

The Anatomy of Academic Decay: Caste Politics and Ethical Degeneration in Devender's story "Nalanda Par Giddah"

Mr. Manjeet Singh

Assistant Professor, English, Govt. College Kosli

Abstract:

This research paper presents a critical anatomy of academic decay in Devender's short story "Nalanda Par Giddah". Set in the fictional Banaras Hindu University, the short story deconstructs the Indian university as a space where merit is systematically inverted. The paper addresses the pertinent questions: How does Devender portray caste as a pivotal and transactional currency that determines recruitment, promotion, and survival in contemporary Indian universities? In what ways does the story depict the inversion of merit? How does the short story expose the moral laxity of academics? This study follows qualitative, analytical and interpretive research design. It is based on close textual analysis of the short story. The study argues that Devender exposes not isolated corruption but as institutionalised system of caste brokerage, recruitment fraud, publication factory and moral laxity. It exposes how merit is systematically inverted where an undesiring and unqualified candidate becomes eligible over a qualified candidate due to kinship with power. The study reveals that the vultures of Nalanda are not outsiders but professors themselves who have replaced library with paan shop, and marksheets tied to stomach become the symbol of educated unemployment.

Keywords: Academic corruption, University election, caste as currency, and publication racket.

Introduction:

Devender's "Nalanda Par Giddah" uses the metaphor of vultures hovering over Nalanda- once the centre of learning- to depict the contemporary Indian university as a site of decay. This paper anatomizes that decay through three interlinked layers: caste as dominant factor in university elections (politics), corruption as institutionalised practice in recruitment and publishing, and ethical degeneration as the normalization of sexual exploitation. Pierre Bourdieu argues that "power works through culture" (242). Caste functions as symbolic power in Indian universities. The story reveals the caste politics in the University of Banaras. Devender shows how the caste has become the supreme driving force for the university teachers, determining all their actions. Acharya Chudamani, the head of the Hindi Department of Banaras University is portrayed as a big fish in academia. Devender creates him as the vulture king. He has unwavering faith in Manu Maharaj's varna division. He is the godfather of the big organization RSS. All the leaders of Student Council gather in his court to give him information about every affair of university. Acharya Chudamani had great influence over the Hindi Departments from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Assam to Gujarat with his aura. Not only the department heads and professors but even new lecturers and peons were appointed as per his wish. Subodh Misir is a worthy disciple of Acharya

Chudamani. He is a promising son of a poor farmer. In order to support his guru, he counters the Marxist ideology. Subodh gives new vitality to the RSS. Subodh is intelligent and restrained person. He is purely rural in dress and lifestyle. He spent most of his time in library. In the evening, he would regularly go to the court of Gurudev Chudamani to touch his feet. Gurudev's only son Shravan Kumar is doing M.A final in Hindi. He is a completely stupid person. Devender remarks about the academic atmosphere of the university in satirical vein:

It was the renaissance period of Banaras University. The sons and daughters, brother-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law from new lecturers, senior readers and professors to clerk Sharmaji and peon Ramdin were doing M.A. and Ph.D. The night before the examinations, question papers would be distributed at paan shops. Those who did not understand the sequence of vowels and consonants were breaking all previous records and passing with first class in no time. (98)

Devender's renaissance is in fact anti-renaissance. The paan shop replaces the library; the family replaces the merit. Acharya's son Shravan Kumar scores 80 percent marks breaking the records of all the previous Acharyas' sons. In an emergency meeting of Teachers union, Janardhan Parsad suggests that they must raise this issue and some take action against Chudamani. The boy has failed in intermediate three years. Chudamani has occupied his chair for twelve years only for his son. M.P. Tripathiji raises the issue of Sharvan Kumar's 80 percent marks in M.A. People are demanding an inquiry into this matter. The university is being disgraced in the entire country. Chudamani replies that Dean Sinha ji is a Bhumihaar and he is inciting the students for protest because half of the protesters are Bhumihaar and the other half are Brahmins and two-four are communists. At this, Dean accuses Chudamani of "raising the issue of casteism" (Devender 114) in the university. V.C accuses Chudamani of doing caste politics and having his hand in the attack on teachers. Chudamani says that the V.C may set up an inquiry commission but he should not be under pressure of Brahmin and Bhumihaar lobby. Moreover, no Rajput has ever been appointed the V.C. of Banaras University till date. Chudamani remarks that "he considers casteism no less dangerous than cancer for the country" (115). Devender illustrates that everyone is anti-casteist in speech but hardcore casteist in ideology. This is the hypocrisy of vultures of Nalanda University.

Inversion of Merit: Devender highlights the pitiable condition of educated unemployed youth. The story shows how the vulture finally eats the disciple. In spite of having all the degrees and qualification, they roam around jobless. They feel frustrated. Chudamani's worthy disciple Subodh Simir has completed his Ph.D. but still he is wandering from door to door and is unable to get a job. Acharya is being appointed as expert in some appointment or the other. Every time he resolves to appoint his favorite disciple Subodh but "his sense of human responsibility and sense of justice is misguided every time by a recommendation letter from a minister, M.L.A., former head of the department or a contemporary professor" (Devender 118). Subodh's daughter is growing up in the village. After every harvest, the debts related to water, electricity and tax on farming get increased. He has to sell three acres of his land one after the another. Finally, an elder of the village asks, "Subodh, how long will you keep looking for job? The fields you are selling are not your earnings" (Devender 119). At last, Subodh says goodbye to his guru Chudamani. He spits in the middle of the city and leaves. After having lived in the village for five years, Subodh Misir remembers only the price of urea, electricity bills, wheat, paddy and sugarcane. He has forgotten the Hindi poetry, prosody, rasa, rhyme, thought and the critical principles of post-modernism and deconstructionism. He declares modernity, Marxism and existentialism irrelevant. He remarks, "Ideas, Ideals and morality are

meaningless. This is the beautiful model of postmodernity” (Devender 120). He feels cheated by ideas, ideals and morality.

Subodh receives an interview letter for the post of lecturer from Punjab university. He also gets a postcard from Acharya Chudamani inviting Subodh for journey to Punjab. Subodh thinks that Guruji must be an expert in the interview. He goes to his Guruji and shows his interview letter to him. In the interview board, one expert is an extreme leftist from Delhi and the other is a leftist from Rajasthan. Third is Acharya Chudamani himself whose son is yet to become a professor in Banaras university. Subodh’s interview goes wrong not because of lack of preparation but because “Whether the interview is good or bad ultimately and solely depends on the expert” (Devender 123). The daughter-in-law of Registrar has been appointed. Everything was already decided and fixed. This shows that interview is a theatre. Chudamani explains to Subodh:

People are turning leftist just for the sake of saying. But all the professors have only one caste and one ideology. Who can make them examiner and pay the plane fare? That is all! I have seen the world at large. The appointment of Professor is going to be made in Banaras University. He may come as an expert. So, I remained silent. Somehow, Sharavan Kumar would become a professor. (124).

While returning back, Chudamani tells Subodh about a temple of goddess where every wish made with true and pure heart is fulfilled. Subodh thinks that his guru ji is going to pray for his appointment. Subodh stands before the goddess and prays to her: “Mother, I want a job! I can teach in any class from high school, intermediate to B.A., M.A. I want a teaching job, mother! ...Take me out of the dark hell of the village and send me wherever you want. I don’t want to stay there. The whole village laughs at my education” (Devender 125). When Acharya Chudamani appears before the idol of goddess, Subodh thinks he will plead for his appointment. Chudamani remains calm for sometimes but then he bursts into crying, “Mother, please make my son a professor. Yes mother, professor! The entire Hindi world is burdened with my gratitude. But I no longer trust anyone. Knowing my plight, have mercy on me” (Devender 126). Hearing such words from his Guruji, Subodh loses all faith in him and decides to move leaving Chudamani alone in the darkness. It seems to be the death of *guru-shishya Parampara*. Similarly, there is another helpless youth portrayed in the story. He is depicted tightly holding his marksheets and character certificate tied to his stomach. He is miserable and frustrated because after getting all the degrees and certificates, he is roaming aimlessly. He has lost his way of life in frustration and failure. Devender shows that it is not one Subodh but the whole generation that is unemployed and frustrated despite having requisite credentials.

Acharya Chudamani is appointed the Vice chancellor of the university after the two months of his retirement. His only son Shraavan Kumar “who cannot write a single correct sentence in Hindi” is made a reader in Marudhar University after five years. The Rajput lobby welcome him in the university. This is the inversion of merit. Sinha ji was the dean at the time of his appointment. The Bhumihar lobby saw their relationship with Chudamani more important than their caste-based animosity. Right after one month of this appointment, Chudamani makes Dean Sinha’s daughter-in-law a lecturer in English in his university. Devender proves that university elections and V.C. appointments are not about ideology but about caste brokerage as every lobby- Brahmin, Bhumihar, and Rajput uses the language of anti-casteism to hide its own caste capital. Sunil Vikram Singh in his story “Takshashila Ke Loh Kapaat” also highlights the issue of casteism in recruitment in Indian universities. The university does not eliminate caste, it institutionalizes it.

Caste in University Elections: Devender portrays a vivid picture of the Teachers' elections in the university and the role of caste equations. Election is portrayed as caste war. Brahmins, Bhumihar, Rajputs and Kurmi all are trying to win the election. The author comments that casteism "has become the basic mantra in the settlement of the scholars who celebrate the festivity of civilization and modernity. All around Brahmins are abusing Rajputs, Rajputs are abusing Kayasthas and Bhumihar, and Bhumihars Kurmis" (Devender 100). Acharya Chudamani is an important pillar of the Rajput lobby. By ending the Brahmin dominance of an institution (RSS) which instilled the spirit of Indian culture and nationalism, he brought it under his control. There is a complete chaos and confusion in the meeting of Teachers' union. A fat Brahmin professor of commerce picks up a Kurmi professor of Physics and throws him on the stage. And then there is witnessed a continuous flow of kicks and punches. A policemen reprimands, "What will you people teach to your boys?" (Devender 99).

The Rajput lobby is paralyzed by the victory of the Brahmin candidates in the three seats of the President, Vice-President and the Mahamantri. Chudamani is very upset and downhearted due to the results of election. In the midnight when Brahmin people are returning from Mahantji's, a group of Rajput goons of Gundavahini attack them with hockey sticks and iron rods. Special care is taken that no Bhumihar should be beaten along with the Brahmins otherwise this equation will become permanent and cause far-reaching damage. After some time, police and PAC start searching for the goons in the hostel. The boys who are unaware of the whole incident do not understand anything. The boys start chanting zindabad- murdabad. Lathi charge starts. The city kotwal is a Brahmin. C.J.M is also a Brahmin. And the person "who should have been a street goon or a police inspector is unfortunately the professor and Chief Proctor" (Devender 100) and he is also a Brahmin. The Vice-Chancellor starts an investigation by a retired high court judge into the matter of killing of Brahmin professors after the teachers' union election. When the inquiry committee is announced, Chudamani reacts, "Chancellor is a Brahmin. Retired judge of the high court is a Brahmin. What is the point of conducting inquiry into this? The decision will be one sided" (Devender 101).

The whole equation changes in the Student Union Election to be held after a month. Leftist candidate Vijayanand Shahi is emerging as a strong contender for Marxist-Leninist ideology. Chudamani thinks that "ideologies are changeable and are determined by age and circumstances" but "the basic truth is caste" (Devender 101). The Rajput and Bhumihar lobby of RSS gives support to Vijayanand Shahi for the post of president against Shivanand Ojha of Vidyarthi Parishad. The Left wing of Leftist registers a spectacular victory. The Dalit representation finds no space in the election. Devender comments, "The Harijan candidate of the same panel, after getting only eighty-five votes, was walking alone on the deserted and lifeless road, shouting 'Long live revolution'" (101).

Samar Singh who is the former president of university students' union and now provincial coordinator of RSS comes to Chudamani along with a boy named Pratap Singh. Samar Singh expresses his concern that they have allowed the communist and that too Naxalite to win the students union election. But Chudamani remarks that he had no other option and could not let the Brahmins win. The ideologies will survive only if they survive. Sumer Singh tells him that Pratap Singh is to be registered for Ph.D. He is applying for scholarship for research in the Ayurveda department and he will get the scholarship if Chudamani recommends. Chudamani asks whether he is a Kurmi. When he informs his caste as Khanti Baliya, he signs his application form. The writer comments that casteism has assumed the greatest importance in the lives of professors. In this context, Pathania and Tierney assert, "The educational institution plays a role in highlighting caste identity. There is no mechanism to cope with such humiliation and prejudice.... Caste

is seen as a part of culture and not a structural shortcoming... Even as higher education becomes more accessible, equity and equality remain elusive” (10-11).

Corruption in Interview: Devender exposes the corruption in recruitment in higher education. He uncovers nepotism as main factor in university recruitment of teachers. Chudamani's son is doing M.A. The Vice-Chancellor is making all efforts to conduct the stalled interviews of the university for the last ten years. His son Sharvan Kumar will not get the chance of appointment if the interview happens at this time. Then there will be no interview for the next ten years. He gets heart attack due to the concern of his son. Chudamani is admitted in the hospital. It is guessed that number two reader Acharya Bhavesh Pandey will sit in the interview board for Reader in the capacity of chairman. Most of the lecturers of the department start gathering around Bhavesh Pandey and talk about his mufflers, caps and good health. A lecturer who is a candidate for Reader says, “Gurudev! I have not forgotten the Explanation of Kamayani till now which you taught me in M.A.” (Devender 103). Pandey ji smiles and says, “Hey brother! I have been teaching Uddhav Shatak for twenty years” (Devender 103). The interview of Hindi Department is echoing in the air. Subodh has great expectations from Chudamani who considers him as his adopted son. The leftist Rai Saheb is a relative of the Dean Sinha and is confident from there. But Chudamani can not be trusted as caste is the first condition for him. He informs Subodh that in this interview, Rai Saheb is a candidate for the post of reader and his nephew is a candidate for lecturer.

The author depicts how caste plays pivotal role in interviews in contemporary academic world. Caste is represented as currency in academia. A Kabirpanthi Acharya Mahadev Muni advises Ramkarna that since Dean Sinha belongs to his community so he should seek his help in winning the favors of expert otherwise Chudamani will not let him survive in the interview. Lecturer Jain Saheb tells Subodh that this time too there is no hope for him in the interview. Looking at the Hindi department with empty eyes, he sighs, **“What a time has come? There are no professors left in the university. There are only Thakurs, Bhumihars, Brahmins and Lalas everywhere”** (Devender 107).

Corruption in Publications: The writer exposes the poor quality of publications and degeneration of research in academia. A publishing industry has emerged in contemporary times. Upadhyay ji informs Subodh that he is getting his book published by selling the Mangal Sutra of his daughter-in-law for five thousand rupees. The publishers are looting. He has to give all the money for paper and printing. Devender satirically comments on the publishing work of Hindi Department:

In the period of twenty years of peace, only three books were published from this department. This was the information of the publication of forty-fifth book since the interview was announced. Janardhan Prasad sold many of his shares in a hurry! He encashed the amount of N.S.C. He is a candidate for the post of professor. It is heard that there is a huge hall in his house where his students usually keep checking the copies received from other universities. Nowadays five students are preparing books day and night sitting there. Books on Indian Poetics, Role of Contemporary Literature, Artistic Contribution of Ritikaal, etc. are being prepared by tearing and plucking the pages from library books. (106)

This shows that publication is no longer a proof of research but proof of corruption. Devender shows that the journey is from Mangal Sutra to share market. University library meant to produce knowledge becomes a source of pages to be torn and plucked, promoting plagiarism.

Research Scholar as Bonded Labour: Devender demystifies the sacred *Guru-Shishya Parampara*. He highlights the exploitation of the research students of Banaras University who are doing research in various

branches of science and humanities. They are walking silently with luggage on their heads. They are the research students of the university. One of the students is carrying a sack full of old jaggery and bran for Gurudev's buffalo which has given birth to a calf recently. Another student is taking pumpkin and bottle guard for his guru, after having bought it from Pahadia Satti where vegetables are cheap and fresh. A third student is carrying cement for his guru's house which is being built. This shows that research scholar in Indian university is not a scholar, he is a bonded laborer. Tabassum, Nihan in her story "Sard Talkhiyan" also depicts the exploitation of Ph.D. scholars by their supervisors. In this regard, John Kennedy contends that Ph.D. "is a crucible for new knowledge, a space where bold questions thrive, and intellectual integrity is sacrosanct" but for the vast majority of researchers, "it is a journey of endurance, not enlightenment" ("From Dreams").

Moral Laxity in Academia: Devender depicts the moral laxity among academics through the portrayal of Shiv pal Mishra. When Subodh Misir is standing at a paan shop, they hear some noise and sound of 'catch! Catch! There is a crowd of professors and students in front of the Hindi department. Gurudev Shiv Pal Mishra is seen running away from the crowd. He is being chased by the police. Gurudev does not have even a shoe on his feet. The buttons of his coat are plucked. He manages to cross the huge gate of university with a long jump and runs away. The policeman exclaims! "The bastard's puppy has run away" (Devender 108). When the curious crowd asks the inspector, "Has he done something wrong to any girl?", the inspector replies, "Lecturers often keep doing such things" (Devender 108). Shiv Pal Mishra used to cheat at Kanpur station. He got hold of someone's marksheets and degrees. He has been doing his job for seventeen years on the basis of these documents. The police inspector exclaims, "This is too much, brother. Is it a university or a Zhandukhana?... What kind of people are studying here?" (Devender 108). Someone from the crowd expresses his curiosity that what will happen to the almost fifty scholars who have done their research under him. Many of them are doing job in other universities. Devender also depicts the incident of gang rape of a girl student in the university. She came from Gujrat to visit Banaras with her lover. Five boys locked her in a hostel room. "She was kept thirsty and hungry for three days and was continuously raped by five boys" (Devender 17). Hence, Devender's moral laxity is not an individual lapse but institutionalised chain fraud. When there are no professors left, there is no morality left either.

Conclusion: The critical analysis of the story "Nalanda Par Giddah" reveals that contemporary university has inverted merit and institutionalised caste as the primary currency of survival. Ideologies become changeable costumes while caste remains the basic truth that decides victory or defeat. Devender shows that recruitment corruption is systematic, where interviews are stalled, flattery replaces scholarship and posts are bartered among lobbies. Publishing and research have collapsed into a photocopy factory where quantity replaces knowledge. Moral laxity among academics turns the university campus into a *Zhandukhana*. The vultures are not external but internal lobbies that feed on university itself.

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