
Questioning the Stereotypical Portrayal Dalits and Tribal Life: A Study with Special Reference to the Autobiographies of K.A. Gunasekaran and C.K.Janu.

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Abstract

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines the term 'Stereotype' as "a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality". This stereotype divides the social groups' mentality like 'we/'us' and 'others/'them' resulting in prejudiced attitudes that divide the groups into superior groups and inferior groups. Because of this attitude, superior groups act adversely toward the inferior/targeted groups. In Indian society Dalits and Tribals are the most inferior group negatively stereotyped. The present research paper discusses the Stereotypical Portrayal Dalits and Tribal Life in K.A.Gunasekaran's *The Scar* and *The Scar and Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K.Janu*. Dalits and Tribals are frequently stereotyped as impure, untouchables, uncivilized, and uneducated in literature and society. This paper examines how Dalit and tribals are stereotyped and portrayed in literature in a negative light. Dalits and tribals face more barriers to achieving their goals than other social groups, and they have long been stigmatized by the stigma of stereotypes.

Keywords: Dalit, Tribals, Stereotypes, Untouchable, Uncivilized, Superior-Inferior

Introduction

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines the term 'Stereotype' as "a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality". Stereotypes are never true since the majority of stereotypes portray a negative image of a certain social group. Even if it is beneficial, it might be detrimental. This stereotype divides the mentality of social groups into 'we/'us' and 'others/'them.' It fosters prejudicial attitudes among groups, dividing them into superior and inferior categories. On the basis of race, class, caste, religion, and sexual orientation, dominant groups impose discriminatory behaviours on inferior groups. Because of this attitude, superior groups act adversely toward inferior/targeted groups.

In Indian society, Dalits and tribals are the most negatively stereotyped groups. When dominant people consider or observe

dalit and tribal people, thoughts like 'Untouchable' and 'Uncivilized' rapidly spring to mind. The Brahmins have deliberately created this stereotyped image in Hindu society through the religious texts *Vedas, Smritis, Puranas, Epics..etc.* It fosters a prejudiced attitude against the excluded minority, which is portrayed adversely in literature, art, painting, mass media, folk songs, and society. The present research paper examines how Dalits and tribal life are stereotyped in K.A.Gunasekaran's *The Scar* and *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K.Janu* where they are shown as impure, untouchable, uncivilized, unskilled, illiterate, poor, and dirty. Furthermore, this paper examines how Dalits' and tribal are the negatively portrayed and biased in literature and society. More than other social groups, marginalized writers have faced numerous obstacles in pursuing their goals, and they have been stigmatized by unfavorable perceptions.

Untouchable

Dalits are considered untouchable in Hindu society because of their affiliation with carrion and other polluting things, forcing them to live away from Hindu castes to prevent contamination and untouchability. For instance, in India, the 'Two-tumbler system,' which involves serving water or tea in two separate tumblers, is a kind of untouchability. Many modifications have occurred in the practice. Dalits were once served tea in coconut shells, whereas upper castes were served tea in steel cups. Dalits were taught to sit on the

floor rather than on seats, but now they are served tea in disposable plastic cups while others are served tea in stainless steel cups. Gunasekaran chronicles his own experience:

Early in the morning, cousin Jayaraj and I would go to the tea shop and drink tea from a *vattai*. Whoever drank from such cups could easily be identified as Dalit. We could work at the kiln regardless of the hunger pangs till eight or ten having just had tea. (85)

Not only Hindus, but also Muslims exercised discrimination against Dalits. On their way to Thovoor, Gunasekaran and his brother Karunanithi were given water with cupped hands from Muslims houses in Karunchutti. He says "the Muslims here are surrounded by many other castes like Saanar, Konar, etc. they must have learnt from them" (21). When Ambedkar and his dalit colleagues visited the fort in Daulatabad, Hyderabad, they washed their faces, bodies, and garments in the public tank. The old Muslim guy yelled arrogantly "why did you not tell these outsiders that this tank could not be used by untouchables" (BAWS, Vol. 12, 684). According to Ambedkar, a person who is untouchable to a Hindu is similarly untouchable to a Muslim.

The image of Dalits as untouchables is already ingrained in the minds of caste Hindus; as a result, as soon as they are identified as Dalits, caste Hindus run away from them to escape untouchability. According to the Evidence a non-

governmental organization, 104 villages in twelve districts of Tamil Nadu still use the Two -Tumbler system. A glass mug is provided to one community in some areas, whereas the AdiDravidars receive a silver mug and plastic cups (104 Kiramangalil).

Uncivilized

Across India, where the Dalits and tribals have lived for thousands of years, they remain uncivilized. They are not just uncivilized, but some of them have been subjected to persecution, leading to their classification as criminals. The caste Hindus never attempted to civilize or guide these tribals to a better life. They may still refuse to believe that no Hindu efforts to civilize, provide medical care, reform, or make them decent citizens are to blame for their uncivilized state (AC 184). Since independence, the government launched a number of projects aimed at improving the lives of the underprivileged, but no concrete results have yet been achieved. As a result, they went without basic necessities such as water, a home, food, sanitation, clothing, and education. That made them uncivilized.

Dalit and tribal communities were usually found in and surrounding dirty areas. Tribals also used public roads to take baths, urinate, and latrines without fear of disease or sanitary issues. Janu guarantees that "That is how the roads were turned into public toilets. This is how we got to be called an unclean people"(50). Because there were no proper bathroom facilities, the caste Hindus purposely contaminated their settlements.

Although clothing is regarded as the most important emblem of civilization, Dalits and tribes continued to wear old and filthy clothes during the civilized era, especially at festival times. For all celebrations in *The Scar*, Dalits borrowed used garments from the shop. Gunasekaran's father's student sent some new garments from Malaysia and Singapore as a gift, but instead of wearing them, he sold them at the business to raise money for rice and old clothes. Gunasekaran recalls "we used to buy old shirts and pants for four to ten rupees from the same Pullampan shop. We would alter them to size before we wore them. I don't remember my father ever buying new clothes for us" (22). Roman Catholic priest also gave him second-hand jeans and shirts given by the foreigners. He changed them and put them on like new, which made him happy.

Ambedkar too experienced the same event, in which his sister only washed their clothes at his home, despite the fact that Satara had no washer men. They couldn't afford to pay the washer men, of course. His sister did the washing because they were untouchables, and no washer men would wash an untouchable's clothes (BAWS, Vol. 12, 671). Thus, Dalits never sought to dress neatly and cleanly in order to avoid teasing the upper caste, whose taunts cut deep through them like poisoned arrows.

Tribal groups were recognized for their distinctive clothing. Modernization and socioeconomic progress have forced them to abandon their traditions, medicines,

art, music, clothing, food, culture, and so on, all of which are endangered. Civil society also wants them to be poor and powerless, forcing them to work hard to keep them alive. Our traditions and the way we dress, Janu observes, live on among our ladies even now (53). Because they don't have a second dress to change and wash, tribals frequently wear a ragged, old, and toned outfit, which makes civil society consider them dirty. Adiyatribals in Mother Forest wore a single garment to cover their upper body. If their sari wore out, the older women would break it into two or three pieces and utilize them. Janu wore a *chela* (a single strip of fabric worn by tribal womenfolk to cover the chest) when she was younger (6). Tribals were more embarrassed, ashamed, and mocked by civil society when they wore worn and damaged garments. This shame encouraged tribal children to dress in bright colours. They created garments from bananas while working on the jenmi's farm.

Tribal women were often in a lot of pain during the rainy season since they couldn't change their garments. Even when they reached adolescence, they never donned new clothes. Instead, they were used to washing and drying old clothes, which made them excited to put on new ones. Janu says "After a bath in the stream we had to wear a new *chela*. Not new only the old one washed and dried" (20). Tribal children donned colorful cloth dresses for the first time while caring for the babies of teachers who always gave them new dresses. Janu described how lovely the garments were "Teacher bought me a

dress... It had little black dots and was painted with several butterflies... It was as if a stone had been thrown at a beehive... And it was of a very thick fabric"(8). They were motivated by the colorful costumes to study tailoring from members of the civic society. Janu made beautiful garments for small toddlers out of leftover clothes. Whatever tribals dressed, civil society looked down on them because they were filthy and worn out. "They way they dressed invited lewd comments"(48).

The government set up a water supply for the wooded areas, but no one is allowed to use it. Janu guarantees it "there is a *panchayat* pipe taking water downhill, but we cannot use that water. Should we wait for death without a drop of drinking water just because the houses do not have numbers on them?" (42). They were forced to steal water illegally from the *panchayat* pipe due to a lack of water, which prevented them from bathing or washing their clothes. Janu proves this "Little children grow up running noses, without water from the pipes, without a bath, without clean clothes. This community stands in a queue to fetch water and people quarrel with each other". (51)

Water scarcity rendered them unclean and dirty, resulting in battles within their society over minor issues like "someone's fowl dirtying another's house, someone's baby defecating in another's courtyard, and someone else polluting the drinking water with washing soap" (52). Nowadays, the tribal condition is similar to that of individuals riding in auto-rickshaws

when they leave their homes. In this approach, tribal society should be concerned with hygiene, profanity, and stench. According to Ambedkar, civilising the aborigines is adopting them as your own, living among them, cultivating fellow-feeling, and, in short, loving them. Hindus, on the other hand, cannot do what the Christian missionary did because Hindus' life ambition is to protect their caste, which is a valuable possession, at all costs. The Hindus cannot afford to lose it by making contact with the aborigines. As a result, Ambedkar concludes that Hindus' failure to let the primitive remain a savage in the midst of civilization is due to caste. (AC 184)

Submissive

The master-servant connection is the most important relationship in the *Chaturvarna*. Despite their differences, the three classes, *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Vaishyas*, were able to work together through compromise. The lowest castes were compelled to work at the lowest level for all classes, and they had no way of escaping or means of escaping. As a result, they came to terms with their acceptance of eternal enslavement as their fate. They couldn't think or know the road to salvation since they were deprived an education..

The lowest castes should obey caste Hindus, but caste Hindus should not obey them, according to *Chaturvarna*. They treat Dalits with contempt and refer to them as 'hey', 'ei', 'you', or by their caste designation. In *The Scar* Muniyandi,

Gunasekaran's uncle, worked as a chief doctor in Madurai, where Konar people from his village came for treatment. They all admired him as a doctor, but when Muniyandi returned to his hometown, the same Konar people referred to him as "what Muniyandi or EiMuniyandi! When did you come from Madurai?"(63).In the village, the respect that one received in the metropolis dwindled. Dalits could not push beyond the limitations since they accepted it as fate.

Similarly, Dalits should refer to upper-caste persons as 'Ayya' and 'Sami' instead of their names. They would be penalised if this was the case. "Dei," Gunasekaran said to an eight-year-old upper-caste youngster one day. "Dei Why are you cutting away the flowers and tender fruits of our tree?" (51). The boy smacked him and went away, but later he brought a bunch of upper caste people who brutally threatened him. "Do you know whom you have addressed as Dei ?. We will cut your tongue. Are you aware of the difference of between your caste and ours...You have the audacity to address one of us as 'Dei', is it?". (51)

In the *Panchayat*, his grandfather fell at their feet to forgive him. He told him that it was a caste norm that they should be respected and not addressed by their names because they were young, but that upper caste people always called dalits by their moniker (nickname) despite having grand names. His grandfather's name was Karunanithi, but he was referred to as 'Karuppa' and his father's name was

Azhagan, but he was referred to as 'PeriyaAzhaga' (46). It demonstrates that dalits should not be given magnificent names, whereas caste Hindus are given complex names. They discriminated even in name which because plays an important part in revealing one's caste..

Alcohol Addiction

Alcoholism is disproportionately prevalent among the poor and socially underprivileged, particularly tribal people. All states have banned indigenous and individual alcohol manufacturing, forcing tribals to rely on outsiders for their needs. Women are more responsible in tribal groups than men. They all go to work in the fields and look after the little ones, but the men just go for walks in the woods. As a result, outsiders exploited their ignorance by making people addicted to alcohol in order to abuse their land, physical energy, and resources.

In *Mother Forest*, All the tribal guys drank toddy (palm tree nectar) and arrack (kind of alcohol). Outsiders readily furnished them with alcohol to seize their territories by using this situation. Janu observes "They would befriend our men, give them arrack or a small sum of money and transfer the land in their names"(31). They were forced to work as permanent enslaved people in the *Jenmi's* fields after losing their lands. They were paid meagre salaries that could be used to buy booze. They were forced into a predicament where they couldn't work because of their addiction.

Furthermore, because there was no job in the field, tribals used alcohol to beat their wives. Lakshmi, who married young, was abused by her husband in *Mother Forest*. Janu says, "She used to go out to work, but her husband beat her after getting drunk" (MF 43). Their minds and bodies were corrupted by their addiction, forcing them to exist without alcohol. As a result, they borrowed money on credit to buy booze; making them a perpetual slave to the *Jenmi* because they couldn't respond. Janu assures "there was a steady supply of toddy and arrack in our settlements. The men would get drunk on credit... becoming their slaves... cut down trees for them in the forest for the money owed" (MF 44). More than 60% of tribal households in Jharkhand are struggling because their males are addicted to alcohol and are intoxicated even throughout the day, leaving their wives to labour hard to support their families. Even though *hadia* (rice beer) is a part of indigenous culture, a liquor ban is necessary to safeguard tribal families, so Tigga established anti-alcohol camps around the states and pushed their followers to abstain from drinking alcohol (Minj 2016).

Women, Dalits, and tribals were represented as untouchables, uncivilized, destitute, impure, unskilled, criminals, and so on in Indian literature by Brahmins who solely had the ability of writing. Until the writing was in the hands of elites, the negative stereotyped images put on them could not be eradicated. In the twentieth century, marginalized writers attempted to break free from the elite's clichéd

stereotypes and establish their own identities through their writings.

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