



SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT OF THE DALIT WOMEN IN BABURAO BAGUL'S NOVELLA *SOOD*

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Abstract

Baburao Bagul, a well-known Marathi writer, powerfully portrayed the suffering of women in his works. He envisioned an ideal society based on universal human values such as freedom, equality, fraternity, and social justice. His characters often live within the rigid Varna system, controlled by the so-called upper classes who consider themselves leaders of civilization. Although the Indian Constitution grants equal rights to women, these rights have often been ignored or not properly implemented by those in power since independence. Crimes such as rape, murder, dowry deaths, female foeticide, and exploitation continue to occur, even in a country that claims progress and development. While laws exist to protect women, authorities frequently fail to enforce them strictly, allowing offenders to escape punishment. This failure has created serious threats to women's safety and has damaged the nation's image globally. Dalit women, in particular, face severe insecurity, as cases of violence against them have increased significantly. Even though the Atrocity Act was introduced to protect their rights, it has not been effectively enforced. Many victims file cases but are still waiting for justice, highlighting the gap between law and reality.

Keywords

Ascension, Atrocities, Dalit, Harassment, Liberation, Resistance, Sexual, Struggle, Women, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Baburao Ramaji Bagul (17 July 1930-26 March 2008), a short-story writer, poet and essayist, is regarded as one of the pioneers of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. He is a renowned Marathi writer and a crucial personality in the Indian short story in the 20th century. While reviewing the novella in Dalit literature, the first name that comes to mind is Baburao Bagul. Renowned as a preeminent thinker of Dalit literature, Bagul significantly enriched the realm of the Dalit short story. Perhaps because he did not focus extensively on the novel format, he did not produce a large number of them. Among his works like *Sood* (Vengeance), *Aghori* (1983), and *Pavshya* (1971), though *Sood* (1970) was published as a novel, it is technically considered a novella (short novel). Baburao Bagul has presented Dalits as heroes of the modern world, and he used literature to show the unreasonable tactics which left those heroes and heroines are unrecognised. Baburao Bagul is one of the writers who were influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement, and thus his inspiration behind his literature can be found strongly. The characters in his novels want to break away from his tradition. The invention of emotions such as anger, love, lust and affection can be seen in his novels. In his novels, there are so many characters they hope for conflict-proven justice and narrate the relationship of brotherhood. Also, people who crave a helpless life due to traditionalism are seen in his novels. Come to the occasion; the character has a vision of revenge. Bagul has created characters who adopt a rebellious as well as an optimistic side while showing his characters the path to liberation. Bagul has given an indirect message of life transformation through his novels. The novella *Sood* written by him is thought-provoking and has become a



direction for Dalit literature. Baburao Bagul, a budding writer, has tried to break the ideals of Marathi stories to some extent. While the picture of injustice and oppression of Dalits is expressed through his stories, it reveals a strong sense of rebellion. He has created stories of new senses. Because Bagul describes emotions in his stories, he captures the nuances of intimacy and anger in words. The emotion in his stories sometimes takes the form of nature and sometimes social. Appears in cultural form Baburao Bagul represents the female characters in his stories. The male characters in his stories think that a woman is only like the flesh body and that she is an object to be enjoyed. Therefore, the women in the story have been made under the weight of the patriarchal family system in the social system, its dominance, its ignorance and its poverty. Tradition has done injustice to these women. Similarly, men have done injustice to them. Bagul's story is revealed through the suffering of Dalits. He has boldly presented everyday issues in his story. Middle-class storytellers in Marathi have written love stories. Happiness and sadness, the love relationship of men and women in the house, are drawn. Lust has been given importance by giving priority to body pleasure. The parts of women are described boldly. But Bagul did not go that way. He tackled social problems through stories. The story has been taken from the personal level to the social level.

Nature of the Novella:

Let's take a detailed look at the nature of the novella *Sood*. Baburao Bagul's *Sood* is considered a work that is small in physical size but grand in its artistic merit and impact. Much like his short stories, this novella is an extraordinary tale that breaks away from traditional norms and proves to be intensely sensational. From the perspective of its plot, this novella possesses a fresh and strikingly unique narrative that stands out as remarkably innovative within Dalit literature. Only a gifted writer like Bagul, who has closely observed and lived the life of the downtrodden, could create a masterpiece like *Sood*. This novella is different from other stories of Bagul. Also, the heroine of this story is different from the heroines of other stories. This heroine has gained self-awareness, so she is moving towards light, towards self-esteem. In the company of a monk, she has been introduced to the meaning of life. This optimism is expressed in Bagul's story. This story proves the power of the best literary works to give momentum for the change in the right direction of the society.

The Ascension of the Heroine:

The heroine of the novella *Sood* (Vengeance) is Janaki, also known as Jwalaprasad, the daughter of Murali. Janaki is a Dalit heroine. She is vulnerable. She has rubbed off in a male-dominated society. She is overwhelmed by helplessness. After becoming mature, the mother arranges her marriage with Khandoba. As Murali's daughter has no place in the society, the target boys of the village, like Dagdya, Janya, Rasoolya, Isanya, Pandya, Kulkarni, Deshmukh, etc., oppress her. Such inhuman torture will happen to anyone else. A Dalit woman belongs to no one. They also feel that Dalit women belong to them. She is subjected to many sexual assaults. Her female body suffers. Many customers fall on her body like flies on molasses. She begins to hate her femininity. She knew that many women had become men, just as in mythology, and princes had become women. So Janaki also wanted to destroy her femininity. The real Janaki is the central point of this novella. Because of her, this novella has become one of the most effective, radical novellas in Dalit literature. She is an extraordinary woman whose life has been scorched by the harsh fires of reality. The word 'extraordinary' here refers to her traumatic past; having survived inhuman mental and sexual abuse, including rape, she is consumed by a fire of grief. Driven by this agony, she sets out to take revenge for her own womanhood and the very fact of her birth as a female. Developed out of an infinite loathing for her own femininity, she adopts a masculine identity—



donning male attire—and leaves her home to assert a sense of “manhood”. During her journey, she encounters ‘Swami’, a virtuous and innocent-minded sage. In his company and through his proximity, she eventually discovers the true meaning of life. Ultimately, she experiences the highest realisation of life. She is filled with immense joy at reclaiming her lost womanhood. Janaki’s femininity, which had been crushed and trampled by the boots of lust throughout her life, finally finds fulfilment in the company of the Swami. In the profound silence of the Himalayan surroundings, the two of them honour life for the very first time. Thus concludes this short yet virtuous story, steeped in such deep meaning.

The Inhuman Atrocities of the Heroine:

Janaki and her mother are the representatives of Dalit women who suffer in such an unequal society. As a daughter of Murali and a Dalit woman, she becomes a prey to the caste discrimination and conventions that forcibly victimise her. In *Stritvachi Adim Sahajprerna: Sood*, M. N. Wankhede rightly comments on Janaki’s tragedy. He states that, “She is one of the daughters of Dalits called Murali, her language testifies to 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” (Wankhede, 22). He further continues, “Janaki is a heroine of Dalit people.” Who else would bear such infernal atrocities? Dalit women are anybody’s possession” (Wankhede, 23). The question was asked around the world—and even her own mother, Gangu, asked her, “What kind of ‘honour’ does a Murali’s daughter have? ‘You fool, what has God even given you? Cry in His name, but what has that corpse of a god given you? Do you have land? Do you have a caste? Do you have a lineage? What do you have? All you’ve got is this fair skin. It’ll sell in the market—so sell it. Earn. Eat. Wear fine clothes. And then, die. You’ll rot and die” (Bagul, *Sood*, 32). While returning from the floor mill, a crew of ruffians chase Janaki, 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, *Sood*, 18) When Janaki is handed over to the custody of her husband and mother-in-law, her plight didn’t complete with her marriage; rather, it continued in more horrible ways. Her mother-in-law sells her to Rasul, a butcher. Rasool too regards her as a body and humiliates her for two years and sells her to Naikin, the woman who puts Janaki in prostitution and starts earning money. Janaki is thus also a victim of convention-based caste and gender discrimination. The cycle of her exploitation gets renewed in a more inhuman form the moment when she is handed over from one hand to the other. The crew of vagabonds violently raped her. Her mother forcibly wants to put her in her prostitution. Her mother’s lover, Dagadu, views her as a plaything and forcibly rapes her. Gangu mixes drugs in her food to make her fall fast asleep so that Dagadu can get an opportunity to consume her. The writer narrates, “She forcibly put her down. Pressed her arms hard with her feet and sat on her bosom. Shut her mouth fast with her hands so that she cannot scream aloud and signaled Dagadu to proceed. He started taking off her clothes. She came to her senses 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 her back; she fell down and cried aloud in pain” (Baviskar, 583).

When she gets married, her husband and her father-in-law regard her as a commodity and sell her to a butcher. Rasool too after using her for two years sells her to Naikin, the owner of brothel house who puts her in prostitution. Janaki 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. Janaki survives the inhuman brutal forms of oppression and exploitation and thus begins to rebel and revolt against the hegemony that caused her plight and denied her birthright 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” (Miskita, 117). How long can such a woman withstand the brutal atrocities and rapes with no intervention of laws anywhere in any form to safeguard her existential rights? She must break the religious conformist barricades that have constrained her. She plans to kill herself and goes to a riverside to commit 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. In *Baburao Bagulanchya Kadambaraya*, Subhash Pulavale rightly comments, “A Dalit woman rejects her body as it is regarded as a plaything and the offspring of all the pains, sufferings and exploitation, but when a woman's body is perceived with dignity and respect, she accepts her womanhood wholeheartedly” (Pulavale, 128). Subhash Pulavale rightly points at the reality of *Sood*. He terms it a fiction with “a naked reality of a Dalit woman who is regarded as any man's possession and a plaything to appease male hungers” (Pulavale, 127). It is here; she disguises herself as Jwalaprasad, a sannyasi, 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 that the prime cause of her sufferings is her caste and then the body. In her view, the cause of Janaki's despising her body is ‘Being a daughter of Murali, she is not respected. The upper-caste Hindus exploit her sexually and her exploitation begins the day she enters puberty’ (Nikam, 97). It is on her way to the Himalayas; 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 Rajan's opinion, “It is due to the ignorance and superstitions that people even in the world of science believe in gods and desire heavenly salvation.” (Rajas, 15). Each of these was a challenge that constantly stung Janaki's womanhood. She was not at all willing to enter the prostitution. Seeing Janaki's refusal from the very beginning, her mother, who was well-versed in the business, would get annoyed while trying to convince her: “Which brat taught you this 'saintliness'? Look, you're in your prime. Start now; enjoy yourself, you silly fool! Are you still a child? Why are you so disgusted by this? Don't you understand what pleasure is?” (Bagul, *Sood*, 19) and her life began to put up for sale.

As she recounts each memory of sorrow and inhuman atrocities, Swami asks, “Is your anger directed at your body or at society?” Janaki replies, “At God, country, body, and society—at everything. All of these were the causes of her suffering. It becomes necessary to reach her original, primitive state by rejecting the entire legacy of this “culture” that tortured and pained her. This is because only in that primitive state does one has the power to dissolve the deceptive ego of civilization” (Jadhav, 42).

The author paints a serene picture of the Himalayan union with a sense of weariness and wonder, drawing a parallel to the primordial couple. The poignant ending highlights a mystical union amidst a menacing, silent landscape, evoking a powerful, almost divine, atmosphere. “And all the distance between the two of them vanished. The cruel darkness outside had sprouted many predatory eyes. They were growling and moving forward—and the atmosphere had become as solemn as it was at the birth of life while the moon emerged like Yajnaseni appearing from the flames” (Jadhav, 02). It is a stunning reality to see that the people, even in the twenty-first century, believe traditions, conventions and outdated rituals organised systematically for their exploitation and oppression.



The Theme and the characteristics of the Novella:

In *Sood* (Vengeance), it appears that the core layer of the novel is formed by Janaki's experiences. However, that is not the only layer. Her world also includes her mother, who casually encourages her toward the flesh trade, and the lives of the Swami's disciples. These additional layers elevate the narrative far beyond the scope of a short story or a novella. Yet, the experience remains centered within the limits of Janaki's life journey, portrayed at the steady, deliberate pace of a novella. Its treatment is like that of a novel. However, it does not reach beyond Janaki's life into a specific historical period. Consequently, *Sood* takes the form of a novella. Janaki's journey—her evolution, self-absorption, hesitation, and irritation leading to a spiritual expansion and a realization of life—is the central theme. The journey ends at this final stage of development because there is no further progression for this experience; that is the extent of its scope. Since Janaki's journey is the central focus, she is portrayed with great clarity, whereas other characters in the novel remain less expressive. The society is depicted as lustful and greedy, viewing her only as an object of beauty and physical consumption. Even her own mother pushes her into the profession. Driven by a desire for revenge against them all and a deep loathing for life, her journey begins. However, by the end, her encounter with the 'Swami' leads to a profound life-realization. This progression—from her initial state of mind to her ultimate spiritual awakening—shapes the novel's person-centric narrative, defining both its structural form and its thematic direction. This serves as the framework for the depiction.

Here, the author's purpose is not merely to trace her life, but to provide a realization of the personal experiences and journeys she encounters through her growth and life path. Other characters in the novel appear only as needed for Janaki's portrayal; their development does not equal the depth of her own journey. While the novel offers a complete awareness of life, its scope remains limited on a personal level. In *Sood*, we see this complete consciousness of life through Janaki's perspective. Thus, based on the above explanation, it qualifies as a novella (short novel). The Novella, *Sood* fits the definition of a novella because it is concise yet possesses the depth of a full-length novel. It focuses on a single, intense conflict and a specific set of characters, driving home its social message with sharp, impactful realism.

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A Journey of Psychological Revolution:

When examining the story *Sood* (Vengeance) in the context of a novella, it becomes clear that it is primarily the journey of its protagonist, Janaki. The narrative focuses on her psychological evolution, her distinct individuality, and the emotional states she experiences at every stage of her life. The novella is significant because it captures a comprehensive emotional development: moving from her initial desire to seek revenge against her own womanhood to her final realisation and the joy found in embracing her female identity. The author has handled this transition with great skill. Structurally, the novella as a literary form aims to depict a specific individual's personal journey within a condensed space. Given the plot and the depth of Janaki's transformation, this story fits perfectly within the novella (form) framework.

Reflection of Mahatma Phule's and Dr Ambedkar's Ideology:

Baburao Bagul was a writer deeply influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement, and this inspiration is intensely reflected in his literature. The characters in his novels strive to break away from their traditional roots. His works vividly portray a range of emotions, including anger, love, lust, and motherly affection. Within his novels, one finds characters who demand justice through struggle and emphasise the bond of brotherhood. At the same time, he depicts individuals who have become helpless or enticed by the wretchedness of traditional life. Occasionally, a sense of vengeance is also evident in these characters. In showing his characters the path to liberation Bagul has created personas that embrace both a rebellious spirit and a sense of optimism. Ultimately, through his novels, he delivers an indirect message of life-changing transformation. Baburao Bagul's novella *Sood* (Vengeance) is a powerful reflection of the philosophy of human liberation advocated by Mahatma Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The novella manifests the ideals of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar fought against the structures of caste and patriarchy that are dehumanised individuals. In '*Sood*', Bagul portrays characters who are trapped in these oppressive systems but strive for dignity.

The novella doesn't just depict suffering; it highlights the rebellion against social injustice, aligning with the Phule-Ambedkarite vision of a society based on equality and freedom. The core of the novella revolves around the idea that, "womanhood is a precious thing" (Limbale, 02). Bagul challenges the traditional, regressive view of women as objects or victims of shame. By centring the narrative on the struggle of a woman, he elevates her status from a mere victim to a symbol of resilience. This glorification of womanhood is a direct nod to the reformist tradition that sought to restore the agency and honour of women in Indian society. The title *Sood* (Vengeance) is not just about personal vendetta; it represents a social "settling of scores" against a system that has long exploited the marginalised. When the protagonist asserts her identity, it becomes a radical act of self-reclamation. In essence, *Sood* is a literary manifestation of the struggle for human rights. By portraying the fight for the dignity of womanhood and the breaking of social chains, Baburao Bagul successfully translates the Phule-Ambedkarite philosophy into a gripping narrative of liberation.

Conclusion:



Dalit women's sexual abuse and harassment is the central theme of this novella. The writer focused on the hypocrisy and lechery of upper-caste people with the Murali system along with the oppression of Dalit women and family and their plight for existence. The woman from the lower caste was and is being forced, in oblation, to devote her whole life to community service. In some parts of Maharashtra State, women are being forced to be murals, and this is a very important form of oppression. Mahatma Phule – Dr Ambedkar's philosophy of human liberation is revealed in Bagul's novella *Sood*. Femininity is a precious thing, which is why Bagul glorifies femininity in *Sood*. This novella is considered to be a work of art, small in size but great in its quality. Like his story, this novella is completely different and highly exciting. In terms of plot, this novella is a new innovation in Dalit literature. Only a genius like Babul, who has seen and experienced Dalit life at the bottom, can write a masterpiece like *Sood*.

The ultimate transformation of the protagonist in the final stages, framed by a timeless sense of peace, is truly captivating. This film's portrayal of inner strength reinforces one's belief in human resilience. Witnessing a rare and superior possibility of human evolution unfold on screen renews one's faith in our growing potential. While many of Bagul's stories are deeply unsettling, *Sood* (Vengeance) elevates the reader. It brings a sense of fulfilment and balance to the mind, leading to a state of pure well-being. This novella leaves the reader with a wealth of profound insights. Thus, Janaki's rebellion against the religion is rendering an example of the worse treatment women get in society, so as a nation, the intellectual people of the country must raise a strong voice against such discrimination and violence; if not, then it would not take much time to disturb the peace of the entire nation. Each act of atrocity and violence must 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 a serious threat to the nation in the coming years.

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