

K.A. GUNASEKRAM'S THE SCAR: THE PORTRAYAL OF A MUFFLED VOICE

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The Indian society and culture has a great history of caste discrimination, exploitation, and marginalisation. And this caste discrimination is still living in the Indian society. Dalit literature is an example of the counter memory of caste system. The stories of some people's life are truly inspiring. Especially in the Dalit literature these stories are quite touchy because there are tears, sufferings, pain and survival in these stories. This literature is dabbled with emotions, poverty, sufferings, discrimination, survival and painful experiences of life. It has always been a medium to express their emotions and feelings. The portrayal of struggle and survival are the key features of Dalit literature. K. A. Gunasekran in his novel Scar beautifully portrayed the sufferings of the life of a dalit. Gunasekran describes how the religions like; Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism merge and losing their identities in a very natural manner. Being a dalit autobiography the novel becomes a representation of a highly suppressed, discriminated community of Indian society. But along with that the autobiography is a wonderful example of a great success after a lot of sufferings of a dalit. Instead of presenting rituals, customs, habits and traditions author portrays him as a hero, and his experiences become the developing source of the narrative. The novel announces that the physical wounds can be cured but the wounds of discrimination and untouchability cannot be cure and they continuously give pain and trouble throughout life.

The Indian social system is very much based upon division of religion. There are maximum number of the whole population are the follower of Hinduism. The traditional Hinducaste system is broadly divided into four groups; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. The Shudra's got the lowest position on Indian caste system. The people of high class are known as Savarna and Shudras are often regarded as untouchables or Dalits.

The colonial period in India was ruled by British. In 1851 the penal code was introduced, which exposes the dissimilar, ancient, and stereotypical nature of Varna system; that how Indian society was dominated by upper class. And through this the supremacy of high was challenged. Till the end of the nineteenth century the condition of low class was very bad and they were treated worse than animals.

Therefore the writings of Dalit community are dabbled with the theme of struggle and survival. The early writings of the community were mostly autobiographical. In which the writer talks about his sufferings and experiences of life and their community. In 1930's the term 'Dalit' apparently used for 'suppressed classes'. And in the year 1972 it becomes an identity for the

people of low class. The literal meaning of the term Dalit is “pressed or rooted in the soil”. The main objective of this literature is to revive and create a separate identity.

Autobiographies are a personal, independent and respectable representation. But a dalit autobiography is the representation of the whole community. Dalit autobiographies have become not only a part of literature but also an important part of Dalit literature.

In India these autobiographies are published in many regional languages like; Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Gujarati, Punjabi and Hindi. There are certain examples of Dalit autobiographies published in different regional languages like; Arvind Malagatti's *Government Brahmanna* in Kannada, Daya Pawar's *Baluta*, Vasant Moon's *Vasti: Going up Untouchable in India*, Narendra Jadhav's *Amma Baap An Man: Out of Caste A memoir* in Marathi, Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Surajpal Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* in Hindi, Bama's *Karakku* and K. A. Gunasekran's *Vadu* in Tamil. At the national level B. R. Ambedkar and Rettaimai Srinivasan are the king pen figures for Dalit autobiographies.

This paper is an attempt to analyse a Dalit autobiography named *The Scar*, written by K. A. Gunasekran. The novel was originally written in Tamil with the name *Vadu* in the year 2001. It was translated by V. Kadambari in English under the title *The Scar* in 2009.

The literal meaning of *Scar* is “A mark that is left on the skin after a great wound heals”. The word also refers “a prominent feeling of permanent sadness and mental pain which left after a great unpleasant experience. It is also suggestive of “something unpleasant or ugly which spoils the appearance or common image”. Leonard Cohen in his *The Favourite Game* writes, “Children show scars like medals. Lovers use them as secrets to reveal. A Scar is what happens when the word is made flesh” (Cohen, Leonard.2010). Gunasekran narrated the scars of his life beautifully in the novel like; the scars of poverty, untouchability, caste and discrimination etc.

The Indian society and culture has a great history of caste discrimination, exploitation, and marginalisation. And this caste discrimination is still living in the society. Dalit literature is an example of the counter memory of caste system. This literature is dabbled with emotions, poverty, sufferings, discrimination, survival and painful experiences of life. It has always been a medium to express their emotions and feelings.

Writing for Dalit is not for pleasure but it becomes a kind of medium or weapon / tool to express their thoughts and experiences. According to Touchable Tales “Dalit writing is a strategy of liberation to convert their sorrows into asserts” (Touchable Tales, 2003).

The theme of this novel is drawn from day to day life. The novel carries an extension and expression of social description. According to Arjun Dangle “An autobiography is not circumscribed by a writer's life alone. It is an expansion and extension of a societal description”. Gunasekran talked about his life up to his graduation. There are two major issues seen in the novel; the first one is, it there is a portrayal of voice of victim and second one is it is a testimony and appeal of a sufferer community. There is not only description of his experiences of life, but also portrayal of a certain time. The language of the writer is heart touching but it does not arouse the feeling of pity and sympathy. Author portrayed number of experiences of this stereotypical caste discriminated society. He describes his father's struggle which he faced to provide him education.

Gunasekran lived in Elayankudi and belongs to a Parayar family. He was born in a big family of six children. Poverty messed his childhood. There was very little food to eat. As they eat good food like idly and dosa only on festivals or on any important occasions. Author claims; “Because of poverty his sisters Kalawathi, Malathi and Jothi did not have the ear-piercing

ceremony"(10). His mother was educated up to eight classes. And in the condition of extreme poverty, she does several works to support a large family. His father was a school teacher in Salaiyur. His family lived in the predominance Muslim neighbourhood. The benefit of living in a Muslim neighbourhood, it saved his family from some of the ugly, stinking stages of untouchability.

There is portrayal of certain incidents which exposes the truth of this typical caste system; as when a clerk comes in the classroom demanding Dalit students to get up to obtain scholarship forms and he addresses their caste. Gunasekran claims that it was very embarrassing to stand up in front of the whole class even then when Gunasekran and his friends did not know the meaning of caste;

“Stand up in front of others in the class, shrinking and cringing, They would reinforce caste identities by labelling us Pallars, Parayars, and Chakilliyars, in front of other friends who never knew what caste was”(K. A. Gunasekran.2009. 5).

One more example is taken from the novel which attacks on this caste discriminated Indian society; And once Gunasekran was going towards Thovoor, there he also faced the effect of caste discrimination; as he was walking with his brother, he askedthe cart man , could he get on to the cart. The cart man replied to him, “What kind of people are you? (21)”, “I am asking your varnashramam? (21)”.

Author’s visit to his mother’s village Keranoor represents a number of incidents and encounters of castism and untouchability. In that village it was practiced by Christians. Whenever his family leaves his village there was a need to lie about caste and claimed to Christians to avoid further problems and sufferings.

Migration was a very important factor of his life and because of this there is portrayal of large community in the narrative. He talked about himself but he did not present himself as a hero. Somewhere the autobiography proves that Dalit is not a caste but it is a state in which people forced to live. It announces that how a person faced so many problems like, poverty castism, untouchability in his life but finally he become educated and successful. He struggled but survives, finally in a good manner: As the author was born in a poor, Dalit family but in spite of that his father struggled for his education and he becomes a successful educated person in his life. Gunasekran was Dean of the college of performing arts at Pondicherry University. And he also became the director of the International Institute of Tamil studies.

As migration was an important factor of his life through which we have seen the effects of caste discrimination dispersed in the different parts of the society. Therefore we could say that the autobiography has a counter attack on the typical mind set of the society towards caste system.And it becomes the voice of a victim or marginal to express the story of his struggle and survival.

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