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Resistance and Rebellion against the Caste Ridden Society in Baburao Bagul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!*

Abstract

Baburao Bagul's stories reject the gods, religions and conventions which support the established caste ridden society and its social order. The voices of dissent are very much reflected in the writings of Dalit writers but the reflection of resistance and rebellion against the unequal social order in Bagul's Marathi short stories does not remain mere a rejection but 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. The present paper explores the resistance and rebellion as projected in Bagul's stories to highlight how the educated Dalits reject the Hindu religion, its gods and spurious scriptures and refuse to accept its infallible nature. The rejection of Hindu ideologies which comes in Bagul's stories is for creating the new society and destroying the established social order which denies the equal rights to the depressed classes in India and refuses to accept their existence as human beings. This paper is an attempt to highlight the impact of Babasaheb Ambedkar's revolutionary thoughts on the Dalits and the society as reflected in the short story collection entitled, *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!* (When I Concealed My Caste!)

Key words: oppression, fascist elements, resistance, rebellion, protest, humanity

Babasaheb Ambedkar, the father of Dalit literature ignited the protest among Dalits and made them aware of their slavery. He illumed their lives and liberated them from the slavery. Mahad Satyagraha (1927) and Kalaram Temple movement (1939) made Dalits aware of their positions and rights in Hindu society. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movements, speeches and writings, and his acceptance of the democratic values-freedom, fraternity, equality and social justice inspired Dalits to take education, organise and agitate for their rights. As he showed them the path of Buddhism, the only scientific religion in the world, they embraced

Buddhism and rejected Hindu religion, the living hell of inequalities, fatalism, superstitions, traditions and outdated rituals. He made Dalits conscious of their positions and made them literate, rational beings to fight against the caste oppression in Hindu society which is the prime cause of their degradation in Indian society.

He strongly held the view that literature must be accountable to society and humanity. The text which is not accountable to society and humanity must be rejected. He held Manusmriti “a symbol of injustice,” and thus burnt it publically in 1927. By burning the caste system upholding text of Hinduism, he rejected all the spurious religious texts and claimed equal rights for the oppressed people. As he wanted to liberate the masses from the thraldoms of the slavery of Aryan priests, he started *Mook Nayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata* and *Samata* and also paved the way to the Dalit writers to emerge and voice the marginalities and address the pains, problems, miseries and agonies of the common people to give justice and bring progress in their lives:

Through your literary creations cleanse the stated values of life and culture. Don't have a limited objective. Transform the light of your pen so that the darkness of villages is removed. Do not forget that in our country the world of the Dalits and the ignored classes is extremely large. Get to know intimately their pain and sorrow, and try through your literature to bring progress in their lives. True humanity resided there. (Ambedkar 8)

Receiving this message from the writings of Babasaheb Ambedkar; the prolific Marathi writer Baburao Bagul projected the marginalised world of the oppressed people in his writings and awakened the Dalit consciousness in them and made them aware of their degradation in society and their rights to exist as free citizens of the country. Being the pioneer of Dalit literature, he perceived Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision and highlighted the problems of outcaste Dalits and oppressed people in society. His short story collection entitled *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli! Hoti* published in 1963 throws light on the lives of Dalits in the post-independence era. He attacks the caste ridden mentalities and tendencies and holds them responsible for the degradation of the Dalits in society. This research paper explores the caste oppression which gives rise to the protest among the educated Dalits who are inspired by the mass movements of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Bagul's two short stories: “Vidroh” and “Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!” from the short story collection, *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!* highlight the protest of educated Dalits against the caste ridden society and the obnoxious Hindu religion. He encapsulates the persistent anger, anguish and protest emerging from the educated Dalits against the Hindu barbarian ideologies that support the division of the society

and fragments it into the castes and sub-castes to maintain the supremacy of the upper castes. The realisation of injustice, inequality, discrimination, segregation in Hindu society inspires Kashinath Sapkale in “Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!” and Jai in “Vidroh” to protest against the established social norms and reject the age old Varna and caste system. As the upper castes Hindus get privilege to the economic, social, cultural and political rights and powers, Kashinath Sapkale and Jai who represent the educated class among Dalits raise their voice against the prejudiced ideologies and the pernicious systems to assert their claim to the natural rights and stand against the caste ridden Hindu society, religion, culture and the scriptures which the Brahmins have created to dupe and loot the common masses.

In “Vidroh,” Bagul presents 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 the downtrodden people. Jaichand, the protagonist 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) Jai’s firm trust in education and his strong resolution to end untouchability implies the change in Dalits which is the result of Babasaheb Ambedkar’s movements against caste oppression and his message-educate, agitate and organise.

When Jai’s father reminds him of their misfortune, poverty and duty to Hindu religion, he rejects the religion and scriptures which inscribe autonomy and authority to the upper caste Hindus and deny the existence of untouchables as human beings. 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 this is true of Jai as “He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven” for the reason they are the cause of the caste oppression and degradation of Dalits in Hindu society. (Randhawa 66) Jai rebels against the caste oppression only because of the sense of awareness which comes from Babasaheb Ambedkar’s movements against the Varna system. Prakash Kharat emphasises, “He protests against exploitation. The character of Jai which Bagul has

presented is portrayed in the light of enlightened awakening. It stands the ground reality and at the same time, ignites protest for justice.” (Kharat 101)

In the next short story, “Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti!” Kashinath, a Dalit labourer represents the educated Dalits who refuse surrender to the discriminative ideologies. Though the upper caste Hindus threaten and intimidate him, he confronts them aggressively. The unfavourable conditions and circumstances in which he grows make him rough, bold, belligerent, and a rebel. In his childhood, when his sister is brutally assaulted by her husband, he drops the idea of continuing his education while studying in the tenth class and outbursts his anger on her sister’s husband to retaliate the violence meted out at his sister. Later, when he gets a job as a cleaner in railway department, the upper castes: Ranchod, Tiwari and the other labourers 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 denies the dirty work allotted to him and refuses to clean the wall where the labourers piss. He stands against the injustice and fights with the upper caste labourers consciously. When Tiwari provokes all the labourers and orders, “Beat this dhedh” Kashinath challenges him and others for a duel with a warning, “I 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 85) When the foreman and others socially estrange him, he creates terror in their eyes with his violent temperament. But the day, the caste oppression becomes intolerable, he resolves to leave the job of a cleaner in the railway department and continue his education to become a lawyer to fight against the Hindu extremists and fascist elements. While the unnamed protagonist conceals his caste and endures the assaults after it is revealed; Kashinath Sapkale rebels and reveals him: “Master, I am going to leave this service. I will go to Mumbai. I will do any 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 labourer now.” (Bagul 90) This resolution of Kashinath which he shares with the protagonist is significant as he raises his voice and protests against the caste oppression and aspires to continue education to bring transformation in society which treats stone gods as ideals and human beings as contemptible, despised, disgusting objects. Babasaheb Ambedkar delivered the message of “educate, agitate and organize” to the depressed classes in his historic speech at All-India Depressed Classes Conference held at Nagpur in 1942 and made them understand the importance of education, agitation, and organisation to avail their rights. Deriving inspiration from this message of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Kashinath Sapkale rebels

against the caste ridden society and also aspires to become a lawyer to fight against the injustice meted out to Dalits in a caste ridden society to replace the old social order with the new one and establish freedom, fraternity, equality and social justice in the conformist, and extremist fascist society.

Thus, it is through Jai and Kashinath Sapkale, Bagul suggests resistance and rebellion are the ultimate weapons to fight against the caste 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 obnoxious culture which are all Brahmin made systems, sustained with the support of Kshatriya and Vaishyas. Without realising this reality, the Shudra and Ati-Shudra have been enduring the sufferings in slavery imposed on them for thousands of the years and to break the shackles of this slavery, Bagul's Jai and Kashinath, the representatives of educated Dalits who are inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar's mass movements for human liberation against the caste ridden society resist, rebel and protest against Hindu discriminative ideologies and all the pernicious systems devised for their degradation and destruction in Hindu society to reinstate humanity in a cultureless orthodox Varna based society.

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