

Identity crisis in Dalit literature: A study of K A Gunasekaran's *The Scar*

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Abstract

The scar (vadu) is the modern Dalit autobiography written by K A Gunasekaran and translated by V Kadambari. This work deals with how the identity of Dalits is oppressed by the other communities. It explores the caste system, discrimination, and exploitation which isolates the Dalit people from our society. It focuses on the pain and sufferings of Dalits by the Hindu caste system and their conversion of religion to gain their identity. Furthermore, It shows the position of Dalit women and their sufferings in the community. Author Gunasekaran shows his experience as a parayar boy among other communities, which made him question his identity. This paper deals with the identity problems faced by the Dalits and how it affects the psychology of a man. Gunasekaran was influenced by B R Ambedkar's views on the philosophy of education, which can help the Dalits to struggle against discrimination and identity issues.

Keywords: Discrimination, Dalit, identity, exploitation, suffering, Education.

Introduction

Dalit Autobiography has a major role in Dalit literature. It depicts the writer's own experience as a Dalit in our society. Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa* and Retaimali Srinivasan's *Jeeviya Saritira Surukkam* are considered to be the forerunners of Dalit Autobiography. Many Dalit Autobiographies are translated into other languages. Autobiographies of Kishor Shantabai's *Against all odds*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Narendra Jadhva's *Outcast: A memoir*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons we broke* and copious others are translated into English. These translations help others in the world to know and understand Dalit literature. *Vadu* (The Scar) is a Dalit Autobiography written by K. A. Gunasekaran and translated by V. Kadambari into English. Gunasekaran is a well-known Tamil playwright and folk artist who is considered to be the first Dalit playwright. He was the Dean of the school of performing Arts at Pondicherry and the

director of International Institute of Tamil studies. His major works include *Sathiya Sothanai, Ariguri, Thodu and Maatram*. *The Scar* is not only about his childhood experience as a Dalit but also a documentation of certain period. It bears ample testimony to the fact that wounds made of fire might heal, but wounds made of untouchability would continue to give trouble.

The Sufferings of Dalit

There are bountiful predictions on the origin of the Indian caste system, some believe that Aryan's are the one who started the caste system. One person's caste is determined by their birth. We can easily say that Poverty has a Prominent role in Dalits life. They are struggling for their basic needs such as food and shelter, furthermore they are struggling to get a meal every day. In this novel, Gunasekaran and his fellow boys used to sell mangoes and fish and Ordinarily his mother would sell firewood and flat dung cakes for her family meal. They frequently have only porridge given at the mosque for their dinner. Even today, maximum of the Dalit families in our society are struggling for everything in their life because of poverty. The author says, "For all my troubles, Poverty had been the fundamental reason" (Gunasekaran 77). Untouchability is a crime against humanity. According to Article 17 of the Constitution of India 1949 Untouchability is a Punishable offense, but even today we can recognize the victims of untouchability in the form of Dalits like they are only offered drinks in the folded palm leaves and not in the vessels used by upper caste They are restricted from entering the temple or use the same pathway which is used by the upper class people. They are strictly not allowed to touch the upper caste people or their belongings, and they always have to maintain a distance of 8 feet away from upper caste people. According to their ideology, both high and low caste people can't help each other. In this novel, author shows how an upper class man can die, than to get helped by the lower caste people moreover, He questioned the man who saved his life "How can you, a parayan, touch me?" (Gunasekaran 60). The position of Dalit women in their community is cruel. They have to suffer and struggle against both the cast and Patriarchy of our society. Consequently, Girls in their society are not allowed to continue their secondary education considering their family conditions. Gunasekaran's mother was educated, but not allowed to take up any government job. So She used to sell tickets in the theatre. Dalit people are oppressed by every other in our society because of their caste. They were usually asked by others

like “What is your caste? And Where are you from?” Dalit's were practiced like they have to stay at least 8 feet away from upper caste people and to address them as ‘Ayya’ and ‘Aachi’ furthermore the upper class people even held discrimination using the lower caste people original names.

Finding Identity

This caste discrimination, untouchability and oppression has all a major impact on human psychology, especially children Psych. By Indian Caste system people have a delusion that the upper class is meant to rule over the lower caste people whereas they can't look each other as a common human being. Dalit people even restrict themselves from doing something as a common man and directly accepting their place in our society, which is determined by the upper caste. In this novel Gunasekaran as a child, he has experienced so much of harassment in the name of caste (parayar) therefore he had thought of converting to Islam considering his views on the Muslim community around him that they are not aware of the Hindu caste system. Schools are the common ground of the society, but There also one can notice the difference, like an upper class boy can sit on the table and the lower class boy has to sit on the ground. Gunasekaran states that he and his friends were offended when they were asked to stand up (Parayar) in front of everyone for their scholarship in school. These things definitely affect the psyche of the children, who are all till now not even care or aware of the distinction between human races. Dalit people are also practicing their children to respect and worship the upper caste people. Knowingly or unknowingly, they prepare the children psychologically accept that this is the life and need to do all this to live in this society. If someone continues to say that you are lower in others, it's the nature of the human mind to accept it. These differences cause the child to question about his identity in our society consequently, It affects their faith on people and society.

“The root of identity crisis: We seem to know a lot of ourselves, but we can't tell who we are Realize yourself.” (Emundus). He claims that everyone require to know their worth and realize themselves to break this root of identity crisis. Identity is the quality of a Person that establish him different from others, so every human being is concerned about their identity. They want to be Individually identified by their talent, education and other qualities, and conversely Dalit's are always identified by their caste and community and not as a fellow human who can have their own rights. This only creates discrimination. In this novel

Muniyandi, a doctor in Madurai, and also a relative of Gunasekaran, even he is a doctor for everyone out there he is still identified as a parayar boy in his village. Considering the caste, their talents, knowledge and individuality is at the stalk. The author states that “I have often thought about the day when people pushed caste aside, and appreciated me for my talent” (Gunasekaran 68). This is where the identity of the Dalit relies on in our society. Gunasekaran's words reflect each and every Dalit people's thoughts, who are all struggling hard to prove themselves in our society. Dalits are only considered as lower caste people and not as an equal human who have their own Qualities and talents. He wants the society to look beyond the caste and appreciate them for their talents, moreover He wants to be identified as Gunasekaran and not as a parayar boy. Dalit people want to develop their qualities and wants the society to identify themselves by what they can do and not by where they are from. “Our country is still in a state where the village and caste are inseparable” (Gunasekaran 62). The caste system has its full influence in the villages. Therefore, Dalit people want to take off from their villages to escape the suppression of the upper caste people and trying to create their own identity by their profession and education.

Conclusion

According to Article 21(A) of Constitution of India. Education is a fundamental right, and it is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination by the Government. But still, Dalit people have to struggle against poverty and discrimination to get their education. This novel “The Scar” States the importance of Education. Gunasekaran's family believed that Education and knowledge can support the Dalit to get rid of caste discrimination. His mother states that “If you study well, you can live in a dignified manner.” (Gunasekaran 81). Only Education will give you the respect and meaningful life. According to Ambedkar's Philosophy on Education, it is the best way to liberate the Dalit people from their overall discrimination and to fight against their oppression and injustice in our society. He states that “It is Education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery, and it is the Education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain Social status, economic betterment and political freedom.” (Ambedkar). He strongly believed that only Education has a power to destroy inequality and will provide Dalits the knowledge about their (human) rights as a citizen and make them voice out for it. Most

importantly, it will reduce the poverty rate and bring confidence among the Dalit people. There is a separate respect for education in this world, so the Dalit people have to get educated and to gain their individual identity by their talents in our society. The Author projects his childhood experience as a life of Dalits in our society. He describes their suffering from poverty, untouchability, women oppression and caste discrimination among Hindu caste system in a well expressed manner.

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