**Bagul, Baburao (1930\*-2008)**

Aniket Jaaware

A major inspiration to a younger generation of Marathi ‘dalit’ authors, Baburao Bagul’s literary and critical writing is somewhat atypical of what subsequently became famous as ‘Dalit’ literature (‘literature of the oppressed’) after 1972. Bagul was also actively involved in the discussions that would later lead to the founding of the Dalit Panthers. Having published stories in magazines earlier, he published his first volume of short stories, *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I Hid My Caste, 1963). He reinforced his reputation with his short story collection *Maran Swasta Hot Ahe* (Death is Becoming Cheaper, 1969).  Most of his stories explore ‘lumpen’ characters’ and the ethical implications of their actions as they fight to survive the unrelenting misery and poverty of urban modernity. They are characters who survive (or not) in limit situations of hunger and criminality, in dwellings without any civic amenities, and often exploit or violate other characters in similar circumstances.

‘Caste’ often serves as metonymic social detail in his stories, rarely becoming a theme-in-itself as in much subsequent ‘dalit’ writing. An outstanding feature of his writing is the almost aporetic schism between ‘style’ (especially diction) and ‘content’: the diction frequently is alliterative and tends to use words that are derived from Sanskrit (a mark of ‘high’ Marathi), whereas the content is the gruesome and near-impossible lives of the characters in his stories. Such an aesthetic of discord could very well be said to be a feature of modern Marathi literature because Marathi literature became modern and modernist especially with the rise of ‘Dalit’ literature—and Bagul, along with a few other authors, was at the cutting edge.

Bagul’s novella *Sood* (Revenge, 1970) uniquely explores the life of a beautiful woman who is exploited by men, raped and humiliated in other ways, and wishes to become a man. For most part of the novella, she dresses up as a male sadhu and travels with her spiritual guru. Other stories by Bagul also often focus on women characters who are exploited in so many ways. One such story ‘Aai’ (Mother) has become particularly well-known. In spite of the popularity of ‘Aai’, which has been anthologised frequently, not much of Bagul’s writing has been translated into English, thus making him an author less-known to English-users. Reprints of his fiction often come from publishing houses peripheral to the publication business.

Bagul has also written critical essays, compiled in *Dalit Sahitya: Aajche Krantividnyan* (Dalit Literature: Today’s Science of Revolution, 1970), these bear marks of a committed activist’s interest in the ideas of Karl Marx, B R Amedkar and Jotirao Phule among others.

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\* There is some uncertainty about Bagul’s date of birth because he was not sure about it, and roughly estimated the year as 1930 or 1931.