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Protest in Baburao Bagul's Short Fiction

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Abstract

The awareness of degraded positions in caste ridden society makes the oppressed rebel and protest against the Hindu ideology. The downtrodden people were forced to live on the outskirts of the villages and cities and suffered utmost in the Varna system due to the caste hierarchy and the fascist tendencies of the upper caste Hindus. Babasaheb Ambedkar ignited the spirit of rebel, revolt and protest and made them aware of their degraded positions and worse conditions in Hindu religion. As these oppressed become conscious about inequalities, the atrocities and the injustices heaped on them in the caste and gender based society, they demand their natural rights which stand rejected in the Varna system. In many short stories, Bagul encapsulates the persistent anger, anguish and protest emerging in suppressed people against the Hindu barbarian ideologies that support the division of the society and fragment it into the castes and sub-castes to maintain the supremacy of the upper castes. The rejection of Hindu ideologies which comes in Bagul's Marathi short stories is for creating the new society and destroying the established social order which denies equal rights to the depressed classes in India. Bagul voices the protest of marginalities against the conservative societies which displace Dalit people in the lowest rungs in the society and reject their equal rights. This present paper explores how the downtrodden people stand up against the extremist elements, their fascist ideologies to claim their human rights to staunch their existence as human beings. The depiction of this reality is graphically highlighted in Bagul's short stories to ignite resistance movement, protest and revolt against the authoritarian caste ridden society and its pernicious ideology to the entire mankind that may get infected with the casteist tendencies all over the globe.

Keywords: oppression, patriarchy, rebellious, resistance and protest

The denial of equal rights leads the men and women characters in Baburao Bagul's short stories to raise their protest against the Hindu ideologies and fight for justice and equal positions in society. Bagul reflects the protest of the oppressed in the short stories: "Kalokhache Kaidi", "Bovhada", "Pesuk", "Vidroh" and "Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!" from the short story collection *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!*; "Lutaloot", "Aai" and "Shikshan" from the second short story collection, *Maran Swasta Hota Aahe*. In these short stories, Bagul presents the resistance and protest against the established social order that has its base in Varna system and the Hindu religious book Manusmriti. The other short story writers like Annabhau Sathe, Bamdhumadhav and Shankarrao Kharat depicted the miserable lives of the oppressed people but the resistance and protest which comes in their short stories is mild whereas, it is strong and rebellious in Bagul's short stories. Avinash Dolas states,

Bagul's stories reject the gods, religions and conventions which support the established social order. The voices of dissent are very much reflected in the writings of Dalit poets and writers. But the reflection of rejection in Bagul's stories does not remain mere a rejection, it emerges with all its intensity and tremendous power. With this rejection comes protest. The nature of this protest is uncommon. Behind this protest, there is a strong inspiration of demolishing the established order to form a new one. This rejection and protest is for ultimately a new society. (51) (Trans. by the Researcher)

"Kalokhache Kaidi" (Prisoners of Darkness) presents Daulat's resistance and fight against the conventional society which strictly observes segregation, untouchability and superstitious practices.

Daulat, the son of a Dalit woman and the upper caste Ramrao Deshmukh is tortured brutally by the villagers. Since the days of his childhood, the mean minded ruthless people harass, humiliate and socially boycott and declare him insane when he goes against the traditions and violates the social customs and taboos imposed on him. In anguish, he protests the social norms, enters the temples and even the house of a Hindu priest. He thrashes priest's mother who denies him water and condemns him for polluting her house and gods. A conservative villager Sudama's question, "Will the mad person born in the Mang, Mahar and Chambhar castes enter the house of a Brahmin?" throws light on Daulat's violations of Hindu laws. (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 13) (Trans. by the Researcher) The conservative villagers humiliate his mother. Even his step-brother, Deoram violently attacks her to disgrace her. After that, Daulat withstands these savage people and kills Deoram: "When Deoram bent down to rape Banu, Daulat instantly thrust his sword-stick in his back and the sword-stick came in and out several times." (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 20) (Trans. by the Researcher) As he kills Deoram, the violent villagers target him. Though, Daulat is brutally attacked and killed by the villagers, he resists till the last moments of his life and it is this resistance, Bagul suggests is the ultimate weapon, Dalits must use against violence, oppression and unjust practices; if not, then the failure of the same will result in the continuation of age old practices which will perish the upcoming generations.

"Bovhada" is a graphic representation of Damu's resistance and protest against the established Hindu social order. As untouchables have been deprived of their human rights, Damu's act of demanding his right to perform the role of Narasimha is rebellious. It inspires Dalits to rise against the injustice done to them in Hindu religion. Damu resolves to paint his face like a lion-man and the incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu, Narasimha. His assertion to use temple for this purpose displays his protest against the age old conventions practiced in Hindu religion by the laws of which Dalits are not allowed to enter the temples even today in rural India. The upper castes people use threats and even the possible tactics to dissuade Damu from performing Narasimha but he does not budge an inch from his absolute decision. Damu bids the huge amount of six hundred rupees and gets the right to perform Narasimha. His protest is not for accepting the traditions but to claim the rights which have been rejected to Dalits. In the words of Sukhadev Dhanke, "Damu rebels for social rights and equality." (130) As Dalits succeed the upper caste Hindus, the headman declares "not to celebrate Bovhada festival in future" while Dalits assert, "Next year, we will perform the role of five-Pandav (the characters from the epic *Mahabharata*). Let it might be at the risk of life or even property." (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 32) (Trans. by the Researcher) Through Damu and the entire Dalit community, Bagul presents the protests of entire Dalit community which stands united and defeats the purpose of the upper castes people.

The short story, "Pesuk" deals with the patriot's struggle against the British Indian government and Savitri's protest against the male hegemony. The patriot whom the children address Kaka, narrates the story of his contribution in the freedom movement and also tells them about Savitri's revolt against the landlord and the men who exploited and oppressed women. Kaka and his group use guerrilla tactics and chalk out their plans. As he and his group have ignited the freedom movement secretly, the police haunt him day and night and declare a prize in his name. While Kaka fights against the foreign rulers, Savitri, a victim of her husband, Jaidev's cruelties rebels against patriarchy. After her body is disfigured by him, she takes shelter in the forest and takes revenge. She attacks men violently and cuts off their noses to save women from men's violent assaults: "The man feared to walk out alone. He could not even beat his wife, nor humiliate her. He feared the severe punishment for disobeying this order." (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 53) (Trans. by the Researcher) The rich landlord Jaidev fears for his life. He does not step out of his mansion. He appoints people to protect himself from his wife, Savitri. He dies of her terror and even Savitri ends her life. While Savitri's

rebel ends in her death; the patriot Kaka continues his movement and tells her tale to children and guides them to rise against the injustices inflicted on women.

Another short story entitled, "Vidroh" (Rebellion) is the emergence of a rebellion against the established hegemony of the upper castes, the cultural terrorism of the scriptures which degrade human beings and impose slavery upon them. Jaichand rebels against the established social norms and refuses to continue the work of a scavenger. He firmly stands by his decision to take education and destroy the pernicious religious order. He speaks out his resolution, "Father, I'll not leave the school, come what may! I'll never do the job of a scavenger. On the contrary, I want to study, become a Socrates and blot out the curse of untouchability." (Trans. Katamble 77) When his father reminds of their misfortune, poverty and duty to Hindu religion, he questions, "Which religion? The one which has broken our backbones and turned us into animals? Or that society which worships stones, and discards us as untouchables? I care a fig for such a religion and such a society! Since it is the religion and the society that have inflicted on us this suffering, we have first to throw them away." (Trans. Katamble 78) In the words of Prof. Gangadhar Pantawane, a Dalit is "a symbol of change and revolution." This is true of Jai as he does not believe in "God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven" for the reason these myths have caused the degradation of Dalits in Hindu society. (qtd. in Trivedi 3-4)

The short story, "Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!" (When I Concealed My Caste!) presents the protest of educated Dalits. Kashinath represents the educated Dalits. He works as a labourer and refuses surrender to the caste based discriminative ideologies. Though the upper castes Hindus threaten and intimidate him, he confronts them aggressively. The unfavorable conditions and circumstances in which he grows make him rough, bold, belligerent and a rebel. After he gets a job as a cleaner in railway department, the upper castes: Ranchod, Tiwari and the other laborers abuse and use derogatory language to insult him but he retorts and threatens them with a knife which he carries in his pocket to protect himself from the attacks of the extremist Hindus. He protests against the injustice and challenges them consciously. When Tiwari provokes all the laborers and orders, "Beat this *dhed*", Kashinath challenges him and others for a duel with a warning, "I will make your foreman understand the Indian constitution. I will send you all in prison. Fire you from your work, the way ants are shaken off the clothes." (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 85) (Trans. by the Researcher) The day, the caste oppression becomes intolerable, he resolves to leave job and continue his education to become a lawyer to fight against the Hindu extremists and fascist elements. He reveals, "Master, I want to resign this post. I will go to Mumbai. I will do labor work. I will pass the S.S.C. exam. I will take admission in college. I want to become an advocate. No, I won't die a laborer now." (Bagul, *Jevha Mi Jaat* 90) (Trans. by the Researcher) This resolution of Kashinath which he shares with the unnamed Dalit worker with whom he works is significant as he raises his voice and protests against the discrimination and aspires to continue education to bring transformation in society which treats stone gods as ideals and human beings as contemptible, despised, disgusting objects.

The short story, "Lutaloot" (The Looter Looted) depicts the Dalit women's resistance against exploitation in Hindu society. Vanchala represents Dalit women. She resists against her exploitation in patriarchal society which relegates her position to a prostitute. Her husband often subjects her to violence and treats her inhumanly. She endures the pains and miseries but when it is unendurable for her, she raises her protest against him and leaves his house. She suffers endlessly when her father sells her to his sister Gangu in the brothel house. She refuses surrender to her father's demands and even condemns Gangu, the brothel owner: "Nothing! From now on he'll get nothing from me. Not even the shell of a snail. I wouldn't even let him stand near a place where I spat. Witch! No doubt you will ruin my sister's life as well. Some day I'll see that he pays for this. And when he is dead I'll dance on his grave." (Trans. Moscovitz 60) She opposes her father's monstrous demands. Though, she raises her

protest against Gangu, she is seriously subjected to the harsh whipping from Sidrappa, the rogue and falls unconscious. Thus, by challenging the domination of Gangu, she truly emerges “a sign of revolt and change.” (Piraji 97) In spite of her protest, her efforts fall short and even the other prostitutes do not come forward to support her and oppose their exploitation at the hands of Gangu.

The short story entitled, “Aai” (Mother) presents the struggle of a Dalit widow who asserts her rights to live her life decently in conservative male dominated society. The unnamed mother represents the millions of the Dalit widows who fight against the anti-social elements who trouble them in the public sphere when they go out to earn their livelihood. Though, the people living in the neighbourhood torment and humiliate her frequently, she boldly faces them all and struggles hard to provide education to Pandu. As a widow, in Hindu society, she is expected to lead a pious life after the death of her husband and must not indulge in love making, but she rebels against the patriarchy, breaks the social norms and takes a lover to claim her rights. When her son joins the enemy ranks, blindly following the rumours spread about her, she turns violent towards all: “Pure hatred towards Dagdu and her own weak son coursed through her body. She wanted to kill them all.” (Trans. Manvi 42) Though, her son does not understand her feelings, she struggles against the oppressive conditions and refuses surrender to the conservative society.

The next short story entitled, “Shikshan” (Education) focuses the problems of the landless labourers and the resistance movement of the Republican Party of India to demand justice against the exploitation of landless labourers. Prabhakar Pagare, the educated Dalit and the leader of one of the batches of the party leads his group. He and his companions get themselves arrested voluntarily and encircle the place with their shouting and slogans. Since his school days, he is rebellious. When his school teacher instructed him to take the broom in hand and clean the school, he objected saying: “We have been sweeping for the last five thousand years. Now it is your turn. Gandhi wanted to become a sweeper, so now you become.” (Bagul, *Maran Swasta* 53) (Trans. by the Researcher) Through Prabhakar, Bagul stresses how education can transform the youth and change the prospects in the lives of Dalits in future.

Vanchala in “Lutaloot”, the unnamed mother figure in “Aai” and Savitri in “Pesuk” fight against the anti-social elements in Hindu patriarchy. Jai in “Vidroh”, Daulat in “Kalokhache Kaidi”, Kashinath Sapkale in “Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!”, Damu in “Bovhada” and Prakash Pagare in “Shikshan” do not accept the role of “mere players” which William Shakespeare, the greatest writers of all the time in his poem “All The World’s a Stage” thinks, God, the director has assigned men to play. (Shakespeare 49) But in Bagul’s stories, the men resist the caste and gender oppression and rebel against the inequalities, injustice and atrocities inflicted on them in Hindu society. Prakash Kharat affirms, “Bagul’s characters do not act and surrender like the puppets in the hands of destiny. They do not endure the injustice mutely. They struggle against it. They rebel against it.” (101) (Trans. by the Researcher) Bagul’s characters protest to assert their rights, demand equality and reinstate the dignity to their being. They reject the conformist value system and rebel against it. Without rebel, they understand, their emancipation is not possible. For this rebel, they draw inspirations from Babasaheb Ambedkar’s ideology of human liberation movement that ignites and inspires Dalits to take education, form organizations and protest against injustices to staunch for their human rights rejected over the last five thousand years by Manu and his progeny who still rule this country and want to uproot Indian constitution to bring back their Varna system to reinstate their authority over the *bahujan* people.

In nutshell, Bagul suggests, resistance is the ultimate weapon to protest against the caste and gender oppression, the discriminative ideologies of the Hindu religion, the spurious religious books and the orthodox traditions. Without resistance, he warns, the age old practices will continue to degrade, devalue and humiliate the oppressed people and the upper castes will always try to maintain their monopoly. So, to live with pride and dignity, one must stand upright for one’s own rights and

persistently fight for it against the oppressive systems which disregard human beings and glorify stone gods, the irrational scriptures and the spurious religion. To break the shackles of this slavery, Bagul's men and women resist, rebel and protest against Hindu discriminative ideologies and all the pernicious systems devised for their degradation and destruction.

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