

## Deplorable Social Status of Women in Laxman Mane's *Upara*

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### Abstract

We the individuals dwell in a beautiful living organism where everyone has equal right to luxuriate everything present in nature. So far as the communities in every nation are concerned, all of them have adopted their ways of leading life. The people have their independent culture and they behave accordingly. Had the anomalous people of one country or community not been fighting and trying to have ascendancy over another, the whole world would have walked the earth harmoniously. But this battle has not remained limited up to the hegemony of either one nation over the other or a community over the other but it has crossed its limits and reached at the tormenting of the male over female in many countries and in numerous communities. The paper has limited its scope and focused on the harassment of tribal women with reference to the celebrated autobiography *Upara* by Laxman Mane.

**Keywords:** Hoodlums, caste oppressors, mental slave, honour and respect

### Introduction

To reach up to the roots of atrocity on the Indian women, we need to peep into the past Indian culture. The erudite Indians are quite sure of the rich culture of their country before the invasion of Aryans. So, in Indian context, one has to begin colonization since the seizure of Aryans over the India. And they became successful to rule the country through the religious text called 'Manusmriti' by Manu. It has very derogative comments about women when it says, "Women are evil by birth. 'Illicit conduct' has been bestowed upon them by the Nature and hence they should be kept under control" [1]. There are various statements likewise that reflect very common and negligible status of the women. Among the women Manusmriti has differentiated the status of the son as an heir of the property. If a Brahmin married Brahmin woman, the son from her gets the best portion of the of the estate, that is one third; half, one and half, and one ounce to the son of Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra respectively. It clearly suggests the Brahmin would not merely use physically non-Brahmin women but also give minimum share to their son in his property. The women from Ati-shudra Varna that is tribals and untouchables were made twice slave.

The women in *Upara* are from Kaikadi, Dombari, Patil, Vadar, etc. communities. Though they are related to the Hindu religion, their social status is two different poles. But, still, all of them are the victims of the society. Sharda is a young and attractive girl from a Dombari community. She would perform the best athletic activities and run the house who was living with her grandfather, Shankar. Shankar was telling the sad story of Sharda to Laxman Mane's father. She had performed that day on the rope, lifted a big stone with her hair. Late in the night when Shankar woke up, he didn't find her on the bed. The whole night he searched her out. At dawn, she was found near the stream. She was badly wounded. She could open her eyes and mouth but didn't speak or eat. She was raped and beaten severely by the high caste hoodlums of

the village. She could not survive more than two days. The grandfather became orphan due to the death of Sharda. A very simple question can be raised here, 'Had she belonged to a higher caste, would it have happened with her?' The answer is simply negative. Therefore, the untouchables and tribal women are made double slave in the society and in their own home.

Once, the writer's parents were caught red-handed while stealing the canes. A lady landowner was cursing them before the villagers and the chief of the village. For this simple reason, Anavari's (Laxman Mane's mother) sari was snatched away by four to five vandals. Rambhau, a young and educated man from Baudha community stepped forward and saved her. The village chief felt it his insult and rebuked him to be arrested. He (Rambhau) retorted:

"In place of Ani, if your sister was made to stand like this, how would you have taken it? You do have a mother and sister, don't you? ... You have to lodge a complaint, that's all. How will you feel if your women were dragged to the village chief" [2].

So far as the stealing canes, this crime is concerned, for some instance we should agree the couple should get punishment. But it should be according to the crime taken place. One more shocking seen can be observed the lady landowner supports the inhuman deed of snatching the sari of Anavari and demands the tribals and their hut should be put on fire. At least, she should have backed up the honour of female. In the social context, Kaikadi tribe is very backward. Their community members in the village remain a few compare to the upper caste individuals. Culturally, they have been dominated centuries together. In such circumstances, it becomes very easy for the dominant caste hooligans to treat the minority people inhumanly. There are persons like Rambhau in every society who fight against this wicked psychosis status of some high caste oppressors but they are

not supported widely. In the case of Anavari, the comments of Bhavalkar and Dhere are thought provoking.

“Woman of a Kaikadi tribe collects the canes to weave the baskets and other articles. To get the canes she has to stroll through the jungles and the fields. And if it is not available, she has to go to land owners’ fields. In case, she is caught red-handed, severe punishment or death is the only solution to her. For chastity is always taken away by the caste fellows. It is but false the man protects woman’s honour. Indian culture has its instances from Sita to Draupadi. A woman has to protect her virginity on her own. Only for one or two canes, she had been made naked. The husband becomes helpless before the bruisers and woman before the husband. Hence tribal woman is more dalitised than dalits”<sup>[3]</sup>.

A beauty is a curse for the poor woman especially of backward class and tribals’ women. For the ruffians from the established society know poor people have no protection, they defile such women without any moral fear. Their wicked plan can be executed at ease as if it is the right given to them. The wife of Martimama’s Paru is a cute woman. So, she takes care of her physique. She takes daily bath and keeps herself clean. She combs properly and it adds to her beauty. Martimama and writer’s mother don’t like her taking daily bath. Once Martimama noticed it and he rushed like a furious hawk and began beating her face with the sharp pieces of mirror. She was severely wounded. He would say, “When we live on the dunghill, we should live like dirt. We must not imitate the people who live in bungalows. We are street dwellers. We are open to the public gaze all the while. What if somebody casts an evil eye on you?”<sup>[4]</sup>. In a few days, Martimama’s prediction became true. Parumami was raped by two to four persons at night. Martimama left her. She lived for some days with the writer’s family and at last went mad. She went to her father and was demanding her husband should be brought before their Panchayat for the justice. At last, she died in her insane condition. There are many Paru who has been living and some of them have left the world due to the atrocity of upper caste social goondas. The tribal women deliberately live unclean and hide their beauty to protect the chastity. Psychologically, Martimama is also a victim of the upper caste culture who doesn’t want his wife to expose her beauty and makes her ugly by injuring with the pieces of the mirror. He compares a lady from a bungalow and of the dunghill. His intention is the woman in a bungalow is quite safe from the attacks of social troublemakers. She can protect her chastity though she undergoes through patriarchic dominations. Laxman Mane’s mother also remarks like Martimama, “A beggarly woman should always behave like a lady. As she must not behave like a nautch girl from the tamasha in makeup. Otherwise, she will meet the same fate as Paru”<sup>[5]</sup>.

Some of the cases are never heard even by the senior Panchayat members. In one of the cases Punnappa was saying that he had mortgaged his wife to Dharmea four years back who gave him two hundred fifty rupees. Now, he wished to return his wife. In due course of time, the man gave her a child. The husband doesn’t want a child and the man who purchased her wanted to return the woman along with the child. The Panchayat declared Punnappa had lost his claim on his wife. But he could claim the compensation from the man who would keep his wife. The man should hand over the compensation money to the Panchayat as per the convention. He had to return the money to woman’s maternal uncle. It was declared that the woman was not guilty. Being a helpless creature, she goes wherever her owner sends her. A man should keep his shoe on his foot only but Punnappa could not

do it. The simile ‘helpless creature’ and metaphor ‘shoe’ are used for a woman. It would be needless to explain the status of the woman in a tribal society. She has been dept mortgage like a thing. More than this female cannot be humiliated.

The writer discusses another innocent and beautiful girl Ratna from high caste family. Her marriage was settled with a bridegroom who was also equally from rich and respected family in the village. Groom expressed his wish to have a photograph with a bride before some hours of marriage. Barje, the uncle to a bride Ratna, rejected the proposal. That became the bone contention of their verbal and a severe physical fighting. As a result of it, Barje family returned without marriage. Both the groom and an uncle belong to male category, they didn’t even think for a second or two apropos of the life of an innocent girl who had nothing to do with their issues. Ratna, a beautiful rose flower on the Barge plant got shocked by the incident. She left her diet. By and by she lost her senses. She was hospitalized in Pune. But all the efforts of the doctors proved fruitless and her dead body reached to the village. Like the Panchayat’s decisions regarding the woman, patriarchic attitude of so-called high caste persons made Ratna their pray.

Whichever the class may be in India, woman is always dominated by it. Hence male dominated Indian society has just made a glorification of a woman but she has been kept very far from her basic rights such as honour and respect. In actuality, it is utilized in social life by the male instead of female. Therefore, Lord Buddha’s philosophy has opposed all these rubbish traditions and made human being free of religious strain. The Enlightened One has very fair and supportive ideology in relation to the birth and the existence of a girl. When Pasendi, the king of the Kosalas was informed by his messenger Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter, the king became sad and doleful. At this time, he was discussing some matters with Lord Buddha. The king told Buddha about the birth of a daughter. Buddha observed his face and replied,

“A woman child, O lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male. For, she may grow up wise and virtuous, her husband’s mother reverencing true wife, a daughter. The boy that she may bear may do great deeds and rule great realms, yea, such a son of a noble wife becomes his country’s guide.”<sup>[6]</sup>

The fact that woman from every class has been oppressed more or less cannot be denied. Hence to protect and maintain the scrupulousness and morals of particularly Indian women, it is a duty of one and all to change the biased sight to look at the woman. It is but essential to analyze honestly the religious scriptures that have made her mental slave and banned to stand with equal status of man. Whenever there is injustice to any woman, irrespective of caste and religion, all the people should support the victim and teach severe lesson to the oppressors. Otherwise, women like Sita and Draupadi from mega epic Ramayana and Mahabharata and Surekha and her mother from Bhotmange family, Khairlanju, dist. Bhandara (M. S.) would be violated perennially.

### Conclusion

The Indian social structure is deeply rooted in male dominance and superiority over women. In this paper I tried to look into the aspects of how oppressed women were treated in this novel *Upura*. They were twice marginalised in society i.e., caste and patriarchy, in such a context they were oppressed socially and at domestic levels. Some of the characters were based on real incidents which and those

characters faced brutalities, inhuman treatment meted out in the hands of dominant castes just because they are from low castes and tribes.

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