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Social Exclusion and Revolt in Short Stories of Baburao Bagul and Bama

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Abstract: For centuries it is believed that caste is as pure as religion. Purity of the caste is based on religion. But in the context of Dalits this ideology seems fake and bogus. Dalits are considered Hindus but they treated as impure and untouchable. In the past they were not allowed to enter Hindus' temples. In 21st century their situation is not much better. In some states of India even Dalits are not allowed to enter Hindus' temples. History is replete with examples of caste-discrimination. For example killing of Shambook by Lord Rama and taking thumb of Eklavya by Guru Dronacharya were the greatest examples of social exclusion and caste discrimination. Dr B R Ambedkar 'the messiah of Dalits' gave certain rights to Dalits in Constitution. Right to education has proved to be 'milk of tigress. Many Dalit writers like Bama, Baby Kamble, P. Sivakami, Sharankumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki and many more through their writings have documented the pain, sufferings, humiliation, exploitation, anger, assertion, resistance and revolt of Dalits. This paper explores the passive and active revolt of Dalits against upper castes' exploitation and discrimination.

Keywords: Dalit, Caste, exploitation, assertion, revolt.

This article is explored through the perspective of Dalit Studies as proposed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Sharankumar Limbale and Bama. The objective of Dalit studies is to understand and examine the situations and conditions of Dalits and women in an upper caste society. In upper caste society Dalits have been the victims of caste-discrimination. The writings of Dalits writers have given voice to voiceless Dalits. The Texts *Harum-scarum Saar and Other Stories* (Kisumbukkaran 2006) and *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (*When I Hid My Caste* 2018) are primary data. Relevant theme based academic research articles, books, critical studies and essays on caste and assertion, webliography and Dalit literature are studied as supporting data for this article.

Caste: A Deciding Factor of One's Purity

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the highly qualified Dalit because of his caste, being a Mahar faced humiliation and caste-discrimination. From the times immemorial all over the world the poor and destitute were always



exploited by the rich and the upper castes. Negroes were purchased by Americans in an open market as slaves like animals. They were ill-treated and forced to work incessantly and excessively. Negroes have been traumatized due to their race. Negroes are not untouchables like Dalits. But Dalits in India belong to the same religion same country, they have been tortured and exploited and treated as untouchables. They are still the victim of Hindu rigid caste system. Regarding this G. N. Devy in the Introduction of *The Outcaste* has pointed out: "...caste is a social marker has probably been the most unique feature of Indian society. " (Devy xiv) In this context Limbale observes: "How does a person born with his caste? How does he become untouchable as soon as he is born? How can he be a criminal by birth? From his feet Lord Brahma gave birth to a vast low community. Since then this community has been living as untouchables..." (Limbale 82) Dalits after conversion to Christianity and Buddhism remain Dalits. Their *dalitness* still exists. Sharankumar Limbale in his book titled *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* has very rightly remarked about caste: "...the caste of a Hindu Indian determines everything about his life – dress, marriage and even food." (Limbale 28)

Baburao Bagul and Bama: An Introduction

Bama's collection of short stories titled "*Harum-scarum saar and other stories*" was written in Tamil and later translated into English under the title "*Kisumbukkaran*" in the year 2006. The collection contains ten stories. Out of ten, five stories portray issues related to gender identity. Bama in these stories has depicted powerful men and women who exhibit resilience, valour and determination to fight against the problems of life. Dalits adopt different strategies of resistance and rebellion to defy upper caste domination as well as against the cruelties of their own men.

Baburao Bagul's short story collection titled *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* was written in Marathi in 1963 translated into English under the title *When I Hid My Caste* by Jerry Pinto in 2018. This collection also contains ten stories. In these stories Baburao Bagul has 'exposed the pain, horror and rage of Dalit experience. The unnamed young protagonist of the title story risks his life and job, and conceals his caste from his fellow workers in the hope of bringing about social change. Damu, the village Mahar, demands the right to perform a religious masque---a preserve of the upper castes---thus disrupting the village order. Jaichand Rathod revolts against his parents' wishes and refuses to take up the task of manual scavenging.'"(Bagul n.p.)



Another story titled 'Pesuk' registers the inhuman pain Savitri has suffered at the hands of her husband."(Bagul ix)

Exploitation, Discrimination, Anger and Revolt

Both the Dalit writers Baburao Bagul and Bama through their stories have recorded the lived experiences of caste-discrimination and revolt. Bama in story titled "Freedom" has documented that how two Dalits children named Arayi and Subramani were assaulted and exploited by their cruel landlady Amma. She was very cruel to all the servants of the house. Servants were not allowed to talk to one another. Subramani was twelve years old and Arayi had been working there since her childhood. The landlady always found fault with Arayi and Subramani. Sometimes Subramani was beaten by Amma for a slight mistake. One day both Amma and Ayya went to meet the doctor and returned in the evening. This was the freedom day for both Arayi and Subramani. Subramani expressed his anger by urinating on the plant whose leaves Amma used for cooking. The writer remarks: "Subramani unbuttoned his shorts and peed on the curry-leaf plant. While peeing he said, patti, Amma plucks leaves from this plant for cooking. Let her do that now!"....She makes me suffer so much, let her cook with my pee and eat."(Bama 85) This shows the passive revolt of Subramani.

There is another example of Subramani's freedom and passive revolt by 'kicking the water cistern' and 'sending the water splashing in all directions'."(Bama 86) In one of her another story titled "An Old Man and Buffalo" Bama expressed active revolt of Malandi Thatha. Malandi told Kadasami an incident of the past when his father grazed the cattle. He said whenever any upper caste abused his father; he would ride on the buffalo of that upper caste. Out of rage Malandi named one of the cows as Kovaalan, after the name of an upper caste landlord. Malandi remarks: "When my father grazed the village cattle the landlord's cattle would also be there, le? So, whoever had abused my father or me, I would ride only that fellow's cattle. There used to be a landlord named Kovaalan then, I named his cow Kovaalan and rode only that cow! Elay, Kovaala, go east, da! Come here, da! Go there, da!" (Bama 102) Malandi's father didn't say a word when an upper caste man humiliated and exploited him, but Malandi didn't tolerate all this. He said that 'I will even shit on the landlord's cattle.'" (Bama 103) When the upper castes didn't allow Dalits to enter their houses, Malandi threw cow dung at their doors in anger: "...for some reason, I had to go with my father to the landlord's houses. They wouldn't let us enter. Do you know what I did? I threw cow-dung at their doors!"(Bama 103) He again



told that when once the cattle of Komaravel Naiker ran away, he beat his father. Seeing all this, his anger knew no bounds. What he did. He grabbed his father's grazing stick and let the cow have it: "You know that Komaravel Naiker? He beat up my father once. Beat him, saying the cattle didn't return home. But his cow had wandered away –somewhere and returned much later. Anger straight to my head. You know what I did? I grabbed my father's grazing-stick and just let that cow have it."(Bama 103)

Baburao Bagul's debut collection of short stories titled *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Holi (When I Hid My Caste)* was hailed as "the epic of Dalits." Shanta Ghokhle in the Introduction of the book has pointed out: "Bagul's stories enforce . . . foundation of revolt, pain and dissent with verbs that act like a physical force and qualifiers that carry violence."(Ghokhle ix) Further about Dalit literature he remarks: "The three imperatives that drove Dalit literature were vidroha (revolt), vedana (pain) and nakar (Dissent)."(Ghokhle ix) In all the story of this collection, Baburao Bagul through the lives of the margins—rebellious youth, sex workers, street vendors, slum dwellers and gangsters has painted a collage of pain, horror and rage of Dalit lived experiences. The writer has documented the exploitation, caste-discrimination, revolt and resistance of Dalit in all his stories.

As a consequence of centuries-based suppression and exploitation Dalits treated themselves inferior and they thought that it was their dharma (moral duty) to serve the upper castes. The present story "Revolt" was about a Dalit family where father and mother did the menial job but their son refused to do the caste-enforced work and revolted against subhuman treatment. Jaichand's father Prabhu was a Bhangi and did the menial job but now he was on his death bed and unable to do the work. He wanted that his son Jaichand took the job of Bhangi. Jaichand, a student of matric refused to take the job and revolted against it. His father asked him to leave his studies and took this job. Listening to these words Jaichand remarks: "In the school and in the settlement, he had been able to defeat the great and good in debate and even now when his father was on his death bed, he was intent to demolishing the old man's decision to make his son a Bhangi."(Bagul 90) Not only his father Prabhu but also his (Jaichand) wife Shanti was not happy with Jaichand's decision of not taking the job of a Bhangi. She desired physical satisfaction from her husband. She remarks: "She wanted to tell him to take her, to abandon his education, to get a job, to settle down and begin a physical relationship with her."(Bagul 91) Jaichand's wife Shanti expressed her desires to her father-in law by touching his feet. His father-in-law understood what she wanted. His father-in-law called Jai by his name. Listening to his name,

he (Jaichand) shouted in revolt. He says: "Pitaji whatever happens. I will not give up my education. I will not take up this job of a Bhangi that is being thrust upon me. In fact, when I finish my education and I am as wise as Socrates, I am going to destroy this inhuman practice of untouchability." (Bagul 91) These lines vividly show Jaichand's anger and revolt against centuries-based subhuman treatment of Dalit.

Jaichand's father very much knew that after his death Jaichand could not take proper care of Shanti. His father was in a great fear that due to "... refusal to look at his wife even by mistake would drive her to search for the comfort of another man's arm. This fear made him speak with no little bitterness and no less determination." (Bagul 92) Jaichand's mother also worked as a Bhangi. His father Prabhu tried to make Jai understand the situation of his mother and wife. He opines: "Jai, can't you see the state we live in, the condition of your mother is in? Don't you hear your wife's sighs?" (Bagul 92) Listening to his father's words, he retaliates: "Just for this I should become a Bhangi? Give up my education to clear up the dirt of the village? Carry filth on my head? If you wanted me to do that kind of work, why did you have me educated? Why did you let them light these lamps of independence, knowledge and humanity inside my mind?" (Bagul 92) These lines clearly show the resistance of Jaichand.

Prabhu felt sad and his eyes were full of tears of sympathy but Shanti was full of hatred against her husband and thought him a useless fellow. She cursed him and began to weep. Jai Chand was in extreme anger and retorts: "I am not going to do that job. I will never become a Bhangi." (Bagul 92) When his father Prabhu listened to the refusal of Jai Chand of not taking the job of a Bhangi. He remarks: "... But you are the son of a Bhangi. What problem can you have with doing this job? People pay to get this job, hundred, even a hundred-and-fifty rupees. And here you're getting one free. We need you to take this job. If you had a job, I might not be so near death. Your mother would not be reduced to a skeleton. This girl would not live in this state." (Bagul 93) Jai Chand listened to his father arguments and remarks: "Where is it written that a Bhangi's son must become a Bhangi." (Bagul 93) His father replies: "In our poverty. In our Dharma. In our country." (Bagul 93) Listening to these arguments from his father Jai Chand retorts: "What dharma? If it breaks a person and turns him into an animal, is that dharma? In this country that invests greater significance in a stone than in a human being? I will not heed such a dharma. If it has given us only this poverty, this deprivation, then it behoves us to reject it. ... let me pass my examinations." (Bagul 93) Seeing the extreme

anger and refusal of his son, Prabhu feared that his son might go mad or commit suicide. He became calm and asked Jai Chand: “Do this job until you find another. You can go to night school. When you pass, and you find another job, you can give this one up.”(Bagul 93) But Jai Chand was adamant and he did not want to do the job of a Bhangi. He retorts: “I will not. If you want. I’ll leave school. I’ll rob or become a dacoit. But not this job.”(Bagul 93)

His father tried to explain him that this was not a Bhangi’s job. His mother fell at everyone’s feet for this job. He (Jaichand) remarks: “No one will listen. Even if one boss is Christian and other one is Muslim, they will all only see me a Bhangi. They will never see me an educated person. No one at school sees me as a student, Pitaji, only as a Bhangi. Nowhere in the world is there a country like this one, which persecutes you every step of the way. How much must we bear? How much must we swallow? Is this a country or a prison, a jail? . . . I, an innocent man, live the contempt-ridden, insult-filled life of a prisoner? Why endure this hell?”(Bagul 94) Listening to these retorting remarks of his son’s ‘ear-spitting’ cries, Prabhu lamented. Jaichand told his father about his dream, which he wanted to accomplish in his life. He remarks: “Pitaji, when I pass my exams, I am going to become a clerk. I’ll go to college. I’ll get my PhD. I’ll make sure you all live happy, rich lives. And when the two of you go to your heavenly homes, the journalists will write stories about you. They’ll say you were the parents of Dr Jaichand Rathod.”(Bagul 94) His father did not have the courage to listen to Jaichand’s dream.

Jaichand had high dreams in his life which he wanted to achieve. His father shouted at him for not taking the job of a Bhangi. He (Prabhu) contemplates: “You should not have been born my son, not in this country . . . I married you off young and tied you down. But now don’t ruin this poor girl’s life; . . . don’t behave badly with your mother . . . you never call her mother in public. . . you don’t want to go anywhere with her. She longs to show off her well-built and well-educated son to all her worker-friends. But you avoid her as if she were a wild animal seeking your blood.”(Bagul 95) Listening to these words from his father he asked his wife in a choked voice whether it was true. As soon as he touched her shoulders she was very happy and her hatred against her husband lessened. Jaichand did not talk to his mother because she did the work of a Bhangi. Jaichand remarks: “What kind of culture is this? Where a man can treat the mother who gave him life with contempt simply because she does the work of a Bhangi? Where he can insult her and refuse to eat the food

she cooks? If this culture had not created untouchability, I would not be the chief tormentor of my poor aged mother . . .” (Bagul 96)

Jaichand asked his mother to forgive him and he was ready to do the job of Bhangi with his mother. They both went to the office of the boss. The Christian boss looked at Bhangi and Jaichand. He (boss) called the Muqaddam and asked for a cart:

‘Give him a cart.’

‘A cart?’

‘Yes, a cart. They asked for a Mehtar’s job.’(Bagul 97) Listening to these words, his mother Bhani was shocked and said that he was studying for his matric. At this the boss says: “Let him. But he’s a mehtar. And he’s here to be a mehtar. Go.”(Bagul 98) Both Muqaddam and Jaichand reached in a very crowded area of Chatkopar where there were buffaloes and stables. Muqaddam told Jaichand about his job. He remarks: “This is your job. Bring the cart and go in and bring out the boxes and pour them into the cart. Then you have to clean the boxes. You will have to clean the boxes as well as staircases and the area around. If you don’t do the job well, out you go and the job goes back into the boss’s pocket.”(Bagul 98-99) These lines show the pitiable condition of the Dalits. How they were threatened only for the menial job.

Jaichand was standing there clam and still. Seeing her son’s pitiable condition, his mother Bhani filled with torment, shame, anger and self-hatred. She says to her son: “Son, you don’t have to do this job. Go home. . . It’s not work meant for. It’s for unlettered folk like us. It’s for those who are already broken in mind, body, nose, forehead, broken everywhere broken and dead. . . ‘Never mind, my son . . . Don’t use these slippers to hurt your mother. Go. Go. We don’t want such a job. We will not eat and drink and make merry over your body”(Bagul 99) This clearly shows his mother’s helplessness.

Seeing the helplessness of his mother, Jaichand’s eyes filled with tears, “But the fire of resolution running through him dried the tears. . . .His revolutionary mind was now fighting the dharma and the nation. He had debated these issues with the nation and dharma.”(Bagul 99) Jaichand was in a great dilemma and his mother Bhani was standing mute there just then the driver of the cart came and asked that what she was doing there. She could not utter a word out of foul smell.

Due to stench Jaichand's throat choked and his eyes were heavy. Working in such condition was death-like. He had to clean thirty-two toilets filled with filth. All the filth of the toilets filled him with revulsion. He wanted to do something revolutionary, something destructive. His mind filled with plethora of questions. He was in such a state and found himself surrounded by armed enemies like Abhimanyu. He remarks: "Were these the common enemies of all mankind or was it only the crime of having been born in this country, that meant one had to be thrust into this hell? . . . what kind of evil nation was this that any man should ask another to do such hateful work for money? . . . what kind of people would accept that it was their lot in life to do such work? How could they be willing to do this to make ends meet? Mankind, who has named everything in the world, who has created the Gods and the dharma, who has conjured up creation out of nothingness. Mankind . . . greater than all the five elements and more powerful. Man does this work . . ." (Bagul 101) These lines clearly express Jaichand's anger and resistance against the evil practices that are imposed on Dalits by the upper castes.

His mother was standing like a stone doll, motionless. She slipped and fell and could rise again. Jaichand cried and rushed to her and a tin full of shit spilled over him. As soon as the carter listened to Jaichand's cry, he humiliated him. Listening to the words of carter, Jaichand filled with anger and revolt. Carter was humiliating him again and again and this filled Jaichand with extreme anger. Out of anger he grabbed the carter with both hands and started beating him. He remarks: "Animal, are you going to teach me? Are you trying to rub salt in my wounds? Do you want to mock me? . . . Jai began to beat him, his hands flying and falling with the intensity and fury of a monsoon storm. As the sea in a storm whips the fishing boats again and again until it destroys them, he lashed out the carter." (Bagul 103-103) These line show Jaichand's extreme anger and revolt. Being polluted by the touch of Jaichand, nobody dared to come to stop them. His mother was crying and wailing and could do nothing. When Jaichand became calm, "he hugged his mother and shouted: 'Maa, break my fingers. . . cut off my hands. . . slash open my body, throw away my corpse.'" (Bagul 103) This shows that Jaichand is not saying these words willingly.

His mother was in a great fear lest her son should go mad. The writer remarks: "The people stood and watched. But no one could make sense of the flame of revolt that was burning inside Jai. There was no way for them to understand them. For their minds had been murdered long ago by Manu." (Bagul 103) This shows



that Dalits have been victim of caste-based discrimination and subjugation for centuries. Even educated one does not have the courage to fight against such discriminations.

Conclusion

Both the Dalit writers Baburao Bagul and Bama through their stories titled A Man and Buffalo, Freedom and Revolt respectively have expressed caste-discrimination, suppression, humiliation anger, resistance, assertion and revolt.

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