



## Domination of Jatpanchayat in *The Branded* by Laxman Gaikwad

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Jatpanchayat is seemed to be a dominant factor in Nomadic Tribes. The representatives of Panchayat were given more values in decision making. Generally the Panchayat used to be held in the farm with a crowded affair with all the people in *Uchalya* community. Everybody received travelling expenses as honorarium. All the Patil of the area used to attend Panchayat. The accused, for which the Panchayat had been called into session, had to bear all expenses of liquor, meat, vegetable and other items of Panchayat meal. The member of the Panchayat used to attend the Panchayat session in white *dhoti*, white shirt and white *Uparana*. Then Panchayat used to begin to sit in judgment. The opinions were frequently divided. Some Panchas would hold the petitioner to be right while the other Panchas would insist that the accused was in the right. This created a state of confusion and as a result there were much argument.

The Panchayat used to be held in session for three days in a row under the same tree. At last an unanimous decision was obtained from all the Panchas. After much debate, the accused convicted of the guilt was fined. The fine was range from rupees five hundred and fifty to five thousand. If the accused had been convicted of a false charges in their dealings with other members of the gang, his or her treacherous accomplices was required to go on thieving missions only for their bare living for two to six months as per the direction of Panchayat. They would not get their shares of the loot because they had betrayed the professional faith of the gang. Even if the person, so convicted on his or her own, stole anything, he or she had no right over it. If the convicted person refused to pay the fine, he was ostracized.

The dominance of Jatpanchayat in *Uchalya* Community is typically narrated in *The Branded* by Gaikwad. Gaikwad's grandfather named Lingappa worked as a state informer to the police and helped them in catching culprits from their *Uchalya* community by disclosing their names and where about. The community held the



Panchayat against him and resolved that he must be killed. It was impossible in *Uchalya* community to meet police against the Panchayat. The result of this action was worst on the particular fellow. The narrator provides an account of his grandfather who helped police regarding the culprit.

“Our grandfather was cremated without anybody getting to know of it. Now that grandfather was dead, the people from our community resumed their usual business of thriving and picking pockets without the fear of being reported since then the entire house hold depended on grandmother”(04)

If anybody dared to disobey the Panchayat resolutions, he or she was ostracized, nobody would even touch him or her, and they served him or her food from a distance. He was neither invited nor permitted to attend marriages. No marital relations were allowed with such an ostracized person. If he or she visited the house of anybody was served food in a basket and given water in a plate. Yet if anyone dared to touch, give refuge or serve meal in a plate to the person ostracized, that relative or person too was ostracized. Such kinds of hard punishment were lodged against the person who went against Jatpanchayat.

Shankar from Salgara in the present narrative used his daughter as wife. The Panchayat came to the conclusion that Shankarya had used his daughter as his wife and thereby he had brought shame to the community and spoiled its name. The Panchayat, therefore, ostracized Shankarya and his daughter for two years. In this regard Gaikwad narrates

“We received the message of Shankarya’s ostracization at our village. Shankarya visited our village since once after he was ostracized. He was served water in a coconut shell. Just as Patil, Deshmukh keep separate plates for food and water for the ostracized. For there would always be some person ostracized at a given time. So we also served shankarya water in a plate. We gave him rotis and vegetable in an iron basket generally used while digging trenches. We did not take Shankarya into the house. We give him a tattered cloth to lie on and a tattered quit covering himself”. (53)



The decision of the Panchayat was obeyed strictly in the Uchalya community. Nobody took amiss the treatment accorded as a result of the Panchayat's directive. One thing is to be noted that the ostracization was commonly practiced by upper class people on lower class. The practice of untouchability is observed in *Uchalya* Community in the case of accused person under the norms of Panchayat rule. No doubt the base of practicing ostracization is different in both the classes.

Gaikwad provides an account of the ritual bath for the bridegroom and the bride in Uchalya Community through this narrative. The bath is customarily performed with the sacred ritual of thread – winding. The bathing bowl contains the vermilion turmeric–mixed water. The bowl is customarily wound with a sacred thread by married women who have not been ostracized. Then four married women pour the water from the bathing bowl on the bodies of the bridegroom and the bride. According to the ritual Kashibai, a relative of Gaikwad's family, began to wind the thread round the bowl. As she was about to twist and twine the thread, one of the old headmen, came up and snatched the thread out of her hand. He declared that 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. In the result the panchayat of their community held its session against this case and charged against Kashibai. Gaikwad narrates the account as:

“So all the panchas deliberated, and the decision was taken in the panchayat 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 and received in the community as purified. It was declared that there was no other taint in her.”(55)

There were several accounts of Pancha's decision exemplified in *The Branded*. There was no thoughtful base for the Judgment of Panchayat. The innocent people of the community were also suffered against the decision of Panchayat. Gaikwad provided an account of Pancha's decision against the mother of the bridegroom in his community. The charge was that the mother's mother of the bridegroom had lived with a Maratha fellow. So the girl's mother was born of a Maratha father. Even if she



herself had married a person of their community, the earlier taint was not there by washed away. The mother of the bridegroom had not yet got herself purified in their Panchayat. The Panchayat sat under a mango tree against the mother of the bridegroom. The Panchas came out with their proposals, some said let the women eat shit, and some other said let her be fined 2000 rupees, while some others proposed that her nose to be cut off. Finally one of the Panchas proposed a viable middle course that the bride's mothers head be shaved, the Panchas agreed to this proposal unanimously and it was decided that the women's head would be shaved. Actually the mother's mother of the bridegroom had no relation to the charges laid by the Panchayat. Gaikwad expresses his suffocation under the norms of Panchayat rules and backwardness of his own community as:

“My head went numb with all that I had witnessed. How backward and superstitious could our community be! What a horrible scene was I witness to! On one side was the advanced urban society and on the other our community–panchayat. I found the functioning of the panchayat obnoxious and disgusting. I was, small fry, however, before this gigantic social monster. If I dared say anything, they would explore my awn lineage to its roots. I was not yet married. If I said anything in opposition, father would curse me. The community would refuse to give me a girl in marriage because I opposed the community panchayat. So I mutely watched whatever was happening before me” (120)

One more incident is narrated by Gaikwad that the community Panchayat was called at Kawatha against her wife's sister. Her name was Salubai. She was married to a man from Sholapur. Her husband was a versatile pickpocket. But he had entered into a bigamous marriage. So Salubai's mother obtained Salubai's release from the marriage by paying Rs.251 as per the custom of Uchalya community. Salubai continued to live with her parents in Kawatha. She was young and healthy and she fell in love with one Ravan of her own community Uchalya. Ravan too courted her and entangled her in his love. He lived with her for two years assuring her that he was yet unmarried and intended to marry her soon. A daughter was born to Salubai from him. All the people of Kawatha knew of this. Yet nobody said anything for it and was taken



for granted that they were married. Ravan's parents, however, another women for Ravan and their engagement was finalized. So Salubai complained in Panchayat against Ravan. People from distant parts had gathered to attend the Panchayat. It was resolved in the Panchayat that since a girl had been born to Salubai from Ravan, he should accept Salubai as his wife. He was ordered not to solemnize another marriage. The decision of Panchayat was quite good till his. But the Panchayat ruled that Ravan must dip his nose in Salubai's urine. Such decision of panchayat was quite foolish and unlawfull against democratic rules. Actully laws are formed for reformation and to maintain morality in the society. Thus the domination of Jatpanchayat was always crucial in the life of Uchalya community narrated in *The Branded* by Gaikwad

### References:

#### Primary Source

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