

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



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**Abstract**

India is a land of multiple religions and castes. It is a democratic country where all are equal before the Constitution and law. Yet, for centuries, Dalits and Scheduled Tribes have been treated as untouchables and excluded from social equality. In a nation where thirty-three crores of gods and goddesses are worshipped, there is not a single Dalit deity, though Dalits themselves worship these gods. They are considered impure, and this impurity is caste-based. The belief that caste purity is rooted in religion appears false in the context of Dalits. As K. M. Panikkar notes, "Democracy and caste are totally opposed... caste and democracy are fundamentally opposed, they are at their very bases, incompatible" (Panikkar 24). Historically, Dalits were denied temple entry, and in the twenty-first century, their condition remains similar in many states. Examples such as the killing of Shambook and the taking of Eklavya's thumb show ancient caste discrimination. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the "messiah of Dalits," granted them rights, and education became the "milk of the tigress." Dalit writers like Bama, Baby Kamble, Baburao Bagul, P. Sivakami, Sharankumar Limbale, and Omprakash Valmiki have powerfully depicted their pain, resistance, and revolt. This paper explores Dalits' passive and active resistance against caste-based exploitation and discrimination.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Caste, Exploitation, Assertion, Revolt

**Introduction**

Caste has long been the most enduring and oppressive social institution in Indian society, structuring relations of power, purity, and privilege. Although the Indian Constitution proclaims equality and justice for all, the hierarchical divisions of caste continue to determine access to dignity, occupation, and social mobility. The Dalits—historically branded as "untouchables"—have borne the greatest burden of this exclusion, confined for centuries to menial labor and denied entry into the spiritual and cultural spaces of the dominant castes. Their struggle for identity and self-respect has found a powerful voice in Dalit literature, which transforms pain into protest and

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memory into resistance. The emergence of Dalit writing in the post-Ambedkar era marks a radical shift in Indian literary discourse. It rejects the sentimental portrayal of the poor by upper-caste writers and replaces it with authentic narratives grounded in lived experience. Within this movement, Baburao Bagul and Bama stand as two formidable voices who record, with unsparing realism, the social exclusion and moral revolt of the marginalized. Their stories expose the inhumanity of caste and the everyday violence inflicted upon Dalits, while simultaneously asserting their agency, dignity, and humanity. Through *When I Hid My Caste* and *Harum-Scarum Saar and Other Stories*, Bagul and Bama reimagine the Dalit subject not as a passive sufferer but as a moral being capable of defiance and transformation. The present paper seeks to analyze how their short stories unveil the psychological wounds of caste oppression and convert them into a language of resistance—making the subaltern not only speak but also challenge the moral foundations of the society that silences them.

## Theoretical Framework

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.

## Research Methodology:

**Primary Sources:** 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.

**Secondary Sources:** 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*

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*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,

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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 have 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

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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.”(Bigul 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

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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, Jaichand's mother, Bhani, was shocked and reminded the boss that her son was studying for his matriculation. The boss replied, "Let him. But he's a mehtar. And he's here to be a mehtar. Go." (Bagul 98)

Muqaddam and Jaichand then reached a crowded area in Chatkopar, surrounded by buffaloes and stables. Muqaddam explained the nature of the work: "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 reveal the pitiable condition of Dalits and how they were intimidated even for menial work.

Jaichand stood silently, calm and still. Witnessing her son's plight, Bhani was overwhelmed with torment, shame, anger, and self-hatred. She cried out, "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

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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 powerfully captures a mother's helplessness in the face of caste oppression.

Seeing his mother's despair, 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's inner conflict deepened while Bhani remained mute. The driver of the cart appeared and questioned her presence; she could not respond, choked by the foul smell.

The stench made Jaichand's throat tighten and his eyes water. Working in such conditions was akin to death. Assigned to clean thirty-two toilets overflowing with filth, he was consumed by revulsion and rage. He longed for a revolutionary act—something to destroy this indignity. Surrounded by despair, he likened himself to Abhimanyu trapped among armed foes. He asked, "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 express Jaichand's fierce anger and his revolt against the inhuman practices imposed upon Dalits.

Bhani stood like a motionless stone statue. She slipped and fell but could not rise again. Jaichand rushed to her, and a tin full of filth spilled over him. Hearing his cry, the carter mocked and humiliated him repeatedly. Enraged beyond control, Jaichand seized the carter and began beating him: "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 103–104) These lines depict Jaichand's uncontrollable fury and rebellion. Polluted by Jaichand's touch, no one dared to intervene. His mother wept helplessly. When Jaichand regained composure, "he hugged his mother and shouted: 'Maa, break my fingers. . . cut off my hands. . . slash open my body, throw away my corpse.'" (Bagul 103) His words reveal not willful defiance but anguish and despair.

Terrified that her son might lose his sanity, Bhani stood trembling. Bagul concludes: "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 underlines the deep-seated oppression and paralysis caused by centuries of caste-based discrimination. Even the educated lack the courage to challenge such tyranny.

## **Conclusion**

Both Dalit writers—Baburao Bagul in "*Revolt*" and Bama in "*A Man and a Buffalo*" and "*Freedom*"—powerfully expose the persistent realities of caste discrimination, social exclusion,

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and psychological subjugation in Indian society. Their narratives transform pain and humiliation into acts of moral resistance and human assertion. Through characters like Jaichand, Bagul redefines rebellion as a response to systemic dehumanization, while Bama portrays the awakening of self-respect and agency among the oppressed. Together, they create a counter-discourse to mainstream literature, giving voice to the silenced and reaffirming the Dalit struggle as a quest for justice, dignity, and social transformation.

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