



## Dominance of Power and Revolution for Social Injustice: A Critical Study of Harishankar Jaladas's Novel *Sons Of The Sea*

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**Abstract:** The modern world is enlightened by education which helps to improve the lifestyle and perception of people but there is an area in the society which still needs to be improved. The current society is divided into different class like owner class, proletarian class, dalit class etc. In the novel, Harishankar Jaladas brings the issue of Dalit class who are deprived of all kinds of basic rights. The novelist has portrayed the lives of fishermen who try to improve their life status but fail to earn sufficient money. Their penniless situation leads them to take risk of catching fish on a rainy day. Even after this venture, they are unable to manage enough food because they have to pay half of their earning to the moneylender who lends them money at a high rate of interest. The fishermen are bound to sell their fish to the pirate at their fixed rate. Ganga, the son of Bhuvon, who comes as a ray of hope for the fishermen invokes a spark of revolution in them. The fishermen do not only fight against the moneylender but they have also to do away with the dire poverty which force them to catch fish. The fishermen wait for the season when they will be able to catch fish but the money problems hamper their smooth progress. In spite of economic problem, the fishermen decide not to take money and not to sell fish to the moneylender. They are determined to struggle against the pirate but the pirate's devious plan takes away the life of Ganga. In this paper, I want to expose the dirty game of the power class who do not leave any opportunity to suck the blood of proletarian class.

Keywords: Dalit, Fishermen, Moneylender, Struggle and Problem.

The existence of power in the society is discernible due to the presence of oppressed people. The dominance of power is seen when people forget to resist the injustice they are generally meted out. Generally the upper class people who own good economy, lands, and arm power become arrogant and begin to exploit the lower class economically, culturally and socially for their vested interest. Power holder group make their own ideology to force it upon the society. The powerless society is trapped under the ideologies made by the owner class and do not try to protest, instead they accept it as their fate. Marxist Philosopher Antonio Gramsci connects the term ideology with power and force. He describes that the bourgeoisie class holds the power and economy and force the proletarian class to fulfil their own wish. "The shaping of a people's ideologies is, according to Gramsci, a kind of deception whereby the majority of people forget about or abandon their own interests and desires and accept the dominant values and beliefs as their own" (Bressler 198). Power signifies a negative connotation in the society where the dominant group always rules the oppressed people but French philosopher Michel Foucault sees it as

the cause of revolution. He opines that the presence of power leads the people to protest and understand their rights. As Foucault rightly asks: “if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?” (Foucault 36). He wants to show power as productive and constructive for the society which helps to change a human’s behaviour. He argues: in his book *The History of Sexuality* that “where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault 36). He says whenever power will emerge resistance will be seen as the consequence of it. Foucault describes, power is: “coextensive with resistance; productive, producing positive effects; ubiquitous, being found in every kind of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship” (Kelly 38).

Harishankar Jaladas’s novel *Sons Of The Seas* deals with these problems and exhibits the resistance and revolts of the marginalized sections against the established societal order. Harishankar portrays the life of fishermen community who risk their life for the sake of fishing. In spite of their hard labour, their economic condition does not improve. There are number of occasion when fishermen’s family do not get enough rice to fill their stomach. “If they buy rice and pulses with that money, they have nothing left to buy salt, and when they can stretch the money to buy salt, they have little left to buy cooking oil. That’s how their life runs” (Jaladas 13). The main reason of their starvation was Abdus Shukkur and Sashibhushan who create circumstances for the fishermen which force them to take money from them at a high interest rate. If someone desires to give money to the fishermen on softer terms, they threaten them to take their decision back. Abdus Shukkur and Sashibhusan know that if the fishermen will get money on softer terms, they will be able to save money after fulfilling their family’s need. As a result, they will not come to borrow money from them. Here, we can refer to Marxist thinker Louis Althusser who in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* describes:

The ‘State’ is defined in the Marxist tradition as a ‘force of repressive execution and intervention in the interests of the ruling classes in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat’. This is its basic ‘function’. It is, in that sense, an apparatus or instrument by which the ruling class cements its hold on power. (Althusser 128)

Through the novel Harishankar unearths the pathetic condition of the oppressed fishermen. The cruel businessmen Abdus Shukkur and Sashibhusan control the destiny of all the fishermen by lending them money. “They advanced money on two conditions. The borrower would have to pay ten percent interest per month on the money he took or they would have to sell all the fish they caught at the price fixed by the *dadonder*” (Jaladas 51). The fishermen do not make any objection against their cruel oppression, instead they accept it as their fate. They never dare come out from such boundation due to fear of punishment and being ostracized. “If any fisherman breaks the contract, he is punished through a social trial. The violator of the contract is ostracized. He is prevented from fishing. So, everyone was careful about honouring the contract” (Jaladas 51). Their silence against the torture diminishes their social

position and they fail to participate in education system. They are identified as outcast community, and thus remain ignorant of moral values. For them it is beyond imagination that the fishermen's children will be doctors, engineers and IAS officers. "By the time the fishermen's sons cross ten or twelve they have to go to fish in the sea or canals or marshes. No fisherman or fisherwoman ever thinks of sending the children to school" (Jaladas 10). But Bhuvon the widow of Chandramoni who has died during fishing does not support such orthodox norms and wants to give better education to her son Gangapado. She tries to alter her fate by sending her son to school but the presence of Hindu students creates difficulty for Gangapado. The Hindus perceive themselves as superior and try to maintain distance from the fishermen community. Such biased attitude hinders the fishermen from participating in all kinds of social practices. Bhuvon brings some hope by sending her son to school but Hindu students' ill treatment compels Gangapado to take leave from his education. "The Hindu students didn't treat him well. They kept away from him since he came from a fisherman's family. Even if they sat on the same bench, they sat at a considerable distance. Wicked boys mocked derisively, calling him fisherman or *Dom*" (Jaladas 38). The Hindu boys' harsh treatment towards Gangapado indirectly indicates that being the son of a fisherman, he has no right to earn education. He has born in a fisherman's family, so his only duty is to catch fish.

Gangapado does not leave school only due to mistreatment towards him by the Hindu boys but he also feels his mother is suffering in old age by selling fish carrying it on her head. Economic problem is another cause which leads Gangapado to fish in the sea. He cannot escape from the exploitation which he experiences from Abdus Shukkur and Sashibhusan. A spark of revolution comes out in him when Shukkur slaps a fisherman Kamini. He confronts humiliation due to his protestation to sell his fish at Shukkur's undercut price. Shukkur does not only slap him, he constantly insults him by calling: "Son of a bitch! You son of *Dom*" (Jaladas 66). Such humiliation infuriates Gangapado and goads him to organise a fisher community to stand against the money lender. Here one can use the opinion of French Philosopher Michel Foucault who describes:

You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic. (Foucault 167)

Hence, it is clear that the novel *Sons of the Sea* describes the vile game of power and hegemony and how the fishermen's protest conquers the illegal torture of moneylender. In the novel, it is observed that the fishermen begin to protest to attain their due right. Their silent voice turns into anger and it raises sympathy in other fishermen. The fishermen community take the fisherman's humiliation by the moneylender as their own defamation. When Kamini is slapped by Shukkur, Bijon *bahaddar* in consequence, comes to rescue him and orders Shukkur to buy his fish at

market price, not at his fixed price. On the other hand, Ramnarayan says: “Be careful, if you ever dare to lay your hands on Kamini *bahaddar* or any of the fishermen, then we in a body will crush that hand” (Jaladas 66).

The money lender’s suppression opens the door for the fishermen to unite and raise the voice against their inhuman torture. The fishermen’s unity proves the saying that where there is power there is revolution there. But to stand against the power is not an easy task. The fishermen do not only fight with moneylender but they have to struggle against their fate as well. There are some seasons when the fishermen return home empty handed. They try hard in the sea to catch fish but fail. Their family’s starvation continues for a long period. Their wives do not sit silently. As mothers, they cannot endure the pain of their children. They come out from their home and begin to pray to Mother Ganges. They sang: “O Mother Ganges, please turn your eyes at us. You are our life, you are our death. If you don’t give enough fish to our husbands, we will have to starve with our children. O Mother Ganges, be kind to us. Be kind so that we can worship you in the same way next year” (Jaladas 59). The worship of fisherwomen bears fruit and their husbands start to fish. A number of fishermen come out from their house to catch the fish in the sea but among them some people lose their lives. In the list of dead people, Bhuvon’s husband Chandramoni’s name also occur. Chandramoni comes to the sea with the purpose of fishing by risking his life. Before coming to the sea, his wife prevents him from coming out but he ignores her advice. Every year the fishermen lose their lives, yet they cannot stop themselves from fishing. If they leave this profession, they will face starvation again because they have no alternative. The government of the country fail to serve them with better education, human rights and works. When the fishermen’s family confront starvation, it does not show their failure but the failure of the present government. When one dies in the sea he leaves some unassisted family members who depended upon him. In the novel, there are a number of widow women whose: “husbands died in the sea. Some were claimed by tempests, while some drowned in the fathomless water as they got tangled with the fishing nets. A few died of snake bites” (Jaladas 15).

Such calamities also touch Bhuvon’s house but as a widow, she does not surrender herself to her fate on the other hand she takes responsibility of her husband. She firmly determines to support her family by selling fish. She forgets to care about herself and wants to serve her father in-law and her only son. On the other hand, Gangapado observes his mother’s suffering and feels bad not to help her. For the last few years: “he never saw her oiling it. It’s been a long time she stopped taking care of her hair. Her appearance was getting paler. Her fair skin burnt by sun was losing its luster. He couldn’t bear his mother’s pain and sufferings any further” (Jaladas 39). He decides to earn money to reduce his mother’s pain. It would provide some relief to his mother. His decision to earn money is the main reason to leave his study.

Thus the fishermen confront dual problems from natural disaster and from money lender. Gangapado, as a fisherman, comes as a ray of hope for the fisher community. He spreads awareness among the illiterate fishermen about the pirates’ tyranny. He raises the issue of Kamini who is cheated by Shukkur. Kamini calculates his total money on notebooks after selling his fish to Shukkur but he gives him less money which forces Kamini to protest against him. Ganga jumps into the matter and he

calculates their notebook and proves Kamini's notebook is right. Shukkur desires to cheat his money because he knows Kamini is not an educated man. But Ganga compels him to give the whole money. "At Ganga's bold step, Shukkur suffered a huge loss. The fishermen realized how the dadondars had cheated them all these years. Ganga opened their eyes" (Jaladas 118). The moneylender Shukkur's condition is parallel with Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci's ideology. He plays the role of bourgeois who creates social structure for their vested interest where poor proletariat gets trapped and begins to act as their owners want. But Ganga's protest supports Foucault's theory of power. He observes the torture of the pirate against the fishermen which encourages him to revolt. The pirate creates such a circumstance for the fishermen which compel them to step back from participating in social affairs. Till now, they are unaware of their deprivation, if someone brings it to their memory, they perceive it as their destined fate. But Ganga cannot endure it silently. He asks his fellow fishermen: "Should we be exploited all our life? The pirates plunder your fish. On the shore there is another type of plundering. In the name of *dadon*, butcher Shukkur and Shashibhushan take away all your fish paying you almost nothing. If you remain silent, then you will not be able to fish in the future" (Jaladas 127).

Ganga boosts the morale of the fishermen and suggests them to keep sticks, bricks etc. He says if one fishermen's boat is attacked, we will counterattack together. He suggests them not to borrow money in advance from them but Raimohan, a fisher seller says showing his concern: "do the fishermen have cash" (Jaladas 127). The incident of Ganga's mother's humiliation in the hut brings the fishermen under one umbrella. Bhuvon is insulted by a middle aged man. He shouted: "You *Domni*, since when have I been asking the price and why don't you answer me? No sooner had he finished, he shoved Bhuvon's head with the butt of his umbrella" (Jaladas 132). By calling her *domni* he wants to show that they are from better culture. He displays his narrow mindedness which considers the fishermen as their property. On the other hand, Ganga beats him severely. The fishermen assemble there and appreciate Ganga's valour which is beyond imagination for a fisherman. Ganga's act brings revolution in the whole community because Bhuvon is not only the fisherwoman who faces such an insult. For a long period, the fishermen confront humiliation but no one dares to protest against them. So, all the fishermen refer to Ganga as their pioneer who opens their eyes. Jayanta, a fisherman said: "If any one is insulated like Ganga's mother, then we should retaliate in a body" (Jaladas 135).

The fishermen have sworn that they will never reach the moneylender's door for advance money but their penniless situation does not leave them. They sit and discuss the fishing season which is about to come. The verbal has been begun to resolve the money problem because without investment they cannot go to sea to catch the fish. During the conversation, someone says: "The ones with money have no worries. But, you who have no cash, what will you do to buy the gears?" (Jaladas 141). Their conversation shows their frustration which they cannot remove from their lives. They want to do their business independently but their penniless situation forces them to look back to the moneylender. The novelist Harishakar portrays the present scenario of the country's fishermen who are compelled to live in a deplorable situation on account of the government's failure in providing any scheme to rescue them from

their hapless condition. The moneylender Shukkur and Sashibhushan benefit from this situation and try to suck the blood of the poor fishermen. The fishermen don't want to take risk of their family members' life. The difference of opinion comes from the meeting. The fishermen like Ramhari argues: "What can we do? Again take advance, again Shukkur- Sashibhushan, and again exploitation" (Jaladas 142). After coming to know pirate's exploitation he wants to surrender himself to the wish of moneylender but another about the fishermen Anil raises the question: "How long can you take such beating? How long will you give away the fish that we catch risking our life?" (Jaladas 142). His argument reflects the revolution for social injustice and wants to struggle against the suppression of the moneylender.

The fishermen's protest guides them to help each other. There are some fishermen like Bijon Jedah, Ramnarayan and Golak who earned good money last year. All the fishermen approach them they appeal to them to lend money at the lowest interest which will secure them from the trap of the moneylender. They agree to give money which displays their love for each other. A question comes to the fishermen's mind that the moneylender would not keep them silent if they take money from their fellow. Ganga appears as a ray of hope for the fishermen who tries to boost their courage and teaches them to stand against the pirate. As soon as the fishermen get some relief from the moneylender the barren season stop them to catch fish. "The sea turned very cruel. The water got unbearably salty. There was hardly any fish in the shallow waters; the fish migrated to other parts" (Jaladas 144). In spite of these difficulties, some fishermen go to sea to make their both ends meet and are successful to catch fish. Their resistance to not compromise with their fate become an inspiration for the whole society. But the moneylender does not come from their vile game. They trap one fisherman Gopal who brings all the news to them. Sashibhushan says to his community people that Gopal: "is our man. He is our paid agent" (Jaladas 149). Gopal passes the news that the fishermen will not take advance money from them which enrages Shukkur deeply and leads him to make a cruel plan. They bring some unknown Muslim boatmen to catch the fish into the sea. They want to destroy the fishermen's business completely which will force them to return to them. But the fishermen cannot accept it silently, they raise the voice before Shukkur. He responds negatively and says: "Shut up! Do you own the sea? It belongs to everybody you can. Listen, you Dom, son of a bitch, not only you I will starve you all. Take heed!" (Jaladas 161). His answer reflects the power which tries to suppress the poor people and garners more support from the powerful leader of the society. The fishermen bring the matter to the Union Council Chairmen Afjalur Rahman Choudhury hoping for justice but he says he does not have power to solve the matter as the sea belongs to everyone and anyone can drive their boat to catch the fish. The fishermen return to their home with empty hand which invokes them to take a hard decision. They plan to hijack the pirate's root into the sea. "We have to attack the root of injustice. All the boats of our quarter will go the *patta* tomorrow. We will not allow Shukkur or Sashibhushan to set nets before our nets. We will resist" (Jaladas 164).

The situation of the village becomes horrific and predicts the final battle between power and resistance. Before the start of the battle, Gopal once again plays the dirty role of a spy for Shukkur whom he informs of the fishermen's plan against him.

Shukkur gets time to make counter plan against the fishermen. He thinks if he removes Ganga, no one would dare to protest against them. The day comes when the fishermen will set their foot on the sea; the rain and thunder force them to go there but Ganga does not care about this. He is instructed by her mother not to go to sea because she fears something bad will happen to her son. Ganga assures her reminding the name of Bhaghoman. Ganga leaves for the sea alone which gives an opportunity to Shukkur to execute his plan. Finally, he traps him across the road and kills him. Thus power is successful to suppress the protest but the spark of resistance which Ganga puts into the mind of fishermen does not stop and hopefully one day, his dedication will bring complete revolution in the society.

Conclusion: Thus, the novelist Harishakar Jaladas is successful to bring the conflict between the bourgeois owner class and proletarian one. He exposes the vile game of the Shukkur and Sashibhusan who suck the blood of the fishermen by lending them money with interest. But the fishermen do not remain silent. They realize the suppression of the moneylender and mistreatment against them. They understand that the pirate takes benefit of their illiteracy. To avoid suppression, they organise into a group and decide to continue their profession without taking money from the pirate. The battle starts between two classes where power gets an edge over the fishermen by killing their leader Ganga but the ray of revolution still remains among other fishermen. So, the moneylender may kill their leader Ganga but his thinking will be alive in their hearts.

A critical study of the novel under the canon of 'social injustice' uncovers the vile mentality of the owner class. Harishankar Jaladas has tried to show the struggle of the fisher community and indirectly he criticizes the social system governed by the political leaders. By portraying the rebellious figure of Ganga against Shukkur and Sashibhusan he tries to give the message to those oppressed Dalit people who are exploited in every phase of their life. Indirectly, he, through his novel urges the Dalit people to raise their voice against any kind of suppression and must give education to their children.

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