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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SUPPRESSION TO PROTEST: A JOURNEY OF STRUGGLE OF A DALIT WOMAN IN BABURAO BAGUL'S NOVEL *SOOD*

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Abstract

Gender violence in any form is a punishable crime in India but still it is prevailing in society. Indian constitution safeguards women's rights and guarantees them equal status. Despite the strong measures taken by the constitution makers, the loopholes in the entire system of the law implementing authority and the government machineries do not act responsible and consider the atrocities on women seriously. The large number of atrocity cases registered in the police station and pending in the courts makes it clear. Though Hindu society worships women and regards them 'goddesses,' they are perceived as sexual beings, play things, commodities and men's possession in reality. This paper is an attempt to present this reality and highlight the plight of women in caste gender-based society that Baburao Bagul projects in his Marathi novel, *Sood*. Janki, the protagonist is a victim of gender violence perpetuated in the caste prejudiced society. Her rebel against the caste and gender discrimination proves to be a milestone in her struggles with the upper caste mentalities those ones who subjugate and oppress women. Her voice is the voice of entire Dalit community that she raises to assert her resistance for asserting the identities of entire community and demands for a more open and equal egalitarian society for the welfare of entire humanity on this beautiful planet that has already been turned into a hell by the conformist religious ideologies of the priests.

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Introduction:-

Baburao Bagul, a renowned prolific Marathi writer dealt with women's issues in his works. His protagonists are confined in the Varna system that has been adhered and administered by the so-called pundit class which has always been regarded the torch bearer of civilization. Baburao Bagul's protagonists make the people conscious of the age-old customs and rituals which need to be uprooted completely to form an ideal secular society that has its roots in the basic universal human values - freedom, fraternity, equality, and social justice.

Women in India are equal to men, but the constitutional measures taken for their welfare have not been taken seriously and ignored intentionally by all the fundamentalists in the governments who were in power since the first Independence of the country. Rape, murder, dowry deaths, female foeticides and exploitations are routine matters in *shining and clean* India. Although the law promises safety and security for women, the law-abiding implementing authority does not implement the law and punish the culprits accordingly. It has resulted in certain threats to the safety and security of women and a serious menace to the identity of nation across the entire globe. Dalit women are

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not safe at all in the country as the number of rape cases have tremendously increased and the Atrocity Act made by the central government has miserably failed to safeguard the rights of Dalit women and guarantee security and safety to their life and existence. The large numbers of cases are filed under Atrocity Act and the victims are still waiting for justice. It is shocking that many atrocities complaints are not filed and registered as the officer-in-charge under the influence of upper caste politicians never register such atrocities and even if they get registered, the loopholes are maintained to favour the culprits. The culprits with caste based mentalities are never punished due to the lacunas in the technicalities in the entire system starting with the governing parliamentary system to the implementing authorities in many states, those who strongly believe and secretly follow the Varna system which has already been abolished and uprooted by the constitution makers in the country by administering Democracy as a way of living life and the ideal secular culture to be followed in every day, public sphere of the nation to ascertain the nationality of the people: 'proud to be Indian first and Indian last' but the fact is something different that people in India live with multiple identities imposed and imbibed on them by the laws of Manu and his spurious book Manusmriti.

Since the ages women have always been more prone to the exploitations promoted by the elite caste politics administered by the mainstream of the society. Janki and her mother are the representatives of Dalit women who suffer in such unequal society. As a daughter of *Murali* and a Dalit woman, she becomes prey to the caste discrimination and conventions that forcibly victimize her. In "Stritvachi Adim Sahajprerna: *Sood*", M.N. Wankhede rightly comments on Janki's tragedy. He states, "She is a daughter of *Murali*. One of the Dalits, her language testifies her low status. How can a daughter of *Murali* be chaste and pious? It is this question that her mother and the world around deliver her." (22) He further continues, "Janki is a heroine of Dalit people. Who else would bear such infernal atrocities? Dalit women are anybody's possession." (23): (Trans. by Researcher). *Sood*, published in 1970, after twenty years of the republic day, it comments on the striking reality of the caste, class, and gender politics in India. Despite the constitutional measures incorporated in constitution, the governments failed to protect the human rights of the Dalit women. It is nothing but the denial of women's existence and their rights to their being as the subjects in the secular nation. It is a disgrace to the nation.

While returning from the floor mill, a crew of ruffian chase Janki, abuse and attack her to violate her chastity. The conversation that follows among them throws light on the disaster that she is going to become a victim of. Their conversation follows as:

"Consume her."

"How would people retort?"

"She is not from a decent lineage. She is *Murali*'s daughter. Who would trust her?" (Bagul, 18) (Translated by the researcher)

It is her caste and low status in society, victimizes her and makes her a rape victim. Later, Gangu, her mother propels her into her profession that she must abide by the laws of *Murali* imposed on her. Her profession as a prostitute has its origin in *Devdashi* and *Murali* traditions which were inducted in the social order of the day to maintain the hegemony of Aryans to disgrace women and the downtrodden. The so-called *pundit* class and the other elite classes viewed *Devdashi* and *Murali* traditions as a pious service to gods, goddesses, and Earth Gods in which mostly all the women victims were from the *bahujan* community. Vasant Rajas in his "*Devdashi: Shodh ani Bodh*," points out that the origin of inhuman traditions is in the religious scriptures written by the Pope and the Aryan Brahmin. He elucidates, "Since the ancient time, all the inhuman conventions and traditions came to be formed in the name of gods and religions. The Aryan Brahmins and the Christian priests inscribed the myths and the rituals to their benefit" So, in his view all the outdated traditions do have their origins in religious scriptures made to dupe the common mass in the country. He further continues, "In order not to question the authority of Vedas, Varna and Smriti, the Brahmins proclaimed that these books were "*apaurushaiya*" meaning, not written by men but by the gods and to doubt its authenticity is a sin." (21): (Trans. by the Researcher)

In Baburao Bagul's *Sood*, Janki is a victim of *Murali* convention. In the patriarchal set up of the society, the upper castes and her own mother that follows a *Murali* tradition forcibly put her in prostitution. She is forced to live a life of a prostitute. Her mother who too is a victim of such tradition continues her ways of life and she too is regarded 'sex object' than a human being. She is made to believe in preordained state sanctioned in the name of gods and religion. When she should protect Janki and oppose her exploitation, she herself contributes in administering violence on her and gives permission to Dagadu, her lover to consume her. Janki's mother works here as an agent to such an order and proves helpful in sustaining masculinity and patriarchy that regard women as 'sex objects' than human beings. She too like many other women whose psyche is trained to accept *Murali* tradition as her lot and

preordained destiny, goes for it without questioning it that propagates subjugation and exploitation. Her mother does not regard her own existence of any worth and respect. Gangu and Janki live their life in utter poverty that is caused by their low status designated to them in caste set up by the elite hegemony that imposed traditions and outdated rituals to annihilate their existence permanently. It is a mockery to humanity that the orthodox social order relegates women to mere bodies than human beings. Gangu is made to accept her life as preordained destiny. Instead to fight the oppressive forces, she accepts it as her lot and inflicts the same on her daughter. Her mental psyche is thus, the result of conventions strongly instilled in her mind by the descendants of *Manu* those who exploit thousands of women even today in the entire republic and the Maharashtra and Karnataka states where *Devadasis* and *Murali* traditions still exist.

Later, Janki is handed over to the custody of her husband and mother-in-law. Her plight does not end with her marriage, rather it continues in more horrible ways. Her mother-in-law fails to pay off the money to Rasul, a butcher and sells her to him. Rasul too regards her as *body* and humiliates her for two years and sells her to Naikin, the woman who puts Janki in prostitution and starts earning money. Janki is thus also becomes a victim of convention-based caste and gender discrimination. The cycle of her exploitation gets renewed in more inhuman form, the moment she is handed over from one hand to the other. The crew of vagabonds violently rape her. Her mother forcibly wants to put her in her prostitution. Her mother's lover, Dagadu views her as a play thing and forcibly rapes her. Gangu mixes drugs in her food to make her fast asleep, so that Dagadu can get an opportunity to consume her. The writer narrates,

She forcibly put her down. Pressed her both arms hard with her feet and sat on her bosom. Shut her mouth fast with her hands, so that she cannot scream aloud and signalled Dagadu to proceed. He started taking off her clothes. She came in her conscious the moment, he started consuming her. She strived hard with her legs. He summoned all his strength and tried to lock her legs under his own. She kept struggling under his heavy body. Fiery with rage for getting money from Dagadu, Gangu started showering her with blows. And soon both initiated heating her brutally till the moment a sharp weapon was thrust in his back; he fell down and cried aloud in pain. (39): (Trans. by the Researcher)

When she gets married, her husband and her father-in-law regard her as commodity and sell her to a butcher. Rasul too after using her for two years sells her to Naikin, the owner of brothel house who puts her in prostitution. Janki resists all the forces but all her attempts against these dominant oppressive forces fail. It is the disgrace to humanity that women are not viewed as human beings but as play things. Janki survives the inhuman brutal forms of oppressions and exploitations and thus begins to rebel and revolt against the hegemony that caused her plight and denied her birth right and existence as a human being. In *Baburao Bagul Yanchya Sahityacha Chikitsak Abhyas*, Nazarethamiskita states, "In *Sood*, Bagurao Bagul has presented the story about a Dalit woman's plight" (117): (trans. by the researcher) How long can such a woman withstand the brutal atrocities and rapes with no intervention of laws anywhere in any form to safeguard their existential rights? She must break the religious conformist barricades that have constrained her. She plans to kill herself and goes to a river side to commit a suicide and while attempting it, a sadhu wants to rape her. She fights with him and kills him. Her exploitation continues even when she tries to put an end to her life. Subhash Pulavale's rightly points at the reality of *Sood*. He terms it a fiction with "a naked reality of Dalit woman who is regarded any man's possession and a play thing to appease male hungers." (127): (trans., by the Researcher) It is here, she disguises herself Jwalaprasad, a *sannyashi*, a man. She does so to hide her identity as a woman as she thinks that her being a woman has caused all her troubles. She starts despising her body and considers it the cause of all her sufferings. In *Dalit Katha: Nirmiti ani Samiksha*, Chaya Nikam substantiates the prime cause of her sufferings is her caste and then the body. In her view, the cause of Janki's despising her body is "Being a daughter of *murali*, she is not respected. The upper caste Hindus exploit her sexually. Her exploitation begins, the day she enters puberty (97). (Translated by the researcher) It is on her way to Himalaya, she happens to meet *Swami*, a Sadhu, the guiding principle in her life who brings change in her attitude towards life at the end, but her story leads to the diagnosis of religious scriptures to find out the truth of this kind of double slavery inflicted on women who have to bear it unquestioned. In Vasant Rajas' opinion, "it is due to the ignorance and superstitions, people even in the world of science believe gods and desire for heavenly salvation." (15) (trans. by the Researcher) It is a stunning reality to see that the people even in the twenty first century believe traditions, conventions and outdated rituals organized systematically for their exploitation and oppression.

Janki's rebel comes in the form of revenge by killing a *sadhu* who tries to rape her. In orthodox religion, a woman is viewed as a play thing. It makes her to hate her womanhood and desire for a man's substance. In *Baburao Bagulanchya Kadambaraya*, Subhash Pulavale rightly comments, "Dalit woman rejects her body as it is regarded a play thing and the offspring of all the pains, sufferings and exploitation but when a woman's body is perceived with the dignity and respect, she accepts her womanhood whole heartedly" (128) (trans., by the Researcher). In her journey to Himalaya with Swami in a disguise of a *sadhu*, she outshines Vidyacharan in her journey with Swami. She hides her identity and reveals it to Swami, the moment; he makes her realize her folly for desiring a man's body and despising her own. He guides her and stands with her in her fight with the caste and gender biased society, but before she could begin her struggle in future, she and Swami stand prey to the wild forces and die in an attack of the wolves.

To conclude, no doubt, gender discrimination in caste-based conformist society has posed serious threats to society but it would not be too late to realize its seriousness and work towards it. It is the right time to wake to the call and give a proper response to the serious issues concerning caste and gender discrimination to stop violence in society. Janki's rebel against the religion is rendering example of the worse treatment women get in society, so as nation, the intellectual people of the country must have to raise the strong voice against such discrimination and violence, if not then it would not take much time to disturb the peace of entire nation. Each act of atrocity and violence must have to be condemned and punished with severity accordingly by the law machineries, and then only the nation can hope for the best of entire society, otherwise, it would pose serious threat to the nation in the coming years. In *Sood*, Dagadu, Rasul, Vidyacharan, a crew of ruffian, and a *sadhu* who tries to rape Janki are the representatives of male dominated society who do mock at women by disgracing them. It is a mockery to Hindu society that on one hand it worships women as goddesses and the other regards them *sex objects* and forcibly puts them in *Devdashi* and *Murali* traditions. It exposes the duality of society that on one side it supports women and the other it degrades their identity and character in the name of God and religion. Janki's voice and rebel that ends with her death, is the real beginning and the state of consciousness she reached for her rights is the state of consciousness the entire Dalit community has reached and started questioning the unquestioned authority and hegemony of the religious scriptures produced by the Aryan Brahmins. So, the government machineries and the implementing authorities whoever is there in the power today must have to abide towards their constitutional responsibilities and duties and act accordingly to set an ideal before the society that the constitutional law is supreme, the parliament is supreme, and it can encroach in any religious body and any scripture for the broader interest of the entire

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