

Lapis Lazuli
An International Literary Journal



WWW.PINTERSOCIETY.COM
VOL.5 / NO.2/ AUTUMN 2015

Fandry: A Moving Saga of Dalit Consciousness

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Abstract:

Dalit literature has roots in Maharashtra. Daya Pawar's *Baluta* ushered in a wave of Dalit consciousness and many Dalit autobiographies followed suit. Noteworthy among these are Laxman Mane's *Upara* (translated into English as *An Outsider*), Laxman Gaikwad's *Uchalya* (*The Branded*), Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Kolhatyache Por* (*Against All Odds*), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (*The Outcaste*), Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (*Growing Up Untouchable in India*) and Narendra Jadhav's *Aamacha Baap aan Amhi* (*Outcaste: A Memoir*). Many female Dalit autobiographers like Shantabai Kamble., Kumud Pawde, Shantabai Dani, Baby Kamble, Vimal More and Urmila Pawar too outpoured their life experiences in their atmakathans. Dalit poetry, short stories, plays and novels too have been written in large numbers. The plight of Dalits has also been projected in many Marathi and Hindi movies. The 2013 released Marathi movie

Fandry deals with the development of personality of a young boy born in the Kaikadi community. Manjule's *Fandry* is based on the development of Dalit consciousness of the young Jambuvant. It has won many laurels at the National and International level.

Key words: *Fandry*, Manjule, Marathi Films, Caste, Autobiographical, Kaikadi, Symbols,

In my hand, had there not been a pen

It would have been a chisel, sitar, flute or paint brush,

I, somehow, would have scooped out,

This immense tumult in my mind... (Manjule, Loksatta, Free Translation)

Rabindranath Tagore's dream of Utopian, Republic, a free non fragmented India remains elusive even today. The man-made barriers of religion and caste have affected the quality of human life and this aspect has found expression in literature and movies as both mirror society. Many Hindi and Marathi movies have showcased the caste problem in India. Notable amongst these are *Mother India*, *Achhut Kanya* (1936), Bimal Roy's *Sujata* (1959), Praksh Jha's *Arakshan* and *Damul*, Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh*, Shyam Benegal, *Nishant*, *Ankur* and *Manthan* and Tani, *Jait re Jait* dealt with caste issues like discrimination, exploitation of Dalits and atrocities based on caste barriers.

Director Nagnath Manjule's *Fandry* (released in 2013) won many laurels at the national and international level. *Fandry* has a very strong autobiographical element and reminds one of life experiences narrated in many Marathi Dalit *Swakathans*. In an interview, Manjule confesses, "When I think about myself, by default I am thinking about my caste," he says. "I have my caste,

my village, my condition, my language, the people around me, the clothes they wear, and their traditions” (Manjule, Pigs-can-fly). These autobiographical roots have given a personal-political touch to the movie. All Dalit autobiographies are, as such, authentic socio-cultural-political documents.

The movie is set in the village Okalaner of Ahmednagar district. It is a typical village in Maharashtra with its caste hierarchy and imbalanced power equations. Kachru lives with his family of two daughters, one son, wife and old father. He belongs to the Kaikadi community and weaving baskets from cane is their hereditary occupation. The family lives in utter poverty in a hut on the outskirts of the village beyond the ruins of the fort. This place is used as a shit-yard (open air toilet) by the villagers. There is hardly anything worth describing in the hut apart from some old black utensils, a three stone hearth and torn clothes of the family members. All the members of the family, including the old grandfather, work hard to make both ends meet. This part of the movie possesses intertextuality with almost all Dalit autobiographies. The name of the father is Kacharu and his son is Jambuvant. They are addressed as Kacharya, Kaikadya, Jabya, Kalya and ‘Kaikadyacha Por’. Manjule says, “I had friends whose fathers had names like Dagdu and Kachru—they didn’t even have the chance to select good names for themselves,”(Manjule, Pigs-Can-Fly). The shortening of their names in such a humiliating manner stands for the loss of their human status, freedom and equality in the village. Old and young alike address him by his first name or by shortening his name, showing their lack of respect for him and their contemptuous attitude.

The movie is the coming-of-age story of Jabya and his calf love for an upper caste girl Shalu. It is a one sided love affair and Jabya tries to keep his work secret from her. He does not

want her to know that he too performs all these deprecating jobs. His father earns money by doing odd sundry jobs. He moves from person to person asking for work. His wife, daughters and Jabya too go out for work. The old grandfather weaves cane baskets which are sold in the market. The cane is stolen from the fields of other people. The main work of the father is to catch pigs in the family and to get rid of them. Jabya is fond of studies and does not want to miss school. His father forces him to go for work every day. Yet he does homework every day and before sleeping writes a letter addressed to Shalu. This is his only solace and succour in life. In one of his letters he says that the he may not be handsome, he may be poor and he belongs to a caste lower than hers, but he is in love with her. He is aware of his dark complexion. He applies a pinch of talcum powder and combs his hair neatly before going to school. He wants to dress up properly and dreams of buying new jeans or pants (Presige Symbol). The mannequin in the show room makes him more aware of his limitations. He is aware of his dark complexion and low caste. He wishes to have a long, straight nose like it and hence applies a clothes' pin to his nose. His mother motivates him to go for his digging work by saying that with the help of the money earned he can buy new clothes, a trouser or jeans pant. Due to poverty, all he ends getting is a new shirt in village *Jatra* (fair).

Once on his visit to town, Jabya sees a man selling birds. He inquires whether the man has a blackbird with a long forked tail in stock. The man replies in the negative and Jabya is disappointed. Right from the first shot in the movie, Jabya is shown chasing this blackbird. The entire surrounding is dry, bucolic, arid and rocky. Greenery is very rare but this blackbird is shown hopping from one skeleton tree to another and in the background is heard its sound. He has been told by Chankya that if he sprinkles the ashes of the burnt Blackbird on Shalu, she would reciprocate his love. Chankya knows of his crush on Shalu and keeps on teasing him

about the 'Queen' and if he has been able to get it. These dialogues are held while the characters are shown playing a game of Carrom and thus, a pun on the word adds to the effectiveness of the love story. Chankya's beautiful wife from Pune has eloped with her 'brother' and hence Chankya is a frustrated drunkard and runs a cycle shop and because of his failure in love, is sympathetic towards Jabya. Jabya is either chasing the bird or the lass. There is an incongruity in the bird shown on the screen and its sound. This bird call is that of the Red Wattled Lapwing (titawi), which is supposed to bring bad luck. This incongruity/ mismatch perhaps is symbolic of what Jabya longs for and what is in store for him. While he is near the Bird Shop selling Pepsi Cola, a mini truck crushes his bicycle under its rear wheels and what remains is a mangled bicycle that he carries back to his village. This mangled bicycle symbolizes his shattered dreams and aspirations. A person born in a lower class has no right/ freedom to dream of or long for anything. He is meant to obey and to serve upper caste society.

The name of the movie is metaphorical and acts as an objective correlative. The word *Fandry* is a Kaikadi word meaning a pig. The pig acts as the central metaphor in the movie and stands for the pig like treatment meted out to Kacharu's family and their animal like existence. Pigs live in mire, dirt and squalor. This family of Kacharu Mane too lives in absolute dirt, near a shit yard and in squalor. The family is trapped in the mire of casteism, untouchability, discrimination and exploitation. The last scene in the movie, pre-climax scene, shows the entire Mane family chasing the wild pig and attempting to capture it in the presence of the villagers (as passive onlookers watching a *tamasha*, making snide comments and mocking them. The upper caste Shalu is one of the faces in the crowd. The crowd keeps on addressing Jabya as 'Fandry'. The real significance of the word 'Fandry' is unfolded in one scene of the movie. Shalu and her

friend are in the school. A pig touches Shalu's friend. Shalu seeks permission from the teachers to go home. The touch of the pig defiles an upper caste person and the girl has to take a bath, change and wash her clothes, and then the sacred cow's urine (*Gomutra*) is sprinkled on her to purify her. Shalu asks the friend's mother to sprinkle *gomutra* on her too. How can such a girl step out of the vicious web of caste and love a low caste boy is obvious. The emotions of the low caste boy are not even worth a penny. Manjule confesses that he was in love with an upper-caste girl in school, while his late father broke stones, worked on construction sites and reared pigs. "I liked an upper-caste girl too—she was in the eighth and I was in the fifth—but I got slapped once and the love story ended there,... ((Manjule, Pigs-Can-Fly)." This 35-year-old film-maker appears in the movie as a bicycle shop owner who encourages Jabya to follow his heart. Manjule narrates another incident. This is the genesis of his movie. He (Manjule) had accidentally touched a girl in the sports ground once and she called him a *Fandry*. He was so hurt by that word that he could not go to school for fifteen days. It was this hurt, pain, irritation and awareness which made him produce *Fandry*. Thus, *Fandry* is an authentic document of Dalit protest and consciousness (Manjule, Loksatta). Dalit consciousness plays a prominent role in Dalit literature. Sharankumar Limbale has said,

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with the struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedakrite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature, it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness (Limbale, 32).

A piglet falls into a puddle in front of Shalu's home. Patil. Her father, asks Jabya to remove it and get rid of it. Jabya refuses to do such a demeaning task. His refusal is an indication of the development of his awareness and hence Dalit consciousness. There are two definite aspects of Dalit consciousness. One is that of acceptance and the second is that of rejection. It is the acceptance of humans and human/e values in life, the acceptance of values advocated by Dr. Ambedkar. Patil calls his father and tells him that his son has become rude. His father, Kacharu, removes the piglet and cleans the puddle. He scolds Jabya for being rude and says that they have to live in the same village. His father is shown cleaning the meat of the piglet, hinting at its inclusion in their diet. The impact of this incident is so much that Jabya dreams of a piglet in a well and how he has to rescue it. He gets up sweating up profusely.

Kacharya's daughter's wedding is fixed. A dowry of Rs. 50,000 is to be paid. The guests speak in Kaikadi language. Kacharu says that his son is ashamed of that language. The entire family starts working hard to earn money for it. The family is in such poor state that Kacharu begs for cowdung to smear the walls and blue colour is mixed in it to colour the house. Entire family works manually for wedding preparations. Whether it is wedding in the family or the occasion of village fair, Mane family cannot rest. They have to follow orders of the uppercaste people. In the village *Jatra*, Jabya wants to impress Shalu and hence starts dancing. He is being pushed, elbowed and jostled by the Patil and his son. Later on, his father forces him to carry a petromax on head in the same *jatra*. Jabya's impotent fury is reflected in his tears. A wild pig enters into the procession of the god and dashes against the *palkhi* of the god. The Patil agrees to give money to Kacharu for his daughter's wedding provided the family kills the wild pig. The family members set out in the pursuit of the pig. All villagers mock the family and address

Kacharu as Seth. They call names to his daughters as well. The bride to be is also a part of this wild chase and sweats it out with other members of the family. Jabya does not want to be involved in this humiliating task. He tries to hide but his father forces him to be involved, In a very moving scene, the pig is cornered on all sides and as they are about to attack it, Jan Gana Mana, the National Anthem, begins in the school. Jabya stands in attention and does not move. His father too has no choice but to follow suit. The members respect the national anthem and consider themselves as its proud citizens. What kind of treatment is meted out to these lesser citizens is obvious. In Laxman Mane's Upara and Laxman Gaikwad's Uchalya, there is a reference to the Pledge given in the school text books: "India is my country. All Indians are my brothers and sisters". The hollowness of this Pledge is apparent in the manner in which the villagers, as onlookers and bystanders, mock the family. All school kids too throng the place after the school is over and Jabya does not wish to be seen by Shalu and so hides. His father sees him hiding and beats him black and blue in the presence of all villagers, school mates and Shalu. As indignant, furious Jabya pelts stones at the pig and hooks him, Shalu and her friends are shown eating the same Pepsi Cola which Jabya and Pirya used to sell in town. The pig is caught and killed. As the pig is being carried away, the villagers abuse and humiliate Jabya and his sisters. Jabya is unable to accept it and hurls a stone at the Patil's son. The anger, hurt, humiliations, grief and the rejection of such an unjust system assumes the form of an overt protest and results in pelting of stones and abusive language. There is no consolation and nothing to hold Jabya back. The movie ends with a huge stone being hurled and the screen darkens to connote its various symbolic manifestations. The pictures of Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Ambedkar, Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Fule on the school wall act as mute

observers and witnesses and speak beyond volumes about this caste hierarchy, caste conflict, injustice, exploitation, humiliation and social realism.

Thus, the pig '*Fandry*' and the black sparrow are two animal symbols employed in the movie. Dalit texts usually make use of animal imagery. These images stand for qualities like meekness, servility, helplessness, exploitation and humiliation, etc. According to anthropology, each animal is associated with a characteristic in human mind. The pig as such is an ugly and dirty animal. Its look is ugly. Given a choice, everyone wants to stay away from it. The Black bird or sparrow stands for unachievable dreams and desires. In addition, cattle are shown. In the theme song of *Fandry*, there is a reference to the sting of the scorpion which is like the sting of love.

Jabya's love for studies is seen in finding out the homework from friends like Pirya or from the upper caste Vedant Kulkarni. Vedant tells him the home work from a distance and Jabya cannot even enter the courtyard due to his low caste. His father scolds him for burning the midnight oil (rockel). On the compound wall of the school building are pictures of Mahatma Fule, Dr. Ambedkar, Savitribai Fule, etc. The teacher too teaches an Abhang of Chokhamela. It talks about how the merits are more important than the caste. While the teacher is explaining various metaphors in this Abhang, Jabya's mother comes to meet him in the school. All boys make fun of her work and laugh at her. Jabya is angry with her and asks her not to visit the school henceforth or otherwise he would discontinue his studies.. The irony and hollowness of the teacher's preaching is obvious and depicted well. His father too is ridiculed by people sitting in the barber's shop. Kacharya and his wife are conditioned to such humiliations but Jabya is unable to accept it.

One scene in the movie sheds light on the rampant discrimination in the village. Jabya, as usual, is chasing a sparrow. He goes close to a sparrow to see its colour-whether it was black or white. An old lady passing by that side scolds him and tells him that the sparrow is Brahmin and if it is touched, others would prick it with beaks.

In the movie, Jabya is a symbol of Generation Next in India who looks forward to change and longs for an egalitarian, equalitarian, free and just India. The Patil, his son and other upper caste people villagers symbolize casteist spirit, hierarchy, continuity of traditions, strong belief in caste hierarchy. Rigid mindsets and power equations form the epicenter of the text. The way out is through education and Jabya has understood the importance of education and vertical mobility. It is a document of social commitment-an act of doing something for the less fortunate, marginalized and neglected sections of the society. This is the main aim of Dalit literature. Shedding more light on the concept Waghmare says, “I honestly feel that the main aim of writing of literature is creation of consciousness and conscientization. It is my opinion that it could be a very important and precious achievement of literature” (Waghmare, 80).

Fandry brings to fore agonies of all those who have led a silent, suppressed, oppressed, exploited life for years together at the lowest rung of the society. ‘Dalit consciousness’ is the thought of transforming the lives of the Dalits. It is an optimistic attitude. It is the ability to note subtly the pain and agony in Dalit life. It is at the same time a social commitment. “Dalit consciousness is full of revolt, optimistic, revolutionary, self-motivated, new, human-centered...” (Manohar, 1978, 8-9).

While defining Dalit consciousness, Narhar Kurundkar says, “A new vision is being created in literature with a point of view that every individual should get protection for freedom, dignity and moral values. This is what I consider Dalit consciousness to be” (Kurundkar, 53).

The jury of the Federation says that the film was chosen for “a stark and authentic portrayal of deep rooted prejudices and the inhuman oppression of the marginalized in caste dominated rural India.” At a function organized to give away the award, Deputy Artistic Director of the festival, N. Vidyashankar said that the film emphasizes the point that equality is a “non-negotiable value” (The Hindu). Thus, Nagnath Manjule’s *Fandry* is an authentic document of Dalit consciousness, protest and revolt. It advocates the acceptance of human and equalitarian status and just society and rejects caste hierarchy and prevalent power equations in the society. It is the quest of identity of Jabya through education and awareness. Erikson says that experiences in between eight to eighteen play an important role in identity formation and this is reflected well in the movie. It can also be said to be a Bildungsroman romance which is beyond the reach of the poor Dalit Jabya. This autobiographical movie has a similarity of motifs with all Dalit autobiographies and texts-poverty, caste hierarchy, conflict, discrimination, humiliation, exploitation, hunger and starvation, miserable life of women, drunkard husbands, power equation, petty odd jobs, superstitions, and denial of equal, human status.

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