

Liberation of Dalit people and Hegemonic Power in the Novel *The Scar* by K. A. Gunasekaran

Dr. S. Bhuvaneshwari

Assistant Professor

PG & Research Department of English

Sourashtra College

Madurai-625004

Abstract:

K.A. Gunasekaran's The Scar narrates the familiar tale of caste oppression and prejudice prevalent in the village of Tamil Nadu as a boy who grows up from the Parayar Caste, in the milieu of Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities. As the narrative unfolds, the reader is shown how the 'low' caste negotiates differently with the three religious communities. The deep pain of Paraya surfaces through the risible anecdotes that ridicule the grievously unjust practices of the 'upper' castes. This paper emphasizes the fact that Indian villages are doubly treacherous that is being caste-conscious and cruelty, and that Dalit assertion and emancipation rests in better education for the community. It also speaks about the instances of caste discrimination within the autobiography shall be a gigantic task as every page is full of instances of caste discrimination. Thus the title depicts Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony, to show the in-depth scar of subaltern society under the regime of bourgeoisie society.

Key words: Dalit, Cultural Hegemony, bourgeoisie, marginalized.

The Subaltern studies became the model for historical research of the subaltern's experience of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. The identity of the subaltern native is conceptually derived from the Cultural- Hegemony work of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist intellectual, who coined the term subaltern to identify the social groups excluded and displaced from the socio-economic institutions of society in order to deny their political voices.

In Post-Colonial theory, the subaltern describes displaced to the margins of a society, in an imperial colony a subaltern is a native man or woman without human agency, as defined by his and her social status. The term subaltern designates the colonial population who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power of the colony, and of the empire's metropolitan homeland.

K.A. Gunasekaran is a teacher, folk-artist, dramatist and researcher. He was the dean of the school of performing Arts at Pondicherry University. Currently, he is the director of the International Institute of Tamil Studies. K.A. Gunasekaran's *The Scar* novel narrates the familiar tale of caste oppression and prejudice prevalent in the village of Tamil Nadu as a boy who grows up from the Parayar Caste, in the milieu of Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities. As the narrative unfolds, the reader is shown how the 'low' caste negotiates differently with the three religious communities. The deep pain of Paraya surfaces through the risible anecdotes that ridicule the grievously unjust practices of the 'upper' castes. Our history, ideas, ideologies, conscience and consciousness Northern biases always teach us a Gandhian Dictum that villages are the focal point of civilization. There are many forms of slavery that still existed, like Jajmani and Balutedari Syatem. The Romanticization of village when Ambedkar writes, "The love of the intellectual Indian for the village community is of course infinite, if not pathetic," and "What is a village but a sink of localism, den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?". The life narratives by Dalit writers emerge as a text of the oppressed, where articulations of experiences of an individual testifies to the oppression of the group moving beyond the personal and forms link between the self and worldly conditions. Post-modern Dalit writers pay emphasis is not only on the protest for emancipation and empowerment of dalits bit also display the culture and explore the existential crisis of the class. The narrator while charting the semantics of caste exploitation is an observer voicing for the entire community. He explores the historicity of Dalit's struggle. Untouchability still exists in modern Indian society, though educational opportunities are made available to all and article 17 of the Constitution bans the practice of untouchability.

Gunasekaran's life narrative is not just a work of protest, but it also shows the cultural values of Dalits.

It talks about the art forms and their oppression also, besides commenting on socio-economic conditions; thereby it helps the reader to understand the Dalit's way of life. The writer also shows conversion of religion and recognition gained by the marginalized of the society. The work explores the plight and suffering of subalterns and also criticizes the Brahmins and Hindu caste system. The events which populate the text are ordinary and belong to the everyday realm.

The narrative does not narrate in the pathetic way the conditions of the untouchables, but in a positive light highlights the forbearance, efforts, struggles and courage of not only the writer but other characters too in protesting against the oppression and exploitation in the rigid caste system of Indian society. "I would be oppressed by anger at failing and inflamed by a desire to study" (15). The isolated dwellings of dalits in villages is also a kind of manifestation that they must be regarded as a part of village and should be rejected and ignored as if they do not exist at all. Gunasekaran explores the concept that keeping untouchables who defile the space out of high caste peoples' sight, is also the principle behind many types of prohibitions of entry imposed on Untouchables. He depicts how Dalits are neither allowed to enter the streets of the upper castes, nor their houses. However, the narrator in his childhood has the courage to chase and thrash the upper caste boy at his own house for the wrong done to him. The caste system strictly limits mobility of lower castes and confines them to the ghettos (cheri). As the narrator has the courage to chase the high caste boy in the later's own locality and beat him up for the injustice, he wonders that even his own people are less concerned about his well being but bother more about the dalit's entry in their area : " Nobody talked about the boy who was beaten. They were only worried about a Paraya entering their street and their own house, not caring for the rigidity of caste. (26)". "The people of this caste cannot enter the temples and also are not allowed to use the same bathing ghats. We did not know which caste this canal belonged to. "If it belongs to the upper caste we would be tied to the tree and beaten."(21)

"We were Parayars, they would not offer us a drink in a vessel, but would pour it only in the folded palm leaf."(20)

The autobiography is written in the nature of protest against the caste system and disparity which are prevalent in Hindu society. Since the writer as a child cannot live with dignity in his own religion he shifts between other religions. "I have experienced harassment in the name of caste and have often thought about converting to Islam." (4)

Gunasekaran in his life narrative strongly establishes a sense of the self of not only an individual (himself) but also his community as dalit, which unhesitatingly rejects the notion of varna and refuses to evaluate his (dalit) lifestyle in accordance with the mainstream Hindu values.

"Father would tell us the stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Father was a progressive thinker. Our parents never showed any special interest in God, temples and rituals. We too never came under the influence of faith because of them."(83)

The autobiography narrates the manner in which Brahminical hegemony turned an untouchable body into a cultural space. At Keeranoor, Maravars placed themselves at a higher level and were privileged as Brahmins. At the writer's maternal aunt's place, the Konars were the Brahmins.

"The Konars were not treated well by the Brahmins, and they in turn appropriated the caste arrogance of the Brahmins and showed it to the people of the cheri."(36)

Though Government may plan and promote for schemes such as medical care of the children coming to the school from weaker sections but the narrator presents the reality in his story and it is not that much existence. The author also discusses the position of the Dalit woman, located within Dalit patriarchy and their experiences as the worst form of exploitation. These women negotiate with multiple and unequal patriarchies. Gunasekaran's mother is educated but not allowed to go for job. She is confined to home and in order to meet both ends occasionally sells movie tickets in front of cinema halls, but when the women are prohibited from watching films she has to go collecting firewood for cooking.

"As she cut the thorn trees she would sing quietly the songs of lamentation rueing her fate. I would pay attention to her songs, but I would never fully understand my mother's soulful kennings".(80).

The purity of women, who is a carrier of womb, has a centrality in Brahmanical patriarchy, simply because the very purity of caste is dependent upon it. This concept of women is the central point for maintaining the socio-religious hierarchy of caste. Gunasekaran discusses the myth prevalent in his village of the murder of Michael Amma who fell in love with upper caste boy. Gunasekaran represents the life of Paraya community realistically. Dalits are primarily represented as agricultural workers; very few still follow the traditional roles. The narrative has the power to perform the revolutionary and reactionary functions. The age old system of discrimination and exploitation finds strong opposition in the hands of the author. His pen asserts the identity of not only him as an individual but all those who met with injustice. The claim to the right to be treated as equals to their fellow mortals is laid with sensitivity and strength.

Dalit writers work for providing the dalits with an identity in the society. There is no dearth of creativity in them, but denial of opportunities does not let them explore the world. Gunasekaran's life narrative goes beyond being his personal story and marks the emergence of a new self consciousness influenced by Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy. His parents suggest to him that, "If you study you can live in a dignified manner. So study hard, and whatever you have read, tries to think about it with closed eyes"(81).

In Marxist theory, the civil sense of discussions of the meaning of the term subaltern in the work of Gramsci, Spivak said that he used the word as a synonym for the Proletariat (a code word to deceive the prison censor to allow his manuscripts out the prison), that the who and what of social class are determine through the economic relations among the social classes of a society, but contemporary evidence indicates that the term was a novel concept in Gramsci's political theory. Hegemony, the way class domination is based not just physical force but on the cultural and ideological acquiescence of the working class and the peasantry. The author effectively opposes Brahmanical hegemony and encourages Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization. He attempts to stir up thinking among masses and emphasizes the power of literacy and education. The emergence of such literature in itself is an evidence of a profound change taking place in Indian society. His memory of childhood and youth in this creative work is expressive of the need of this section of society to create stories of miseries, struggles and final success in ways that would alter the present reality. The writer does not satisfy himself by merely penning down the fragments of his memory in a documentary mode; rather he reconstructs them to let his readers have a new perspective on the old one. His mode of

articulation is different from others. Gunasekaran has successfully transformed the full dimension of the atrocities and disgrace suffered by his community into literary expression and experience. Thus, this paper emphasizes the fact that Indian villages are doubly treacherous that is being caste-conscious and cruelty, and that Dalit assertion and emancipation rests in better education for the community. It also speaks about the instances of caste discrimination within the autobiography shall be a gigantic task as every page is full of instances of caste discrimination. Thus the title depicts Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony, to show the in-depth scar of subaltern society under the regime of bourgeoisie society.

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