayat on the statement that- “since a girl had been born to Salubai from Ravan, Ravan should take Salubai as his wife. He must not solemnize another marriage. [224]

There took place a lot of discussion and finally, when Ravan was not ready to accept the condition of Salubai, the author’s father-in-law declared-

**Brothers, Look! Salubai is like a cow, she was sold once to one man and she remained tied to his rope for some time. Then she escaped from that house and came to Kawatha and lived with another man, who was not her formal owner. [224]**

The community panchayat mulled this argument and resolved. The decision was “Ravan must dip his nose in Salubai’s urine and pay Salubai a fine of Rs. 251.” [224] Then Salubai collected her urine in bowl and gave Ravana to dip his nose into it and set him free from bondage. Salubai’s daughter could not enter in school as she had no name of father to register Laxman fears that she will remain ignorant, illiterate and fatherless and would inter into the stealing profession.
The Jat-panchayat and its resolutions clearly indicate the backwardness of the Uchalya community. The woman’s urine – seems a great insult for the man to dip his nose as a punishment. The author being one of them feels the panchayat disgusting at, inhuman and practice that has been ruling the poor branded. *The Branded* is a valuable document of he unlawful dominance of Jat-panchayat and he vehemently criticizes its functioning. Laxman, being well aware and doing social work as his mission, wishes his community to be awakened. He has exposed brutal judgements passed by the *punchas* having no logic at all. Instead of solving the problems, they have been creating humiliation and exploiting the society. The ignorant people illiterately ruling their clan would definitely harm them. Out of such fears, the author strongly protests and rejects Jat-panchayat’s illogical justice and lifelong torturing effects.

4.10 THE EXPLOITATION BY MILL MANAGEMENT

Hunger and deprivation made the narrator aware of trials and tribulations of of his community. Hunger took him to the spinning mill at Latur and taught him leadership. Laxman’s image emerged as a man, fighting for the rights of labours. He read a lot about labour laws and raised the woes of the suffering labours. The insult, corruption and humiliation stood before him. Being sensitive, talkative and mingling among the workers, he understood their suffering and revolted against the jobbers, supervisors, manager and the mill management for the legal rights of the mill workers. It raised his humanity and identity as a leader fighting for justice. It is the turning point in the career of Laxman Gaikwad.

4.10.1 Newcomers Receive No Salaries

After leaving school, being failed in nineth, Laxman reached Latur and applied in the spinning mill. He was then sixteen years old. With the consent of Keshavrao Sonwane, the Minister in charge of *sahakar*, Laxman placed his application and made him aware of his poverty- “No one is willing to keep and look after me. I would be forced to beg, if I don’t get a job. Though I am young I will work well.” [97]
Commenting that he was a clever boy and spoke well, Mr. Sonwane signed his application. The manager assigned him to work in ring frame section. Being the youngest, workers used to call him ‘Barkya’. He worked without pay for 125 days. He narrates -

I would not be paid any wages. There were many like me who were trying to hold spindles and piece the yarn. They would struggle for three-four months in vain and then ran away having received no wages. [98]

Most of those boys being outsiders or locals used to leave the jobs for exploitation. As father was working on meal and brothers were married, living separately, there was nobody to feed Laxman. Father was helpless to look after Harchandya and Laxman. So, it became necessary for Laxman to work though starving and suffering. For 125 days, he worked hard and passed troublesome days.

4.10.2 Supervisors and Jobbers Would Cane, Abuse and Beat the Labours Mercilessly

The mill used to harass the workers. Specially, the supervisors and the jobbers would humiliate the poor workers if they lag behind in work. They used to insult by abusing them. Though the workers worked punctually, they became target of the management. Laxman narrates – “The supervisors still caned the workers mercilessly.” [119] Because of the cotton choking the lungs, the workers would often fall ill. Moreover, the humiliation by the higher ranked workers humiliated them. He narrates, “Our supervisors would beat and abuse as if we were their wives.” [146] If the workers returned late from mid-day meals, they would be beaten and sent home. Even though, the lunch break time was of half an hour, the supervisor would give only fifteen minutes. The jobber favoured only those people who carried favour with him and drew parties for him. Laxman witnessed this exploitation of the poor workers who could mutely suffer. Laxman always thought to give words to their woes by forming union. To the corruption and nepotism of the jobber-supervisors, Laxman helplessly felt prey. Regarding his humiliation, he states – “On many occasions, jobber-supervisors had forced me to wash their lunch boxes.” [147] It infuriated him. His piteous poverty compelled him to suffer mutely. The fear of starvation shut his mouth though he fumed and fretted against injustice. Ramanna
told that there was no mill where there would be much harassment as there was in Latur mill. Ramanna inspired Laxman to raise word on behalf of the mute sufferers. The unbearable torture and injustice of the supervisor hotted the head of Laxman. During the night shift a little doze of sleep welcomes the raw stick beating from the supervisor-

The supervisor would kick him and abuse him: ‘Get up you bastard! Fuck your mother! You guzzle and sleep like a buffalo! Who will work? Your father?[149]

Such abusing, beating and suffering was accepted just to fill the hungry bellies. A supervisor named Jadhav saw small wads of cotton hanging all over the machines, caught hold of the neck of Laxman and pushed against the machine. It resulted in the finger slashing to the bone. Laxman narrates-

The flesh round the little finger was slashed to the bone and the bone could be seen. The wound bled profusely. … Bastard you sleep? Is it your father’s mill? Don’t you get paid? [150]

This cruel and inhuman treatment made Laxman, gather courage to revolt against the exploitation done by the jobbers and supervisors.

4.10.3 Laxman’s Revolutionary Speeches

The mill management used to celebrate two functions. One on 1st May as Maharashtra Day which is also celebrated as Labour Day and the other one is Independence Day. On 1st May, Laxman delivered his first speech.

4.10.3.1 First Speech on the Side of Mill Management

Though Laxman was aware of thorough exploitation made by the jobbers and the supervisors who worked as two hands of the manager, he could avoid these things and spoke about Gandhi’s dream to do work as worship. He advocated Gandhi’s non-violence thus -

Our whole body functions because its different parts such as the arms, legs, stomach and head do their allotted work. Similarly, here, there are workers in the mill and the managers and bosses in the office. Even though their allotted functions are different, all of them together make the mill. We should all do our work and behave with the idea well entrenched in our minds, and help bring to reality the dream of Mahatma Gandhi. [148]
As a result of this speech, Laxman received gift of rupees eleven by the manger and the supervisors and jobbers began to commend his courage. He entered in the good books of the management. But it was irritated injustice done to the poor labours.

4.10.3.2 Second Speech Opposing the Exploitation of Workers

Laxman delivered his second speech on the Independence Day. He who was eye-witness and had suffered himself, revolted against – the mill management, doing exploitation of the poor labour, especially, the jobbers and supervisors exploited the labours heartlessly. It became unbearable to him. So, on the occasion of Independence Day, Laxman gave vent to his strong feelings. It was unmasking the ugly face of the system heartlessly exploiting the poor workers. It was Gandhi’s dream that the poor community must live in happiness.

He spoke highlighting the torture of the workers-

The manager-saheb you may not know that the worker’s cards are torn, if they are late even by minutes. If the worker has put in eight hours of overtime, only four hours are credited to his account. Fourteen-year 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 supervisors give to the workers is unlawful and immoral. Manager-saheb get any amount of work done by your workers, but do not thrash us cruelly. [151]

Laxman was sobbed and told their plight to the manager like a boy beaten outside sobs misery. The manager said that it was improper if the workers were humiliated so. He advised the jobbers and supervisors to stop it and asked to co-operate with the labours.

This speech raised Laxman’s image as a leader of the mill workers that resulted in building his confidence and courage to fight against cruelty, corruption and injustice.
4.10.4 Laxman Got Elected as Workers’ Representative on the Mill Management Board

As a system of the mill management, Laxman got elected as a representative of the workers. He being mouthpiece of the woes of the wretched labours raised his voice against the torture, trouble, tensions and tragedy of the workers. He used to attend meetings and used to do the advocacy of the poor labours. He studied the system as being responsible leader and realized the exploitation. It was horrible to realize much difference in the pay. He compared wages and facilities of Latur cotton mill and others mills which resulted in fueling his rebellious nature. Being member of the management, he understood that the management has exploited them by taking whopping profit-

Acute household problems humiliated the workers. On the pay days, the creditors, shopkeepers, liquor-vendors would stand at the mill gate to snatch away the money from them. [145]

Laxman, being the member of the management observed the tormentation of his co-workers. He raises the workers’ piteous condition before the management and demanded rise in salary and bonus for the workers. To stop harassment and injustice, he tried to establish worker’s union under the guidance of comrade Advocate Bhagwanrao Deshpande. Even though the management threatened him, he remained unmoved from his target to do welfare for the labours of the mill.

4.10.5 Strike against Low Percentage of Bonus and Fast unto Death in Protest

The labours are paid bonus on Diwali festival by the mill every year. When Lxman became the member of the management, the mill had earned whopping profit. It stood first in Maharashtra but the management snatched away the pleasure of the workers by declaring low percentage of bonus and half of that was advised to be credited to workers’ account in society. All the workers became unhappy of which the wave of rage took place. The workers decided to go on strike and demand higher rate of bonus. Laxman took help of Adv. Deshpande and prepared draft of demands. Laxman delivered speech, which resulted in a strong support of the labours. The strike started with firm determination. Still the management remained uncaring. So, the workers decided to go on fast unto death in protest. The cunning management
tried to crush the protest, but they couldn’t break the unity. The workers’ families suffered but the strike remained undefeated. The workers took the campaign and organized rally and begged, “Please help the spinning mill workers on strike.” [156] Laxman sent his wife to her parents and kept his tempo. When his wife asked what a fast unto death was, he explained her. “Once we sit for a fast unto death, we’ll have to remain without food till our demands are accepted. We are not to give up the fast even if we die.” [157]

Laxman consoled her when she started weeping. Laxman who used to suffer without food for days could bear the days of fast. Most of his friends were hospitalized but Laxman refused and said. “Let me sit in front of the Collector Office. Let people see our misery.” [158]

One of the determined representatives said to the manager and the chairman- “Look, we have suffered more than enough. Even if a single man of our workers dies in this, we’ll not keep you alive.” None of the workers yielded to the temptation or pressure during the strike. When all the demands were accepted, then only, the fast-onto-death based on Gandhian ideology ended. With slogan ‘Lal Bawata Zindabad’ the procession took place in the city.

Long strike and fast-onto-death created a committed image of a leadership of Laxman Gaikwad. It started his rebellious, protestant and fiery image, which took him to live life with dignity and honour.

4.11 INHUMAN MERCIFLESS POLICE EXPLOITATION

To maintain law and order is prime function of police force. They are expected to save people from injustice, insult and evils. They are protectors of innocence and destroyers of the evil. Unfortunately, this ideal image of police department is totally vanished. Instead of being friend of public, they have joined hands with gundas and have been participating in the benefits of all those wicked jobs of stealing obtained by them. Instead of enlightening human face, they have accepted masks to hide their inner evil. It becomes the impression of police after reading The Branded. The very gloomy, dark, evil and torturing exploiting image of police department stands before us. Instead of supporting good manners and punishing evils, they are exploiting the weak and protecting the strong. The police operation on the way of thieves, not simply exploit thieves and their family, but humiliate and torture them a lot. So that
the thieves, instead of turning to be a good human being, go on the way of becoming
inhuman beings. Laxman Gaikwad, being a member of the branded community, has
seen the injustice done to his family and clan by the police department. Eye
witnessing this suffering, Laxman Gaikwad strongly condemns police department and
raises voice against their evil and cruel injustice. His rebels and revolts raise his
dissonant voice against the injustice done to the poor branded communities. The
police harassment to the branded community would be a pathetic flow of this text.
The very severe beating, abusing and insulting is unbearable to any sensitive citizen.
Some of the samples of such police exploitation may be stated here.

4.11.1. Grandfather and Grandmother’s Harassment

Being poor and suffering from hanger, one day, grandfather tried to pick-
pocket the money from the knot of dhoti of a stranger. Unfortunately, the blade cut
too deep and created deep gash in the stranger’s body from buttocks to waist. The
man bawled in pain and the police caught grandfather. They dragged him beating
severaly, as they wanted to search his hut for stolen goods. The police mercilessly
punished grandfather and dishonoured grandmother. Requesting, granny asked to
relieve but they heartlessly humiliated them. Calling whore and threatening to smash
her bones, they grabbed her hair and thrashed her all over. “They were beating who
so-ever coming before them. They squeezed grandmothers’ breasts, asking her to
show the stolen goods.” [2] They jailed grandfather and released him on the condition
to report to the police station twice a day. It stopped grandfather’s stealing profession
which resulted in the suffering. They made him their informer, which resulted in
inviting the enmity of the clan. The clan in its Jat-panchayat passed judgment to kill
Lingappa, the grandfather. “One day… they gagged our grandfather and hacked him
to death with an axe.” [4] This is how Laxman’s grandfather not simply got
humiliated by the police but also lost his life through his clan.

4.11.2. Chilli Powder Poured in Dada’s Anus and Eyes

One cannot imagine that the police custody would be putting Chilli powder in
anus and eyes of the culprit to draw information from the thief. One day, Laxman’s
Manik dada was caught at Renapur market while trying to steal chappals. The police
caught him and humiliated to tell the other members’ names. They gave him beating almost to death and tortured inhumanly. Laxman narrates his torture -

“Those people put Chilli powder in my eyes and beat me; only when it became unbearable, I told the names.” [7] Suffering in custody, when he returned, his gang members tortured him as he had told their names. Instead of sympathizing his suffering, Tukaram “took chilly powder from the bhakar, put it in Dada’s anus and eyes, and continued to beat him on the burning sand. Only when Dada exploded with shit and piss, they let go of him.” [7]

The burning pain that came to Manik dada is due to the inhuman punishment given to him by police. On one hand, police punishes and on the other hand, community tortures. This is pathetic suffering of this community.

4.11.3 All Right Mankya, Go, But Meet me Again!

Thieves loot public and the police loots thieves. It has become the image of police. Their tie-ups in darkness are exposed. Here is an incident that reveals police thief relationship.

Once, Laxman’s brothers had gone for the thieving trip to Tulja Bhavani fair. On the way at Latur, a police met Manik dada and asked, “Where the hell are you going Mankya?” [48] Dada told him that they were going to Jawali. The police man sensed and abused Dada and asked about last days’ pick-pocket at bus stand. He rubbishy abused Dada and asked for the names of the gang members. Laxman narrates, “Dada begged and pleaded piteously and gave the policeman thirty rupees from his pocket”. [48] The police man then said “Alright Mankya, go, but meet me again. You are trying to get away by paying so little, mind you.” [48] It raises question on the morality, dignity and responsibility of the police. But, unfortunately it brings before us the bitter reality of the partnership of the police in the income of the thieving of the thieves.
4.11.4 Police Never Harassed Sopan, the Most Versatile Pick Pocket and Lifter of Goods: Why?

Sopan from Osmanabad district was Laxman’s elder brother, Bhagwan bhaú’s father-in-law. He had four wives. Elva was one of them and was a versatile thief. They enjoyed happy life. Sopan, had windfall earnings in pick pocketing. Whenever Sopan met the police he used to give big parties to them. If ever he slipped away without sharing it with police, they would catch him at bus stand. The writer narrates-

They never bothered to register a case against him, just demanded a thousand or five hundred rupees. His wife would go to Jawali and bring the amount. [122].

The police never harassed him. Sopan often told the author’s family members, “If these dogs were given money, they never harass you. On the contrary, they supply you as much tea and as many bidies as you wanted.” [122]. It reveals the real face of the police that exploits the thieves and indirectly deceives the society.

4.11.5 Laxman’s Wife’s Grandmother and Father Completely Disabled, by the Police Beatings

Laxman, being married and working at Latur, was living with his wife and her grandmother. His wife’s grandmother used to walk hunch her back. When asked the reason, she told that police beating had broken her back. She told the story that her son named Ram was a versatile thief when Laxman’s wife was a small girl. He had picked pocket containing ten thousand rupees. The police sensed and descended upon their village. They thrashed and kicked them with boots. They grilled them to tell where they had kept the money. The money was buried in a deep hole underneath a tree in the woods. The police besieged the whole village. She had gone to relieve herself early in the morning wearing a bonnet like long covering. The police suspected that she had gone out of the village and started beating the women vehemently with sticks. She narrates, “I was beaten severely and thrown down on a raised stone platform.” [143] The police confiscated and sold all the commodities in the shop of her father-in-law. The writer narrates, “that old woman and my father in law have been permanently disabled by the police beatings.” [143]

The police expedition and their way of treating the culprits seem very hard and heart breaking. It disabled many people. The law never permits the inhuman way.
Human assault like this would never raise the image of the police as the protector of the society.

4.11.6 Has your Father Ever Gone to School? Come Now Let your Schooling Be in Prison: Police Harassed Laxman

“Uchalya” – the name itself leads the police to beat to the man or woman who belong to it. Laxman the innocent school going boy unknowingly got tortured when he said that he was parthrut. The police slapped him so that he pissed in his shorts. He said that his brother’s name was Manik and Bhagwan, the police slapped him. The police said, “you’re the brother of a thief.” [60] when he said that he was a school boy, the police retorted. “You a brat of thieving community! Has your father ever gone to school? Come now let your schooling be in prison.” [60]

The police dragged Laxman out of the house and humiliated everybody at home. They entered in the hut and pulled his mother’s sari. They began to wallop mother. Looking at her sari, they abusively called her harlot and asked for the cash memo of the sari. They did not listen his any word and went on kicking her. They told that her sons had picked five hundred rupees from Latur the last day and asked her to return or face arrest and imprisonment. They warned, “Look, we are waiting at Patil’s house in the village, you better bring five hundred rupees.” [61] They came back full drunk with ramoshi and ordered to take all the members of Laxman’s house to the prison. When the money was offered, they went back. Laxman comments, “my mother and I were the innocent victims.” [62] Simply being younger brother and mother, they received such penetrating suffering at the hands of police. Laxman narrates these episodes to show what the reality is behind the curtain. He has torn out the gentle mask of the police and hanged the brutal evil face hidden behind.

4.11.7 Interest Goes to Police Patil and Hafta Goes to Police?

Kawatha from Osmanabad district is known as “Uchalyacha Kawatha” as half of the population belongs to parthrut community. Their major business is thieving and lifting. The Marathas of the town exploit the ignorance and poverty of the poor parthruts. They lend loans and get interest on the thieving trips-
The Police Patil of the town levies a monthly tax on every pick pocket and unscrupulously recovers it from him. Every time people return from thefts, they have to pay a hafta of up to 50 rupees to the police. [180]

It seems as if a joint venture of police patil and police to receive money from the stealing of the thieves. If the thieves fail, they are punished. The author narrates, “Hence the pick pockets never fail to give the police patil of their earnings.” [180]

The police Patil acts as a go between of the police and thieves. This bitter reality is raised by the author to open the eyes of the society so as to see the brutal naked reality of the police, reality in the white dress of police patil and in the uniform of the police respected for the dignity of their duty.

4.11.8 Haribai Kale, a Pardhi Woman Humiliated by Police

No matter man, woman or children, police treat them inhumanly. Based on suspicion, they arrest and dishonour the innocent people. On the basis of the nature of community, they ill treated the poor. On the suppression of higher authorities, they picked up the innocent people and kept them behind the bars. All these statements could be made on the ill treatment given by the police department to the people referred in The Branded.

Laxman Gaikwad while narrating the pathetic humiliation of this Uchalya clan has given various cases where the innocent people were unnecessarily humiliated. The case of Pardhi woman named Haribai is most pathetic. She had no food at home and her husband was jailed on the pretext of theft. She operated herself under family planning scheme and received 200 Rupees. She purchased jawar of it as she had no milk in her breasts for her offspring. During that time, a farmer had lodged a complaint of the theft of jawar from his field. As the police was unable to find the thief else where, they arrested poor Haribai. They found half a gunny jawar in her hut. She had purchased it from market and it arrested her. Haribai’s piteous justification -

_Saheb, I have just delivered a child and I have nothing to eat. My husband thanks to you is in jail. I got myself operated under the family planning scheme. Out of the 200 Rs. they paid for it, I have purchased half a gunny jawar. Saheb! I have become weak that I have no milk in my breast so for my offspring. That’s, why, I have purchased this Jawar [199]_
The police did not understand this. Mercilessly, they arrested her. When Haribai’s mother ran towards Laxman and narrated the pathetic tale, he felt highly angry, approached the police station, and requested to release the woman. The police Sub inspector chided and warned Laxman that those people were thieves by nature and he should not interfere otherwise, he would be considered an abettor.

Laxman got angry and retorted-

**You arrest the women of Nomadic and De-notified Tribes. You do not even employ lady police constable for this purpose. You keep our women in the police custody at night. How do we know that you do not rape them?** [199]

It made an impact upon the police and Haribai was released with her child. Laxman raises such petitious cases where the things really become unbearable. Laxman states,

**On the attainment of Independence, Pandit Nehru had declared that no community or tribe could ever be thieves by nature or birth. These tribes, which were regarded as criminal, were de-notified. In a way, they were set free from social and legal stigma and bonding.** [200]

It is Laxman Gaikwad’s objection that even today too, his community is not given an opportunity to prosper. Instead, they are falsely charged and innocent persons like Haribai are humiliated. In fact, he states. “It is the police who push their young ones into criminal activity by such barbarous treatment.” [200]

### 4.11.9 Intention of the Pardhi Boys to Work Honestly and Live a Decent Life, Broken by the Police

The wicked one escapes and the innocent suffers, has become the petitious conditions of *Uchalya*. On the name of caste and community, the police department has been dishonouring the wish of the people to live decent life. The author has concluded that the steps taken by the police have proved to convert the innocent, honest people in the bad business. Their humiliation results in turning them back to accept those criminal ways to survival. The author narrates how police is responsible to transform the innocent into thieves by giving the case of the poor Pardhi boys from Dhoki. Once, the hooligans from the neighboring village of Dhoki, killed seven Pardhis. The killers were yet not trapped or arrested. The community was under the
depression. Their children were starving. So, Laxman interfered and brought five young boys from Dhoki and employed in the spinning mill at Latur. He arranged accommodation for them, with the help of other social workers. But the Sub-inspector visited the mill and arrested them. Beating severely and warning them not to enter Osmanabad-Latur region again, released them fifteen kilometers away from Latur. The boys pleaded but the Sub-inspector unheard them and denied them from living decent life and threw them into the hell of the criminal world. Laxman comments—“The police Sub-inspector thus had the lion’s share in turning them into criminals.” [201]

When Laxman enquired at Police station and got clarification that the boys were Pardhi and must work in their district. They might under guise start thieving business there and that was why the police took action. Laxman stood security for their conduct to the police. He met the boys but they refused to join back. It was a gross injustice done to them without anything wrong done by them.

4.11.10 The Hooligan Upper-caste Rapists Spared and the Helpless Lamanas Humiliated

Because of the inability and the oath that is taken and forgotten, the police department has been denying justice to the poor people. It has become puppet at the hands of the landlords and politicians. The power has corrupted them and they are misusing power to threaten the poor and protect the rich Indians. Women’s humiliation has reached to the pick point in this democratic nation. The beauty born in the poor house has become curse. The beautiful women fall prey to the lusty deeds of the upper caste hooligans.

Laxman pleads the case of young Laman girls forcibly raped by the hooligan landlords of Murum. They attacked Bapu Rathod who dared to warn them. They seriously injured Bapu, his wife and mother. Bapu’s three-year old daughter died in this beating. The police when deliberately delayed gave no help to the poor Lamanas as “the police station was under the influence of the local hooligans.” [203] The atrocities and injustice of the police did not stop there. They asked the poor Lamanas to bury the dead child and registered sudden death. People demanded post
mortem of the girl’s death. For 24 hours, the dead body was in the custody of police and the helpless mother was outside. The police advised the poor mother-

**Your daughter is already dead. Why do you want to go against these bigwigs? Part your thumb impression here on this paper and bury your daughter? [203]**

It is miserable condition that humiliated one side and the so called responsible department that has been acting according to the views and visions of the landlords. If the protectors are protecting gundas, how will the piteous poor survive? Whose service are the police of this nation doing? Are they really preparing ground favorable to sow the seeds of humanity? The hardhearted people and the justice denying officers are responsible in the increasing injustice in the life of the helpless poor people.

**4.11.11 The Merciless Police and the Pitiable Masanjogis**

Instead of mercy, pity, peace and love, the word police have become synonymous to cruelty, crime, loot, lockup, hate and humiliation. Supporting the wicked landlords and punishing the poor innocents have become their business. They who were appointed to save and support the goodwill have become rude and receive the share, and survive. Duty, which means a responsibility to develop nation and make progress in positive direction, doesn’t get realized for the police department. We come to the conclusion after going through the cases of humiliation from “The Branded. Laxman Gaikwad has exposed the police department. The most piteous and most backward always remain frightened to the police as they never behaved friendly. The case of masanjogis in Salunkwadi Ahmadpur Tashsil breaks the heart of any sensible, honest, innocent reader.

Masanjogis are the poor beings living in the villages. Once, a high reputed landlord of Kingaon was robbed and there was a pressure to discover the thief. After being failure to find real thief, the police dog squad snatched the poor masanjogis from Salunkwadi. They searched masanjogis’ huts and humiliated them. They found a palte engraved the name of Kulkarni upon it and the police started beating the poor. It was actually given to the masanjogi in a neighbouring village. The police harassed.” Tell us which Kulkarni you robbed to get this parent?” [205] The masanjogi told that it was given to him by the brahman of Ramegaon but the police did not believe him and arrested fifteen masanjogi persons as thieves. They even arrested the poor
women. The police demanded five hundred rupees to release the women. When Laxman Gaikwad realized it, he reached Kingaon. The police said, “We have arrested these people as suspects.” [207] Laxman raised voice against the inhuman deed of the police and asked for the release of the people and pay back their five hundred rupees. The police inspector replied-

Look Saheb, after all I am an Inspector. What’s my pay? I somehow pay the rent and maintain my wife and children. However, when our supervisors visit us, we have to arrange for them the costliest wines and food. Each party costs no less than four to five hundred rupees at least. Now tell me, if I spend all this money out of my pay, will not my children and wife starve? [207]

Having known of it, Laxman replied him that it will end the faith of people in police if they went on exploiting poor people like masanjogis in that manner. When Laxman threatened to sit in protest in front of the police station along with all the women and children till they rescued the release of masanjogis. It is horrible to see, the suffering of the poor and cruelty of the police. To manage their meal, they mar the poor.

4.11.12. Jayaba Humiliated as he Denied to Sell his Land to a Jamadar in Low Price

Jayaba from Ganjur was a pathrut, farming with his family. He was not a thief. A Jamadar had asked him to sell his land to him at an unreasonably low price and Jayaba had refused.

During those days, a purse of ten thousand rupees of a merchant from Latur was picked and the police were under pressure to arrest the thief. When they had become helpless, the Jamadar told the police Sub-inspector that Jayaba or someone from his gang must have picked up the purse. To find the real thief, he could be traced. The police, after too much humiliation, arrested Jayaba. Though he had not committed any unlawful act, because of the anger due to refusal of selling land to the Jamadar, he became victim of police custody. The police thrust chilly powder in his eyes and continued beating. The police warned him to confess and went on torturing. Due to the horrible torture, Jayaba confessed the crime that was not done by him. Even though the villagers pleaded Jayaba’s case “Saheb, Jayaba is a farmer not a thief.” [210] Police continued cruelty. At a point of torture, Jayaba with his wife tried
to commit suicide by jumping into the well. Jayaba finally requested one farmer to accept his farm as a mortgage and lend him two thousand rupees to pay to the police. When understood about the case, Laxman took Jayaba to the press media and opened the eyes to the atrocities and flagrant injustice of the police against innocent helpless poor victims. The heartless inspector confessed before Laxman “Jayaba is innocent.” [211] and requested “Gaikwad Saheb, do not take up this matter against me to the higher level.” [211] Gaikwad demanded judicial enquiry and organized a rally in protest against injustice. He warned to end the injustice through the rally of “Sickle and Hammer Morcha.” [212] It was indication to fight with the sickle and the hammer against the injustice.

Jayaba’s case is a pathetic tale of suffering, unreasonably just because he was a pathrut, one of the criminal communities, wrongly recognized even today too after the Independence.

4.12 TEARFUL TALES: THE MOST EXPLOITED WOMEN OF UCHALYA COMMUNITY

India being land of multi cultures has variations regarding man-woman rights and duties. The men are supposed to earn and women are supposed to look after domestic duties. Her empire being home has to perform all the domestic deeds. So, she has to rise before dawn and rest after everybody’s snoring starts. The most hardworking women of this land are supposed, children producing factories and cooking machines. Feminism gave awareness to women of their pathetic suffering. On the name of their religious images of Goddesses they are used as prey. The humiliation of the mute women of this nation is raised by Mahatma Phule and educated them to lead dignified life. It was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who legally made them equal owners in the property of their parents and educated them to live with self-respect. After reading Laxman Gaikwad's *The Branded*, the pathetic image of women emerges. His community women seem to be the pathetic tales of tears. Their suffering by their people, upper caste and the police seem highly insulting to them as if they are born to suffer. These women lead themselves towards bearing shocking pain. The mute suffering of these women shout loudly against the slavery imposed upon them. Right of the women of the family of Laxman Gaikwad and his close relatives are
presented as a part of the narrative. They have their separate tales of torture. Regarding the women of Uchalya community, Dr. Suresh Paithankar states-

Like men, the women of Uchalya community look after the family. As there is no means of income, the men go on wandering. In the same manner, women steal and support the family - but they are few. On this background, the women bear load of the family more than men and they do it sincerely. It reveals that, this community as for profession, carries and man-woman equality.

[2007. 114, 115]

This equal share in duty and responsibility leads them to equal torture from within the family and through the society.

4.12.1 Grandmother Narsabai Ran the Household, Suffered and Died

Narsabai is the grandmother of Laxman Gaikwad. She supported her husband Lingappa in his profession and ran the household. As a woman, she supported her family and received humiliation by the police. When the police caught Lingappa and took him to his hut to search the loot, they severely tortured him and his wife. The police harshly tortured her. She narrates her unbearable experience -

When the police catch me, they hang me upside down by the legs and lash the soles of my feet with whip, thrust burning cigarette – butts into my anus. If I do not confess to the theft, they bring shit near my mouth and force me to eat it and keep on beating me. I have had enough of it. [2005. 8]

Because of this humiliation, she could not survive, fell ill and died. The woman, who is grandmother of Laxman, received a lot of torture, trouble, tensions, tragedy humiliation and died. Her poverty, womanhood, profession and husband’s inability made her to suffer. Her miserable life would be the reason that Laxman’s mother tried to save herself from the torture.

4.12.2 Mother Dhondabai Died Due to Utter Poverty

Dhondabai is Laxman’s mother. She worked herself to the bone and barely managed to maintain her family. She being a strong support was the only woman who lived away from stealing and did work to survive. She sold milk at Latur. She had four sons and two daughters. Because of hard work and uncertainty of bread, she
suffered. Once, suffered from fever her family managed survival by selling sheep. Nobody took her to dispensary. Applying sacred ash on her forehead, they uttered, “Ma is afflicted by an evil spirit” [29] and took her to Jawali to exorcise the spirit. Ignorance and poverty couldn’t give her medicine and she died. The writer narrates, “One day, a man came from Jawali and told us that Dhondabai had expired.” [30] Everybody bowled and wailed by sympathising the author. The author even couldn’t attend his mother’s cremation. When Tulsiram’s mother told author’s father to take him to his mother’s cremation, father’s poverty uttered- “True Gangabai, but I’ve no money. What can I do? We are selling these plates at Latur to meet the expenses of the journey.” [30]

The author narrates his pathetic suffering on the death of his mother being unfortunate, orphan child, “father, Dada and Anna went. I was restless with the memory of my mother.” [30]

Laxman’s father always suspected his wife’s fidelity. He used to blame “Sara is not my daughter” [22] and used to beat her. After Sara’s marriage whenever she comes to visit, he used to hate her and if Dhondabai gives her sari or blouse, he would punish her “sit ups as a punishment” [22] and beats. It was great humiliation of Dhondabai.

Dhondabai who worked through out her life met her tragic death. The author and his mother are the only innocent creatures who remained away from stealing profession. Dhondabai died due to poverty, which is imposed upon her by the wretched social set up of this nation and its caste system. She became victim of superstitions of this cruel system.

4.12.3 Manik Dada’s Keep Piteous Padmini: Sold for Rs. 250

Manik was the elder brother of Laxman and he used to call him Dada. Manik kept a woman of Barshi as his mistress. She was a city dweller. Laxman states “As it was, our women were not used to keep themselves clean.” [64] But, Padmini used to keep herself clean and wore a natty make-up. Her language was eloquent. People called her nawadi, newly arrived. Women inquired her of her wearing petticoat underneath her sari. They would irritate her, “Are you a dombar?” [65] Even, they objected of her wearing chemise underneath her jumper. One day, due to such
pressing, she left her bodice and petticoat in to the river. She suffered with Manik of such humiliation and starvation. Actually, Manik who was from well-to-do family deceived her. Due to starvation, one day, Manik took decision to sell her in Karnataka. The writer narrates, “On their return, I learnt that they had sold Padmini to that man for two hundred fifty rupees.” [66]

Padmini, the unfortunate puppet in the hands of Manik suffered and lived such pitiable life. Manik who was already married could do this deed of keeping Padmini by deceiving her, shows male dominance in pathrut community. The woman suffering in this clan is also pathetic and keeping the women as if cattle driven to the butcher.

4.12.4 The Stranger Raped Sister-in-Law

Women’s insecurity in rural area is a burning issue. They are always sexually exploited either by affection or by force. The rapes have destroyed their life. The sexual starvation of the male would be responsible for that or even the evil mind habitual of enjoying woman body. The poor women and the beautiful virgins fall pregnant to the lust of such hooligans.

Once, Bhagwandada’s wife, sister-in-law of the author had slept in the yard of the hut. At a wild night, somebody came, pressed his hand on her mouth, raped her, and ran away. She began to bowl and shout loudly “Run! Run! Some bastard lay on my body and ran away” [86] When asked whether he had done anything to her, she replied the she did not allow him to sleep with her. The writer states – “She knew full well what exactly the truth was. She had prevaricated because she was afraid that her husband could divorce her.” [86] When the incident had taken place, the author being young boy couldn’t dare to stop and had pretended to be fast asleep. It clearly indicates inability of the author and the woman’s fear of her future. The daring of the stranger would be because of the poor and helpless community that can’t raise voice against any crime. This is disadvantage of the poor and pathetic people taken by the rural hooligans.

4.12.5 Mahamaya Chandrabhagabai Jadhav

Chandrabhagabai Jadhav was a landlady of pathrut community who had parted with her two husbands and had been living with Reddy of the Yellam caste a
suspended police constable. She ran unlawful business of selling liquor. She bore no child for Reddy and brought another poor bride for Reddy by telling that she was Reddy’s sister. She also ran a grocery shop where she used to sell ganja, the intoxicating drug. She used to exploit the Vaidu and masanjogis by taking their jawar in low price and used to get profit by selling it in high price. To the barren women, she used to give medicines. The author, insisted of learn decent ways of life was taught “slowly, vulgar ways of the unsophisticated.” [106]

4.12.6 Wife’s Grandmother Permanently Disabled

Laxman’s wife Chabbu’s grandmother became permanently disabled by the police. Her son Ram picked ten thousand rupees and the Inspector descended upon her house. They thrashed them all and kicked with boots to know where the money was kept. They ill treated, Chabbu and author’s father–in–law. Laxman narrates- “Old woman and my father - in - law have been permanently disabled by the police beating.” [143]

4.12.7 Elava: Sopan’s Fourth Wife

Sopan being brother-in-law of the author, used to visit the author’s home. He was the husband of author’s deceased elder sister. He had three living wives, two at home separately living and one, Elava always with him as his fourth wife. He was unknown about her caste. She was a pretty thief. She used to drink and enjoy with her own picked up money. Sopan was father-in-law of author’s brother. If Sopan was arrested, Elava used to go Jawali, manages money and relieves his husband. If Elava was arrested, it was her brother and his wife who would go to Jawali and furnish bail and security bond to get her released. The author states regarding her skills and habits-

Elava picked ornaments from women’s necks and stole parcels from markets. She needed liquor every day and always smoked ganja and bidies. [123]

Elava seems pretty thief and drug habitual woman. Her poverty compelled her to do all those things. She accepted to be fourth wife, which throws light upon her
helplessness for the survival. Elava’s suffering is found in her living as fourth wife and living drug addicted life.

4.12.8 Haribai Kale: A Pathetic Mother

Haribai Kale, the Pradhi woman witnessed suffering and inhuman treatment by the police. Because of poverty, after delivery, she got herself operated under the government scheme and received Rs. 200/-. She purchased jawar with that amount and tried to feed herself and milk her baby. On an account of the farmer’s complaint of his jawar stolen, the police suspected Haribai as a thief and arrested her. They couldn’t believe her. Haribai’s mother requested the police to relive her. She humbly requested the author – “…my daughter has recently delivered a child… please, get her out of their clutches.” [199]

Haribai’s humiliation during her just delivered days shows the cruelty, heartless treatment of the police and heart breaking suffering of Haribai.

4.12.9 Laman Girls Raped by the Landlord Hooligans

The landlords of Murum raped the Lamana girl and attacked Lamana Tanda mercilessly. In this struggle, Bapu Rathod’s wife lost her three year old daughter. The police recorded it as a sudden death. People demanded post-mortem. The police kept the dead body in their custody for 24 hours during which the mother was suffering outside. Writer narrates, “The poor mother was made to sit there all through the night.” [203] The lust of landlords and the hooligans of the rural area is reflected here. The poor woman feels as if born to suffer and survive. Their sexual exploitation seems unbearable.

4.12.10 Changuna from Kawatha Had Three Husbands

Changuna is Laxman’s wife’s cousin from Kawatha. Her family comprises of eight members. She had three husbands. She was a pretty thief. She dressed superbly and used to thieve. Nobody suspected her. If anybody tried to beat her, she would beat saying, “You think I’m thief, eh! I’ve servants like you in my employment.” [183] She used to drink tadi, eat half a kilo meat, drink eight-nine cups of tea and 20 to 25 pieces of bread. Changunabai’s sister kept a Sikh and left thieving. She lived
luxurious life. Her addiction made her suffer and die. Her business was not of her choice but of her tradition.

4.12.11 Ithi Sold her Pretty Daughter of Hardly One and Half Year

Ithi was a relative of the author like Chingi. She had more than one husbands, one from the community and the other from a Muslim. Both of her husbands are in stealing business. Once, they had gone for picking up business. They had no money to go any further or eat something. The writer narrates-

At last Ithi sold her pretty little daughter of hardly one and half years, whom she had born in her womb for nine months and given birth to in pain, for 200 rupees in Pune. [185]

The writer meditates-

it is the tragedy that even after thirty-nine years of Independence people are forced to sell their offspring to feed themselves. If living with dignity and self-respect is impossible what is the use of freedom? [185]

4.12.12 Salubai and her Daughter’s Humiliation

Salubai was young and healthy girl who had fallen in love with Ravan of her community. He loved her for two years and she bore daughter from him. He refused to marry her and tried to marry some other woman. Salubai called Jat-panchayat and placed her case.

Her father plainly told about her nature and the panchayat punished Ravana to pay Rs. 25/- and dip his nose in Salubai’s urine. Because of not having legitimate father, Salubai’s daughter was not admitted in school.

Salubai’s father’s justification and the Jat-panchayat’s justice destroyed Salubai’s future and her daughter had to live fatherless. The parents of Salubai remained responsible to destroy her. Even she had to behave properly before loving Ravan. The women from Uchalya community seem unfortunate regarding male shelter as a father or husband and suffer mutely.
4.12.13 Want of Caste-purity, Shaved Bride’s Mother’s Head

Jat-panchayat insulted the branded women and made them to live underestimated life. They lived dumb and deaf life.

The marriage ceremony always remained controversial and insulting to women. The women are always ill treated by the Jat-panchayat for their illegitimate relationships. In one of the marriages at Salgara, the panchayat punished the bride’s mother and ordered to shave her heard. It raised the backwardness of the community and disgusting justice of the panchayat. Laxman records it thus- “haunted with fear, the bride’s mother came and sat in front of the panchas. Her husband sat as if he was a cold corpse.” [120]

Finally, Laxman states “The sin of the mother was visited on the daughter.” [121] The panchas did not satisfy with that and smeared her head with ochre. The bride’s mother pushed her sari into her mouth so that her weeping would not be heard. She sobbed and wept bitterly later on.

It would be a great injustice to the woman on the name of humanity. She fell prey to her Jat-panchayat and accepted humiliation for her daughter’s marriage.

4.12.14 Laxman’s Wife Chhabubai’s Endurance Shouldered Domestic Responsibilities

Chhabubai was the wife of Laxman Gaikwad from Kawatha. Like shadow, she lived and supported Laxman in sun and shower. When Laxman was working in the spinning mill, he got married. After getting married, she came with her grandmother. Being newly married, she couldn’t get privacy and suffered to meet her husband.

Though Chhabubai was illiterate, she could manage to run her house by doing hard work. Laxman’s sister-in-law tried to poison his ears against her to break his married life. He suspected his wife and trashed her mercilessly when she cried, “Oh mother! I’m dying.” [140]

Chhabubai ran vegetable shop and grocery shop to maintain domestic necessities. During the days of mill strike, she had to go to her parents to be saved from starving. Poverty and husband’s determined decisions made her suffer. When the strike was successful, the mill management by ill tricks suspended him and
Chhabubai had to bear a lot of financial trouble. He states “Since the time I lost my job at the mill, my wife had shouldered the responsibilities of maintaining the household.” [166] “Household expenses kept on mounting.” [167] His wife looked after his father in old age. He states “My wife cleaned the excreta and carried out his urine in a bowl every day.” [171]

With the spirit of awakening and doing justice to the society, Laxman was wandering and his wife was as if a fixed pole to look after family needs. The grocery shop was at her hands. Even though illiterate, she could successfully run it. Laxman needed money to his social work and she had to supply through her shop. It disturbed the shop every time but Chhabubai would raise it every time. She remained a backbone to the social activities of Laxman. Being mother of three children, she maintained her home and freed her husband to the social service.

Chhabubai seems a dedicated, scarifying, sincere wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She shouldered all the domestic responsibilities without complaint. She proved obedient wife who suffered mutely and never raised a word of complaint against her husband. Her dedication is responsible to raise Laxman Gaikwad's activities before the world. She is the woman behind the curtain whose suffering and sacrifice would not be forgotten.

4.13 AWARENESS AND SEARCH FOR EXISTENCE, IDENTIFY SELF-RESPECT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Subaltern voices raised all over the world against merciless exploitation, piteous suffering, inhuman torture and unbelievable pain and pathos. Education poured intelligence and awakened the masses to fight against the cruelty. Thousands of years' slavery was refused and cry for liberty was hared. Everybody who was humiliated searched roots of exploitation and rebelled. Laxman Gaikwad’s ‘The Branded’ is an attempt to reject all those means of heartless exploitation destroying the life of his poor community. Education enlightened and sharpened his sensitivity to revolt against miseries of his poor clan. He raised systematic voices against all those odds to free his clan from the clutches of casteism, hunger, starvation and all the types of humiliation. His life story appeals to make free his clan from the torture of imposed brandidhood from the days of British Government. His search is for existence,
identity and self-respect. He forcefully, legally and humanistically advocated pain and pathos of his people. His plea is for the legitimate acceptance of his clan by the mainstream culture. He appeals to treat his document sociologically to understand and solve the twist in the society. He appeals his community be understood and given respectable ways of life. He wants to wipe out the stigma of criminality on the forehead of his community. His humanistic advocacy of his community raises his image as a social activist of his clan. He rejects all those traditions and thieving to lead his community into the main stream of social life. His fight is for a positive social change to accept his community as the respectable clan suffering due to ignorance, illiteracy and thieving. He tried to replace ‘Bharat blade’ for slate and pencil. He seems the mouthpiece of Marxism, Gandhiesm and follower of Phule-Ambedkarite philosophy.

4.13.1 Education as a Means of Social Change

After witnessing life looting tortures of thieving, Laxman Gaikwad who couldn’t continue his schooling due to poverty, fought for the wellbeing of children of his community. He thought to run residential schools and hostels to awaken his clan. He understood Mahatma Phule’s ideology of education, which forcefully told that illiteracy was the reason of exploitation. Though he unfortunately remained non-metric, he wishes to direct his clan on the way of education. He states-

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. [179]

He confesses “Reading brought me knowledge and acute commonsense.” [102]

4.13.2 Rejection to all those Ways Causing Humiliation

Laxman Gaikwad protested against all those odds causing humiliation of his society. He advised his people to send their children to school for which he started schools and hostels. He strongly argued for the welfare of his community. He rejected illiteracy and awakened his people against thieving, superstitions and ill treatment of
Jat – panchyat. As an awakened fellow, he understood his responsibility to educate his people so as to live respectable life.

He raised voice and strongly advocated schooling against illiteracy. Laxman, who suffered a lot due to illiteracy, opened the campaign of awareness for his people. He told his people about the root cause of their humiliation. He advocated Abemdkarite philosophy to his people and humbly requested to educate their children. He created favorable atmosphere for them with help of his wife’s support.

4.13.2.1 Rejection to Thieving

It was thieving, an inevitabel way of survival which caused a great suffering, torture and inhuman insult. Laxman appealed the government to look after his clan’s welfares. The police custodies of his people and their pathetic suffering made him bear a lot. As a result of which, he communicated his community and turned their views and visions to accept schooling and to adopt respectable ways of moral life with prestige.

4.13.2.2 Rejection to Gods and Goddesses Causing Casteism

The divide and rule policy of casteism caused humiliation. Laxman, when worked in mill, created awareness among the labours and formed unity which was broken by Ganpati festival. He states-

The Chairman and the Manager were in search of opportunity to create disharmony and break the solidarity of the workers. And the festival of Ganpati came near, sowing the seeds of division among the workers. [162]

Laxman realized that the Gods and Goddesses are the means of severe exploitation and he conveyed it to his society.

4.13.2.3 Rejection to Jat-panchayat Humiliation

Laxman Gaikwad, being enlightened after long experiences in life, rejected the Jat-panchayat cruelty, shame and inhuman humiliation. He exposed various ways of Jat-panchayat’s exploitation and the suffering of piteous women. It is a system within the system of Uchale to suppress crimes, quarrels, and insults. Unfortunately, the
panchas being uneducated and egoists, tortured the clans and caused unbearable humiliation. Laxman rejected such system and advocated the constitution as the base of human survival. He strongly condemned Jat-panchayat’s cruelty. Regarding panchayat’s inhuman decisions out of illiteracy, he states – “I found the functioning of the panchayat obnoxious and found disgusting.” [120]

He found the panchayat – “gigantic social monster.” [Ibid] Laxman rejected this social monster and advocated that his clan would refuse it and accept democratic ways where liberty, fraternity, equality and social justice would be provided logically and legally.

4.13.3 Search for Rightful Ways for Livelihood

Laxman Gaikwad left Dhanegaon for schooling and went to Babalgaon and then Latur. His clan and the family were living on stealing. He found the way ugly and torturing and changed his track to survive with hard work.

4.13.3.1 Labor in the Cotton Mill

Fighting with poverty, he worked in the cotton mill and earned bread, where he received knowledge after reading books of labour laws and coming in contact with the Marxist philosophy of comrade Adv. Bhagwanrao Deshpande. Sensitive towards the labour’s torture, he spoke, “I wept as I spoke of the torture, harassment and exploitation, and the workers were subjected to.” [155] As a result to fight against mill exploitation, he with his comrades, “decided to found and organize a union of all the workers in the mill.” [155] Forming the trade union, under Marxist philosophy, he did strike for labour’s demands and the fast unto death and got succeeded even though he lost his job. Neither temptation nor the pressure broke him. It shows determined spirit of an awakened leader who fought for the self-respect. People called him “You fellow, the Gandhian ideology.” [160] May it be Marxist or Gandhian, his target was to adopt philosophies to relieve torture of the sufferers. He accepted every philosophy breaking the bondages of the slaves.
4.13.3.2 Started Grocery Shop and Hotel for Survival

On the pretext of fraud, the management suspended Laxman and Jagtap, another workers’ leader. They broke unity of the labours on an account of Ganpati festival funds. Laxman had to suffer with his family. Still, with the help of Adv. Deshpande, the communist party gentleman, he started grocery shop for his wife. He states, “Since, the time I lost my job at the mill, my wife had shouldered the responsibilities of maintaining the household.” [166] Not only that, he “set up a small hotel in front of the Natraj Theatre in a small rickety hut.” [166] He had no regret as he had lost the job due to self-respect. He says, “I earn my living by honest work.” [167] His dignity and influence of awareness made him to work rather than returning to his family business of stealing. Though the expenses went on mounting, he managed with his wife and maintained respectable ways of life.

4.13.3.3 Sold Chili-powder, Bombil and Salted Groundnuts

During the days of his economic suffering due to loosing mill job, he had not lost will to survive honorably. He adopted various ideas and maintained house. On one hand, his wife was running grocery shop; he sold chili powder, bombil and groundnuts on the road. No humiliation is taken heavily by him. He never returned back to his clan imposed profession of thieving. He states – “I started selling chili-powder on one of the roads… Then I began to buy bombil… I also sold salted groundnuts…” [170]

4.13.3.4 Dairy Business with Sister-in-Law

Laxman went to Aurangabad in searching job. His elder brother Sambha, who he was employed earlier there at Aurangabad, was settled there. Laxman, because of his previous rebellious record of Latur mill, he couldn’t get employment. So, he decided to work at Aurangabad. His sister-in-law had started a dairy for the people from backward communities. She was illiterate and suggested Laxman to work as a secretary, as he was educated. He found his sister-in-law exploiting poor people asking him to maintain falsifying accounts. He denied fraud. He states-
I completely lost my head over this defrauding of the poor members and one day, I violently quarreled with my sister-in-law taking the side of the poor members. [169]

As a result, he had to return Latur without money.

4.13.3.5 Worked as a Peon in Municipality

Laxman Gaikwad being a good orator, worked for the election campaign of Manikrao Sonwane to ensure the welfare of the poor. He thought election, the means to reduce the pinch of poverty. In return, to the work he did, Mr. Sonwane’s son-in-law Mr. Gopal Patil landed him job as a peon in the Latur Municipality. He accepts his humiliation as - “poverty forced me to accept that job as a peon.” [176] He witnessed utter insult and corruption in the offices. The officers used to treat their officials with insult. He was disgusted with such treatment. He couldn’t bear the humiliation and left the job.

4.13.3.6 Started a Cycle Shop

Due to inhuman treatment as a peon in Municipality, Laxman met comrade Deshpande who told him to run cycle shop. Though Laxman’s wife did not like his leaving the job, his self-respect made him to do it. His fight for existence made him to run cycle shop by taking loan. Regarding his wife’s inability to understand him, he states-

How could she understand, what was suffocating me? The yawning gap between the poor and the rich tormented my mind. Vermin were eating into my brain. [178]

This is unrest of a social activist who couldn’t bear valley between haves and have-nots. With such odd jobs, he fought against social injustice done to his society. He thought of running schools to enlighten his community. He even thought election to be the means to release bondages of his clan.
4.13.3.7 Worked as a Contractor of Jayakwadi Project and Realized Corruption

After suffering from acute monetary difficulties, he felt that neither service nor a shop would help him to take over his difficulties. On his friend’s suggestion, he decided to work as a contractor for Jayakwadi Project. Because of not being license holder or an engineer, he had to sell his plot at Latur and had to get a tender of twenty four thousand rupees for certain earth work. When half the work was completed and he demanded for advance, he was told- “If you want to make money in this business, you must pay some percentage to all and sundry.” [220] After hearing the percentage of everybody, he had to complain against injustice and corruption and he fought against all sorts of injustice. His helplessness made him to accept reality. He confesses, “I, who raised my voice against corruption and nepotism, was now helplessly surrendering myself to these evil forces.” [222] He found the entire system rotten and corrupt. When he thought of his community and these so-called high class people, he felt sad. He presents-

…I feel sad to see that people from the Nomadic and Denotified Tribes are still looked upon as thieves by police and the society. Their houses are regularly searched. Even then broken and hole-ridden utensils are confiscated. Not even a simple inquiry is held in respect of officers who amass enormous wealth and properties well beyond their legitimate means and income… [223]

This awareness made Laxman restless, helpless and revealed him to lead for the cause. He shouted, roared and fought for the community who really no longer stands thief before these white-collor looters living in the cities.

4.13.4 Politics: As a Means of Social Change

Laxman Gaikwad, being an activist, got acquainted with many social and political workers. He was not formally a member of any political party. He worked to strengthen the Nomadic and Denotified Tribe’s Unions and Organizations at Marathwada.

During the declaration of parliamentary elections, the Bahujan Samaj Party approached him and asked him to contest for the seat of Lok Sabha. He thought politics as a weapon of social change and contested. But the B.S.P. that assured him to
send a jeep and money couldn’t keep the promise. He had become bankrupt. Being frustrated, one day he wept and uttered-

Why did the party treat me so shabbily after presenting me with sweet words and tall promises and what wrong had I done to them for this punishment meted out to me? [228]

He states – “The B.S.P. did not come to my help at the critical time.” [229] finally, he took decision to support a candidate of Congress (I) rather than thinking “A brick is softer than a hard stone.” [230] He learnt a lesson. He confesses-

In this country, it is not enough to possess good workers and volunteers to win elections, you must possess wealth, social prestige and quality of having born in one of the higher castes. In addition, you must be well versed in the art of hooliganism, mobocracy, making false promises and assurance. [230]

It shows Laxman’s awareness. It is the defeat witnessed by him because of not obeying Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s philosophy – educate, organize and agitate. Laxman Gaikwad seems agitating without organizing, educating himself and his masses. It needs base to build, which unfortunately is not firmly built and hence caused the frustration.

4.14 COMMITMENT TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE, RIGHTS, REFORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Laxman Gaikwad takes flambeau to enlighten his clan by writing The Branded. Lifelong tortures matured him. Humiliation of his community had torn his heart and his sensitivity made him restless.

In the initial stage, he got inspired due to Marxist philosophy. Comrade Deshpande enlightened him and raised his leadership in the mill activities.

Sense of responsibility led him to do social work. Being educated and enlightened as Buddha’s discipline ‘enlighten thyself’, he tried his hand in various activities, even entered in the active politics of B.S.P. and got frustrated. He witnessed all round exploitation by the so called educated corrupt inhuman beings. He fought against insiders and outsiders of his clan. He determined to change the social setting of his clan and tried to bring them on the way of the mainstream of life. He fought to liberate his clan form being called branded socially and legally. He realized his social and political exploitation.
Laxman Gaikwad, by the end of his autobiography, admits his wife’s share in participating in the rallies and exhorts women to work for their own upliftment. He wanders through out Maharashtra to demand justice, rights, reformation and transformation for his people in the present social structure. He broadened his target and fixed his goal to fight for subaltern’s upliftment. He, being a committed social activist of Uchalya community, concludes his narrative -

Now my obsession is to seek various ways to foster and strengthen tribal movements intellectually, so that a complete transformation can be achieved of the Nomadic, and Denotified Tribes, the scheduled castes, and the exploited and downtrodden underdogs.

This, I know, that I shall be ever engaged in this activity. [233]

4.15 REJECTION TO INNOCENT LOVE AFFAIR DUE TO REALIZATION OF LIMITATION OF THE CASTE

Dr. Bhalchandra Phadke in his article published in Asmitadarsha states Dalit autobiography as “Abhanggatha of Sorrow.” [1999. 85] It is poetry of sorrow. It has suffering Hindu society imposed story of pathos, which the author wishes to tell. He intends to demonstrate religion, tradition and evil ethics of existing inhuman society imposed upon him. So, ‘I’ in Dalit literature doesn’t remain personal but becomes representative of all the sufferers. Suffering in love, for which unfortunate lovers are crushed under the heals of casteism, remains pathetic tale of tears. Dr. Vasudev Mulate states “love has no caste, no poverty.” [1999. 47]

Laxman Gaikwad being Uchalya, understanding his caste limitations, shows his open heartedness, innocence and very mature opinion regarding his feeling of sacred love. When he was working in spinning mill, he had joined school. Due to millwork at night, he had to take rest during the day. It created emotional relationship with a Maratha girl which made Laxman realize his community limitations and he rejected his innocent feelings of love for Shobha. Shobha remained his unforgettable treasure of youth. He understood love, friendship and limitations of Caste with this incident in life.

Laxman was living in Chandrabhagabai’s building. He was doing overtime due to which sleep used to linger in his eyes. Because of the daytime disturb in the building, he used to go to a godown near his room to take rest, where Shobha, a daughter of engineer used to smile at him. He states “The girl with her ever smiling
face had turned my head.” [2005.108] He used to go to school at ten and meet her on
the way, but due to discouragement, couldn’t talk her. The image of her smiling face used
to dance before his eyes. He states “It was rare once-in-life-time thing that a beautiful
girl from a rich family had fallen in love with me.” [108] He was bubbling with
happiness. She was beauty with soft lotus like face and he had palms worse than the
soles of her feel. She was a bold girl who had written a touching love letter to him.
“Wherever you may be, dear, let your life be happy. When two hearts join dear, what
need we have to fear?” [109] He showed this love letter to his friends and they
misused it. They frightened, threatened and had beaten him. His friend Moti dared
and showed the love letter to her father which resulted in giving her punishment. Her
innocent love tortured her. Her father “branded her on her cheek with a red-hot
spatula.” [110] Laxman feared that somebody might murder him. There was no way
out, and he wrote a letter to her and conveyed-

I am so poor that I do not deserve to love a girl like you. We have
come close to each other because of love but our love is unattained,
pure. We would always be closely related, but only as brother and
sister. [111]

Laxman, realizing his limitations of education, job and community, took
decision to part. It was insecurity of evil society that would have mercilessly finished
him. He had already tasted experience of friendship and being in love, it was that
dread, fear and community limitations, he had to part from his innocent love. Shobha
then married and died in her first pregnancy, two years after her marriage. He
pathetically confesses, “I cannot forget Shobha who though rich herself, loved a poor
boy.” [111]

Realizing this pathetic tale of love and suffering, Rajpantke in his gazar
writes-

Just loved, what crime had I done?
The castist made casteism and made me burn.
[Gazals in Manuscript]

4.16 CONCLUSION:

To conclude the chapter, it may be stated as-

1. Laxman Gaikwad’s autobiography is a severe blow on the threshold of
    Hindu caste system which made his community suffers a lot. It has
sociological background and hence a social document showing humiliation of the tribal communities in India bearing stigma of brandedhood.

2. It is an advocacy of Uchalya community against the charges fixed by the British government before the independence of India which are yet a black bolt on the forehead of the caste of Laxman Gaikwad.

3. It is the protest against ill treatment given by the Hindu religion, its traditions, superstitions and inhuman treatment given by the Police department.

4. It throws light upon the stealing profession and the tricks applied by Uchalya community for feeding the family.

5. Hunger humiliated the branded community and their age old illiteracy dehumanized them.

6. It is a strong protest against superstitions, untouchability and illiteracy which made the community a slave of the upper caste Hindus.

7. Jat-panchayat of the branded community ill treats the people and never remains balanced. It always humiliated the women and favoured the bribe.

8. It throws light upon Laxman’s leadership and awakening to fight against injustice done to his community.

9. The police-thief relation is exposed where the merciless beating and the exploitation of the Uchayla community takes place.

10. It reflects Gaikwad’s fight for self-respect, existence; identity and social change his community.

11. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who advocated education as the milk of tigress awakened Gaikwad and he dared to open the wounds of his community for noble treatment and justice.

12. The pathetic suffering and strong rejection to inhuman treatment of the Hindu religion makes The Branded an expression of the subaltern which is a feature of all postcolonial literature.