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Wounds Beyond the Flesh: A Psychological Reading of Trauma and Memory in K.A. Gunasekaran's *The Scar*

***Pooja Gothwal**

Research Scholar, Dept. of English & Foreign Languages, Maharshi Dayanand University,
Rohtak

Poojagothwal487@gmail.com

Dr Sonia Malik

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Hindu College, Sonipat, Haryana, India

soniaphougat8@gmail.com

ORCHID ID: <https://orchid.org/0000-0003-3366-9563>

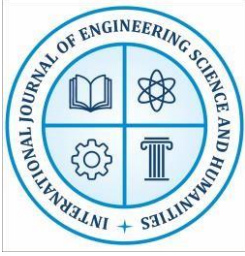
Abstract:

K.A. Gunasekaran's autobiographical narrative *The Scar* (originally published in Tamil as *Vadu* in 2004 and translated into English by V. Kadambari in 2009) stands as a foundational document in the corpus of Tamil Dalit literature, widely recognised as the first modern Dalit autobiography in that language. The text chronicles the narrator's childhood and adolescence as a boy from the Parayar caste in the villages of Tamil Nadu, navigating the intersecting violence of untouchability, economic destitution, and psychological humiliation within a social order that structures its cruelties with deliberate, systemic precision. This paper undertakes a psychological reading of the autobiography, deploying the theoretical frameworks of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as articulated in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Judith Herman's conceptualisation of complex trauma in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), and Bessel van der Kolk's analysis of somatic and neurological trauma in *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014). The argument advanced here positions the wounds narrated in *The Scar* as persistent, structurally produced psychic conditions, locating caste as a chronic traumatising apparatus that operates continuously upon the Dalit subject's interior life and social being. In the text, memory functions as an active and politically charged practice of bearing witness, transforming recollection into a mode of engaging with the unspeakable and the unassimilated. The paper demonstrates how the narrative stages the processes of traumatic repetition, the fragmentation of identity, the internalisation of shame and self-abasement, the body as a site of caste inscription, and ultimately, the transformation of wounded memory into a discourse of resistance and assertion.

Keywords: trauma, memory, psychological reading, scar

Introduction

The word "scar" encompasses a remarkable density of meaning within its semantic field. As recorded in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, it refers to "a mark left on the part



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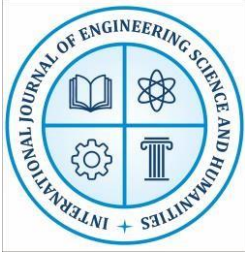
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of the body after an injury, such as a cut, has healed.” In K.A. Gunasekaran’s autobiographical text, the scar signifies more than a physical trace; it emerges as a metaphor for the lasting psychic imprint that caste discrimination inscribes upon the consciousness of those whom the Hindu social order has placed at the very bottom of its hierarchy. Mohammad Tariq, in his critical reading of the autobiography, captures the literary resonance of the title with precision: “The literary connotation of the word scar is a mark that is left on the skin after a wound has healed.” The word also signifies a lasting emotional wound or enduring pain from traumatic experience. “It is also suggestive of something unpleasant and ugly that spoils the actual and natural image of something.” (Tariq 104). What the title announces, then, is the inseparability of the physical and the psychological wounds that appear to have healed on the surface of the social body continue to fester beneath it, shaping personality, distorting memory, and haunting the present with the undigested residue of humiliation.

The relationship between caste oppression and psychological trauma has received sustained critical attention in recent scholarship on Dalit literature. Scholars working within the framework of trauma theory have argued that the violence of untouchability operates through sustained and ordinary forms of injury rather than through a single, spectacular event. As Cathy Caruth observed in the foundational text of trauma studies, trauma is “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual’s past” but is identified rather in “the way it is precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth 4, 17). Dalit autobiography, with its characteristic emphasis on the accumulation of ordinary humiliations rather than the drama of single catastrophic events, offers a particularly illuminating site for the application and the extension of this framework. Jaiswal and Kumar, in their recent study of psychological trauma in Dalit autobiographical writings, observe that trauma emerges as “a condition that is caused by repetitive occurrences of oppression and exclusion” and becomes visible when an unpleasant experience remains “repeated both by remembering and telling it.” (Jaiswal and Kumar 2359). The structure of caste, with its daily insistence upon bodily segregation, verbal insult, enforced servility, and the denial of the most fundamental resources such as access to temples, water, and roads, constitutes precisely this kind of repetitive traumatising environment, one in which the self is perpetually assaulted and perpetually denied the narrative closure that would allow the wound to heal.

Gunasekaran’s autobiography is simultaneously a personal testimony and a communal archive. It covers the author’s life from childhood to graduation, recording what he describes in the Preface as experiences narrated “upto my college days in this account” while clarifying that the text serves a larger social purpose: “Dalit youngsters who read *Vadu* may be inspired to realise that they need to fight this caste-ridden society with more energy than the others do. For the others, this book is an introduction to dalit life” (Gunasekaran, Preface viii). This dual address to the Dalit reader as an act of solidarity and to the non-Dalit reader as an act of testimony is



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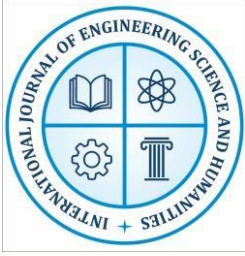
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characteristic of what Sharmila Rege has described as the testimonio dimension of Dalit autobiography as a form of life writing that refuses the privatisation of pain and insists on its social and political legibility (Rege 2006). The text was originally written in Tamil as *Vadu* and published in 2004, winning significant literary recognition before V. Kadambari's English translation brought it to a wider readership. In the translator's own words, *Vadu* is "written with the vision to change hardened hearts" (Kadambari xix). This paper reads Gunasekaran's narration as an enactment of traumatic memory that moves through the stages of recollection, mourning, and ultimately resistant assertion, a trajectory that both mirrors and challenges Judith Herman's three-stage model of trauma recovery.

The Architecture of Caste as a Traumatizing Apparatus

To understand the specific character of the trauma that *The Scar* narrates, it is necessary to first apprehend the structure of the caste system as a mechanism of psychological injury. B.R. Ambedkar, whose thought pervades Dalit autobiographical writing as a foundational intellectual inheritance, famously insisted that "caste is not a division of labour but a division of labourers" (Ambedkar 47). This formulation is critical because it identifies caste as a system that organises psychic and social relations through the graded ranking of persons, where ritual purity and pollution determine status and consign the lowest groups to a condition of hereditary degradation. Ambedkar elsewhere offered an anatomy of the Indian village that dismantles its romanticised image and reveals it as a site of structural cruelty: "The Indian village is not a single social unit. It consists of castes . . . The Touchables live inside the village and the Untouchables live outside the village in separate quarters . . . Socially, the Touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the Untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsmen" (Rodriguez 325).

Furthermore, Gunasekaran's autobiography opens with a scene that immediately establishes this architecture of exclusion. The Siva temple of Elayankudi stands in the part of the village where the Arya Vysyas live in large numbers, and the narrator records with quiet, devastating restraint, "I have never been inside this temple even today. But I have often touched the four stone figure of Ammanavayan, sitting cross-legged in front of this temple" (Gunasekaran 1). This sentence performs a great deal of psychological work. The combination of categorical exclusion ("never been inside") with the small, surreptitious act of touching the stone figure from outside reveals the complex emotional economy of the trauma, a yearning towards belonging that is structurally forbidden, a longing that is expressed only through marginal, furtive contact with the threshold of a space from which the body has been barred. Gopal Guru, in his theorisation of Dalit humiliation, argues that "humiliation in caste society is not an accident but is structured, which defines the way people see themselves and how they interact with others" (Guru, *Humiliation: Claims and Context* 2009).



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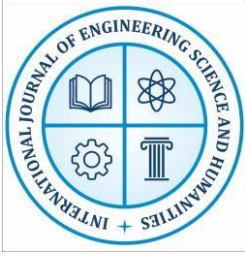
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The temple exclusion that opens the narrative emerges as the paradigm of an entire social condition, establishing the foundational structure of a life shaped by systematic exclusion. This architectural fact is not merely sociological but profoundly psychological. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, asserts that “a history of long-term domination has long-term psychological wounds, which constitute an individual identity and sense of belonging” (Herman 33). The Parayar community’s exclusion from the temple forms part of an interconnected system of parallel exclusions, encompassing restricted access to specific roads, water sources, and physical proximity to upper-caste individuals. As Gunasekaran notes of the Konar community’s rules, as he describes, “See we belong to a Paraya household, and they are Maravars. When men and women of the high caste come, we need to stand at least eight feet away from them. We ought to step aside to give them way.” and must address the upper caste as “Ayya” or “Sami” (Gunasekaran 42, 43). These spatial and gestural prescriptions constitute the grammar of caste subjectivity, inscribing inferiority into the very posture and movement of the Dalit body. Hugo Gorringer’s ethnographic observation is instructive here where Dalits in the villages around Madurai are required to “assume a hunched posture, take their towel off their shoulders and tie it round their waist, lean forward and raise one or both hands in greeting,” performing “exaggerated forms of respect, which are expressed non-verbally through bodily positioning” (Jaiswal and Kumar 2360). The body of the Dalit person is thus not simply located in a degraded social position; it is trained and disciplined into that position, made to enact its own degradation through its very physical bearing.

The School as a Site of Traumatic Inscription

One of the most psychologically significant loci of trauma in *The Scar* is the institution of the school, where education, which Ambedkar posited as the primary instrument of Dalit emancipation in his mantra to “educate, agitate, organise,” paradoxically operates in Gunasekaran’s experience as a site of caste reaffirmation and psychological injury. The school, which ought to be a space of democratic encounter, is instead revealed to be an extension of the village’s caste cartography. The cross-eyed school clerk who enters the classroom with a list of scheduled-caste students becomes the vehicle of a public, institutionalised humiliation that leaves a lasting impression on the narrator. Gunasekaran writes:

‘How many in this class are Parayars?’ he would ask. ‘Put up your hands! How many are Pallars? Stand up, I will count. Look, all of you should come to the office after class to pick up your scholarship forms which should be filled up within a week’s time and returned to the office.’ Even now, it hurts to think about those times when we had to stand up in front of the others in the class, shrinking and cringing. They would reinforce caste identities by labelling us Pallars, Parayars and Chakiliyars in front of our friends who never knew what caste was. (Gunasekaran 5).



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The phrase “even now, it hurts to think about” is a precise marker of traumatic memory. It signals the persistence of the wound into the present tense of narration, the inability of the psyche to assign the experience to a closed-off past. This is exactly what Caruth describes as the temporal structure of trauma: “a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61), in which the past event intrudes upon the present not as a coherent, narratable memory but as a recurring, disorienting return. The public calling out of Dalit students by caste constitutes a recurring practice, a regular feature of school administration. This quality of repetition distinguishes the trauma of caste from more conventional trauma models. A chronic, daily erosion of the self-constitutes the ongoing condition, from which recovery cannot be dated to a single catastrophic event. Ali Mojiz Rizvi, in his study of the text, notes that “the magnitude of caste superiority has devastated in his boyhood itself. This psychological humiliation made numerous scars in his heart. It is the prevailing social experience in every corner of India” (Rizvi 003). The scene of scholarship form collection further elaborates the psychic violence of institutional caste. When Gunasekaran’s father approaches the village headman and local revenue officer for the requisite signatures, he is met with systematic humiliation, as Gunasekaran notes that, “If they saw us in the village, they would ask us to tie up their cattle, dig out a canal, etc., and only then would they sign the forms. Father would feel frustrated every time he had to approach them for their signatures. ‘It’s horrid, the way they displayed their caste superiority before they sign anything” (Gunasekaran 9).

The father’s helpless rage, expressed through his repeated complaint and his compelled compliance, models for the child the psychic position of the caste subject. That position is shaped by the tension between self-respect and submission, and between anger and the awareness that its open expression carries danger. Bessel van der Kolk, in *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* argues that trauma produces a condition in which the nervous system is perpetually primed for threat, in which the individual lives in a chronic state of hypervigilance that is indistinguishable from the normal, ordinary texture of daily life. For Gunasekaran’s family, the anxious deference before the headman’s display of superiority constitutes the texture of everyday existence, embodying the fundamental structure of their ordinary world.

The Body as the Archive of Caste Violence

A recurrent structure in the autobiography is the inscription of caste violence directly upon the narrator’s body. These incidents of physical assault function in the autobiography as both literal wounds and symbolic enactments of the social order’s claim upon the Dalit body. They reveal how caste hierarchy insists on marking, disciplining, and subordinating that body as its most immediate proof. The incident on the narrow bund near Keeranoor is one of the most psychologically rich episodes in the text. Walking back from buying cooking oil, the young



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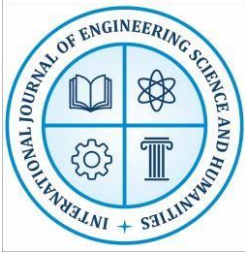
Gunasekaran moves aside on the narrow path to give a man coming from the opposite direction room to pass, and is immediately struck across the face without warning or provocation:

Look at the cheek of the Paraya boy!’ the man spat out, and then went on his way.

It took me five minutes to come out of my state of shock. I put the box down and sat on the bund crying . . . I started walking back home. I had too many questions with myself. ‘Why did that man beat me? What mistake did I do? Why did he call me a Paraya?’ I didn’t get any answer. (43)

The phenomenological detail of this passage highlights the five minutes of shock, the sitting down and crying, the internal interrogation without an answer that captures the psychological mechanics of traumatic encounter with precision. The blow arrives suddenly and without warning. Its unprovoked and unpredictable nature leaves no space for mental preparation or narrative framing. Caruth’s account of trauma as that which “is not known in the first instance” is rendered concretely here, as the child does not know how to interpret what has happened to him and does not possess the cultural vocabulary to name the injury (Caruth 4). His grandmother then supplies that vocabulary, but the naming is itself a secondary wound. She explains that as Parayars they must stand at least eight feet away from men and women of the Maravars, stating, “That is why the man has beaten you” (Gunasekaran 43). The social order is revealed in that moment as one in which the Parayar body is always already trespassing, always already occupying too much space, always already guilty of the crime of existence in the wrong body. The trauma here lies in both the slap and the interpretation that follows it, particularly the grandmother’s transmission of internalised servility as common sense and as the simple explanatory grammar of the world.

However, this incident is not isolated. Later, in Marandai, an upper-caste boy attacks Gunasekaran for the crime of using the familiar address “dei” (meaning “hey”) when questioning the boy about cutting flowers from a tree, stating, “Dei! Elayankudy boy, it is because of Karupa that you have escaped today . . . skinned you alive and rubbed salt on you. Do you know to whom you have addressed ‘Dei’? We will cut your tongue. Are you aware of the difference of your caste and ours? . . . Be careful and know your caste before you speak.” (51). The threats here are not merely rhetorical; they invoke the complete vocabulary of caste violence: skinning, salt on wounds, severing the tongue - an imagery that targets the body, and specifically targets the organs of voice and expression. The threats here invoke the full vocabulary of caste violence through images of skinning, rubbing salt on wounds, and severing the tongue, targeting the body and especially the organs of voice and expression. The caste order demands Dalit silence and threatens surgical violence against the bodily apparatus of speech. Karupa, the grandfather, pleads on his knees for Gunasekaran to be spared. In this act of full-length prostration, a lifetime of traumatised deference is concentrated into a single image that the narrator carries with him as both a wound and a lesson. The text records that people of the village are much scared of the



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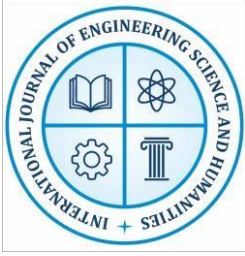
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cruelty of the caste-system. Thatha says to Gunasekaran, “See boy! Even if they (upper caste people) are younger to us, we have to show them respect.” (51). Here the transmission of trauma is intergenerational and the grandfather who has himself lived a lifetime of subjugation passes down the psychic accommodation to that subjugation as the only available wisdom for survival. The incident involving the Konar farmer who suffers from fits crystallises with extraordinary irony the logic of caste untouchability taken to its most absurd extreme. When Muniyandi (a doctor and relative of Gunasekaran) and the narrator pull the farmer off the plough and sprinkle water on him to revive him, the man’s first words upon regaining consciousness are: “Who asked you to touch me? How can you, a Parayar, touch me?” (60). The farmer would sooner have died than accept the touch of a Parayar. The incident is then carried to an evening Panchayat as a matter requiring redress. This episode functions in the text as what trauma theorists call a rupture in the assumptive world as an encounter with a logic so radically inhuman that the psyche cannot absorb it as normal, and yet which is precisely the normal, the everyday texture of social life in the village. Gunasekaran’s observation that “our country is still in a state where village and caste are inseparable” registers less as a sociological comment than as a mourning of that reality, revealing a world in which the survival of the caste order takes precedence over human survival itself (62).

Memory as Psychic Wound and Political Instrument

If the body is one site on which caste inscribes its violence in the text, memory is another, serving both as the archive of that violence and the medium through which the narrator attempts to transform it. The relationship between trauma and memory in the text extends beyond faithful recollection; as Caruth argues in her reading of Freudian trauma theory, it is characterised by belatedness, by the “way in which one’s own survival is not possible in the immediate moment of catastrophe, but possible only in the passing beyond it” (Caruth 92). The adult narrator who writes *The Scar* occupies a position that was unavailable to the child who suffered the slap, the classroom humiliation, and the denial of the temple, namely the position of one who has, at least partially, survived and passed beyond. Yet survival is not resolution. The narrative’s insistence on present-tense formulations such as “even now, it hurts” signals the incompleteness of that passing beyond and reveals how traumatic material from the past continues to exercise its claim on the narrator’s present consciousness (Gunasekaran 5).

Cathy Caruth, in one of the most influential formulations in trauma studies, asserts that “the traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them. Or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth 5). This formulation resonates particularly strongly with the specific character of Dalit memory in *The Scar*. Gunasekaran narrates as one haunted by the history of the Parayar community’s centuries-long subjugation, a history far larger than individual biography that resists full possession or comprehension by any single subject. His autobiography is thus, in the terms proposed by Pramod K. Nayar, not primarily a narrative of



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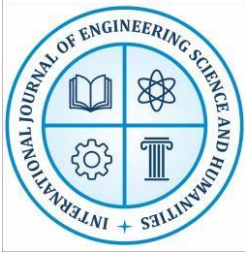
individual suffering but a narrative of “a problematic collective situation,” a form in which “it is an entire community that becomes victim” and which therefore shares its closest parallel with “genocide narratives or holocaust testimony” (Nayar, qtd. in Jaiswal and Kumar 2361). The “I” of Gunasekaran’s narration consistently slides into the communal “we,” absorbing the individual experience into the collective archive of a traumatised community.

Paul Connerton, in *How Societies Remember* (1989), argues that communal memory is transmitted through texts and inscriptions as well as through the bodily practices and rituals that groups perform and pass across generations. In the world of *The Scar*, this transmission takes the form of the grandmother’s instruction in deference, the grandfather’s prostrate pleading, the father’s frustrated compliance with the headman’s demands for menial service before signing scholarship forms. These are not merely personal memories; they are the enacted, bodily transmissions of a collective traumatic inheritance. The Nayandi drummers who hide their instruments when visiting Gunasekaran’s family so that “nobody knows that they belong to the Parayar clan” perform an act of memory management, consciously suppressing the visible markers of their identity in order to navigate a social world in which that identity becomes the basis of persecution (Gunasekaran 3). Their shame and concealment are themselves a form of traumatic adaptation, a somatic strategy for surviving in a world that assigns danger to the mere fact of being seen as who one is. The narrator’s memory serves both as an archive of wounding and as the instrument through which the autobiography powerfully constructs its counter-history. Ravikumar, the Tamil Dalit scholar who writes the Introduction to text, observes, “History, a string of incidents woven together like beads in a rosary, does not leave any trace of the Dalit people. Hence, they write history themselves. Autobiography is the consequence of their yearning to create their society’s history through their individual life story” (Ravikumar x)

The act of writing the autobiography becomes a radical gesture of historical reclamation, asserting that the lived realities of humiliation, hunger, exclusion, and caste violence such as the slap on the bund and the temple denied to the Dalit child be inscribed into collective memory. In doing so, it confronts a dominant readership that has long sustained itself through forgetting, compelling them to acknowledge the histories they have chosen to overlook. In narrating the past, the author is processing a personal wound while also challenging the social order’s demand for silence and invisibility and ensuring that the traumatic history of the Parayar community remains visible rather than disappearing into the oblivion imposed by the upper-caste order upon Dalit lives.

Gendered Dimensions of Caste Trauma

While the text narrates primarily from the perspective of a male subject, it is attentive to the particular forms of trauma that the intersection of caste and gender produces for Dalit women. The autobiography includes several passages that illuminate the “triple marginalisation” - as a woman, as a Dalit, and as poor - that Dalit feminist scholarship has identified as the distinctive



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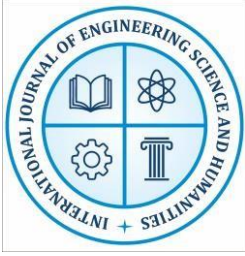
condition of women from oppressed caste communities. The most striking account is that of periamma (aunt) in Thovoor, who narrates her own experience of caste-regulated dress: “From the day I came to Thovoor, after my marriage, I have never worn a blouse. The cheri women were not allowed to wear blouses . . . Girls . . . who came to this village after their marriage too have been subjected to this practice, and have not worn a blouse to this day” (Gunasekaran 26-27).

This is a remarkable and deeply troubling passage. The regulation of women’s clothing, enforced not by law but by the violent consensus of upper-caste village authority, constitutes a territorial claim upon the Dalit female body and asserts that even the capacity to cover and protect the body is a privilege reserved for those of a higher caste. Gopal Guru, in his analysis of Dalit humiliation, notes that “physical torture not only involved physical injuries but also inflicted deep psychological pain, leaving a scar of humiliation in the minds of dalit women” (Munge and Joshi 281). The periamma has lived her entire married life in this condition, so thoroughly normalised that she reports it as simple fact, without visible indignation, in the flat register of one describing an immovable feature of the landscape. This normalisation is itself a form of traumatic adaptation of the psychic capacity to absorb and accept a humiliation so comprehensive that protest seems unimaginable.

The story of Michael Amma, a Pallar woman who falls in love with a Udayar man, deepens the text’s engagement with gendered caste violence. Acknowledging the impossibility of the relationship, she asks, “Will your people allow me to live if I get married to you?” before agreeing to a marriage within her own community (Gunasekaran 37). When the Udayar man finds that she has been betrothed to another, he follows her and kills her. The man is imprisoned for fourteen years but eventually released and employed as a peon in a hospital. The asymmetry of punishment, marked by fourteen years of imprisonment for a man who beheaded a woman, and the brutal brevity of the narration together expose the inadequacy of available institutional responses to caste-gender violence. Bama’s *Karukku*, in a similar mode, records the trembling of elderly abused Dalits and the narrator’s racing heartbeat at the sight of caste violence, thereby locating trauma in the body’s involuntary responses to oppression. In doing so, the text presents somatic experience as the sign of a collective psychic wounding that surpasses the interpretive capacity of any single individual.

The Question of Internalised Oppression and the Fractured Self

One of the most psychologically significant and often least discussed aspects of *The Scar* is its attention to the internalisation of caste hierarchy by the Dalit community itself in the way in which the traumatised subject comes, under conditions of chronic subjugation, to accept, transmit, and in some cases enforce the very degradation that oppresses them. The grandfather’s instruction to Gunasekaran, “Even if they are younger to us, we have to show them respect”, show the voice not of willing submission but of survival-oriented accommodation, a psychic manoeuvre that allows daily life to continue at the cost of a portion of the self (51).



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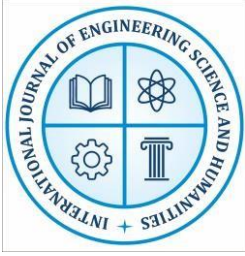
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The narrator's own response to this internalised deference is complex and shifting. As a child, he absorbs it as instruction; as a young adult, he increasingly finds the internal logic unsustainable. His autobiographical reflection on his own contemplation of religious conversion is illuminating in this regard, as he notes, "I have experienced harassment in the name of caste and have often thought about converting to Islam" (4). The consideration of Islam is primarily psychological rather than theological, as Elayankudi, with its large Muslim population, offers the daily experience of a social world in which Hindu caste hierarchy loses its force; as Gunasekaran observes, "Caste was never a barrier. And never did they, even after knowing our caste, discriminate us" (53). The contrast between the Muslim community of Elayankudi and the Hindu villages of Marandai, Thovoor, and Keeranoor functions in the text as a psychological counterpoint, showing that the degradation experienced in the caste-Hindu world emerges from a specific historical system and therefore remains open to transformation. Sharankumar Limbale, in his autobiography *The Outcaste*, identifies a parallel logic when he describes the difficulty of constructing a coherent and dignified identity within a social order that systematically denies the Dalit the basic components of selfhood. The caste system's deepest psychological violence lies in its capacity to compel Dalits to internalise and sustain the very structures of their own degradation.

This fractured self-split between the social identity imposed by the caste order and the inner sense of worth that education, art, and reflection begin to develop. It is one of the most persistent themes of the text. The incident in which Gunasekaran is excluded from an inter-college singing competition despite winning the college competition crystallizes this contradiction, with his exclusion emerging directly from his caste identity. He reflects, "I have often thought about the day when people pushed caste aside, and appreciated me for my talent" (68). This expresses more than an individual's frustration with discrimination; it articulates a fundamental epistemological demand to be recognized as a subject shaped by capacities, relationships, and choices rather than by the accident of birth. Erving Goffman's concept of "spoiled identity" in his work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), which describes how a stigmatised individual is required to manage the discrepancy between the identity others assign and the identity the self-wishes to project which is directly applicable here. The damage is both social and psychic, as the young Gunasekaran must continually negotiate the gap between the self he is becoming and the self the social order insists he will always be.

Writing as Resistance: Trauma Narrated into Counterhistory

The final and perhaps most important dimension of the psychological reading of the autobiography is the recognition that the act of writing the autobiography is itself a therapeutic and political act, a form of what Herman calls the second stage of trauma recovery, "reconstructing the trauma story" and restoring the narrative capacity that trauma has fragmented (Herman 175-77). Writing the self in a social order that has refused to accord the self-narrative



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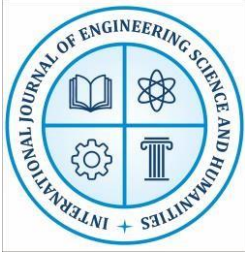
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dignity is a radical act. Ravikumar, in the Introduction to the text, makes this point with particular force that “Gunasekaran’s language touches the depth of one’s heart without in the least evoking pity. We do not see in Gunasekaran’s language the anger of the language of Namdev Dhasal, who wished ‘to copulate with hunger.’ Nevertheless, his language instils that anger in the readers” (Ravikumar xiii). The restraint of Gunasekaran’s narration, evident in its refusal of the rhetorical extremes of self-pity on the one hand and spectacular outrage on the other, functions as a formal strategy of resistance. To narrate the wound in measured, ironic, colloquial language is to refuse the social order’s terms even in the very act of describing what that order has done. Comparable strategies of resistant narration are evident across the canon of Dalit autobiography. In *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki recasts his childhood task of sweeping the schoolyard by hand, a scene in which the Dalit body is drafted into sustaining caste-Hindu regimes of ritual purity, as a powerful indictment of the educational institution’s embedded role in perpetuating caste violence (Valmiki 12). The text here performs the same double movement that characterises the recording of traumatic history and the resistance to that history through the very act of recording.

The title of Gunasekaran’s autobiography, then, functions as more than a metaphor for suffering; it asserts a claim about the nature of memory and history. The scar stands as evidence that the wound existed, as the mark on the body of time demonstrating that the caste order inflicted a real injury on a real person in a real social world, and that this injury endures despite the denial, forgetting, and deliberate suppression of Dalit testimony that the upper-caste order has practised for centuries. The scar is the Dalit’s own trace, the mark that insists on historical record even when the dominant order refuses one. The narration of the scar transforms the wound into witness, private injury into public testimony, and individual psychic damage into a collective claim upon justice. As Ravikumar opines, “This autobiography bears ample testimony to the fact that wounds made of fire might heal but wounds made of untouchability would continue to give trouble.” (Ravikumar xvi)

Conclusion

The psychological force of *The Scar* lies in the way it shows caste as something more enduring than an external social system. In Gunasekaran’s narrative, caste enters memory, gesture, speech, desire, and self-perception, until humiliation begins to shape the inner life of the oppressed as much as their outward circumstances. The wounds recorded in the text extend beyond moments of beating, insult, exclusion, or hunger and persist as enduring aftereffects. They return through recollection and through the ordinary habits of fear that oppressive structures inscribe within the self. What emerges from the autobiography is a map of psychic injury produced by repetition. The schoolroom, the village path, the temple threshold, the panchayat, and the family home all become sites where the mind learns vulnerability. The work, however, does not stop at the documentation of injury. By narrating remembered pain with clarity and restraint, Gunasekaran



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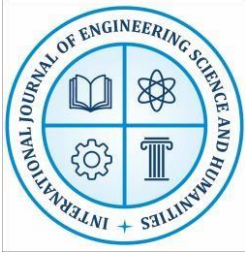
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transforms private suffering into social knowledge and forces the reader to confront the emotional and mental burden of caste that official histories often erase.

At the same time, *The Scar* functions as a narrative of damage, witness, survival, and moral insistence. Memory in the text operates as a living archive through which a silenced community re-enters history on its own terms, rather than serving as passive recollection of a finished past. This explains the autobiography's crucial place in Dalit writing, as it recovers experience from humiliation while maintaining its dignity, and transforms the language of hurt into an instrument of ethical and political assertion. Gunasekaran's work demonstrates that caste trauma is collective, inherited, and deeply psychological, while simultaneously revealing that narration itself constitutes a mode of resistance. The scar persists and evolves, acquiring meaning beyond pain to become evidence, memory, and testimony, a mark that resists erasure and demands recognition.

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