

Subaltern Consciousness and Global Solidarity in Aahuti's "Gahungoro Africa"

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Submitted : 30 Nov. 2025

Reviewed: 17 Dec. 2025

Accepted: 29 Dec. 2025

DOI: 10.3126/kdk.v6i1.90097

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कौमोदकी

Kaumodaki

Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal

ISSN :

2822 - 1567 (Print)

2822 - 1583 (Online)

<https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/kdk/about>

Published by :

Research Management Cell

Shree Vinduwasini Sanskrit Vidyapeeth (Campus)

Nepal Sanskrit University, Pokhara, Nepal

<https://ejournal.vsc.edu.np>

Abstract

This paper examines Aahuti's "Gahungoro Africa" through the lens of subaltern theory, analyzing its role in articulating Dalit resistance against caste-based discrimination. The poem not only foregrounds the experiences of Dalits but also situates their struggle within a broader global context of systemic subjugation. By drawing parallels between Dalit marginalization and historical forms of racial and colonial oppression in Africa; Aahuti challenges hegemonic structures that perpetuate inequality. The poem transforms the historically silenced Dalit subject into an active agent demanding dignity, justice and liberation. Employing the theoretical frameworks of Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Spivak, this study investigates how "Gahungoro Africa" disrupts dominant narratives that erase Dalit voices. It explores how the poem critiques religious and social institutions that uphold caste hierarchy, positioning subaltern resistance as central to socio-political transformation. By connecting the Dalit struggle to the global histories of oppression, "Gahungoro Africa" asserts the universality of marginalized voices and their right to justice. This paper argues that Aahuti's poem is not merely a lamentation but a radical assertion of identity, a call for socio-political change and aims to dismantle 'Caste-System' to form an inclusive society that acknowledges the voices of the oppressed.

Keywords: Dalit literature, Gahungoro, liberation, organic- intellectual, resistance, subaltern, subjugation.

Introduction

This research article, titled “Subaltern consciousness and Global Solidarity in Aahuti’s ‘Gahungoro Africa’”, seeks to critically analyze the poem through the lens of subaltern studies. It aims to explore how the poem articulates resistance to hegemonic structures, reclaims subaltern identity, challenges spiritual and cultural dominance (dominant narratives) and serves as a form of literary activism. By focusing on themes such as bodily labor, cultural erasure and poetic defiance, the study contributes to a growing body of work that not only centers Dalit experience in Nepali literature but also engages with broader questions of dignity, justice and liberation in the postcolonial world, particularly in Africa.

This paper provides a subaltern reading of “Gahungoro Africa” analyzing how Aahuti articulates the experiences of the oppressed and demands recognition, dignity and justice. The poem’s repeated refrain— ‘Dare to meet my eyes’ आँखा जुधाउने आँट गर ((Aahuti, Gahungoro Africa 3)—is a powerful call for confrontation and acknowledgment, urging the privileged to recognize the dignity, humanity and justice of the marginalized (Dalits). By invoking Africa as a metaphor, Aahuti transcends national boundaries, positioning Dalit struggles within a broader framework of historical exploitation and resilience. Dalit literature has emerged as a powerful medium for voicing the historically silenced experiences of caste-based oppression, reclaiming space in the literary and socio-political spheres for those who have long been excluded. In the context of Nepali literature, Aahuti stands as a central figure in articulating the Dalit voice through poetry that is both intensely personal and deeply political. His poem “Gahungoro Africa” reflects the struggles of the Dalit community by addressing themes of exclusion, exploitation, spiritual hypocrisy and the dehumanizing effects of untouchability. This poem shows a profound assertion of dignity, rights and justice of Dalits who have been marginalized in society from time immemorial.

In Gahungoro Africa, Aahuti constructs a poetic persona that refuses invisibility. Through repeated refrains like ‘Dare to meet my eyes’ आँखा जुधाउने आँट गर(3) challenges the hierarchical systems that demand submission from the subaltern. The speaker of the poem—a Dalit laborer, artisan, musician and human—demands to be seen, not as an object of pity or disdain, but as an equal presence whose contributions (culture/civilization) form the foundation of society. The poem’s power lies in its ability to make the invisible visible, the voiceless heard and devalued the so called sacred.

What makes this poem particularly striking is its metaphorical association with ‘Africa’. By calling himself ‘I am Africa of this round world’s village’ यो गोल भूगोलको एउटा गहुँगोरो अफ्रिका हुँ (3), the speaker situates Nepali Dalit struggle within a global history of racial and colonial subjugation. This linkage invites a broader interpretation of caste as a systemic form of othering, akin to race in global contexts. Aahuti's poetic projection thus becomes more than a national critique; it becomes an act of global solidarity and a call for universal justice.

Aahuti is a prominent Nepali writer, thinker and a political activist from subaltern community. As Antonio Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual suggests, Aahuti emerges from the grassroots, not as a traditional scholar, but as someone who grew up in the lived realities of the oppressed. As an organic intellectual, his poetry and other literary creations articulate the sufferings, resistance and aspirations of marginalized groups, using language as a tool for awareness, empowerment and transformation. His political activism, intellectual and creative efforts serve to challenge dominant ideologies(narratives) and mobilize the subaltern toward social justice. His poem "Gahungoro Africa" is a striking example of subaltern expression, where he draws parallels between the historical oppression of Dalits in Nepal and the struggles of marginalized groups globally, particularly in Africa.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rich tradition of Dalit literary expression in Nepal, mainstream literary criticism has often marginalized or ignored its significance. Aahuti's "Gahungoro Africa" presents an urgent critique of caste-based discrimination, yet it has not received the critical scholarly attention it deserves. The lack of engagement with Dalit literature from a subaltern perspective limits our understanding of how these texts function as resistance against dominant socio-political structures.

This research addresses the following key problems:

1. The need to analyze "Gahungoro Africa" through the lens of Subaltern Studies to highlight its role in resistance literature.
2. The exploration of Africa as a metaphor for Dalit oppression and solidarity in Aahuti's work.
3. The broader implications of Aahuti's poetry for Nepalese literature and global discourses on oppression, particularly in Africa.

Research Questions

To examine the significance of "Gahungoro Africa" within Dalit literature and Subaltern Studies, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does Aahuti's "Gahungoro Africa" function as a subaltern text and challenges hegemonic structures and caste-based oppression in Nepal ?
2. What is the significance of the metaphor of 'Africa' in the poem in the context of global subaltern solidarity?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Analyze "Gahungoro Africa" through the framework of Subaltern Studies to highlight its political and literary significance by examining the poem's engagement with caste, labor and historical injustice.

2. Investigate the metaphorical use of Africa and its implications for Dalit identity and see the poem as an appeal for global solidarity of the subaltern for resistance against hegemony.
3. Contribute to the academic discourse on Nepali Dalit literature and its role in shaping social consciousness.

Methods of the study

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on close textual analysis of “Gahungoro Africa” within a subaltern theoretical framework. Primary sources include Ahuti’s poetry, while secondary sources comprise scholarly critiques of Dalit and African Literature. This research employs comparative analysis to draw thematic connections between caste-based oppression in Nepal and racial subjugation in Africa, highlighting Aahuti’s contribution to global subaltern discourse.

Theoretical Framework

‘Subaltern’, meaning ‘of inferior rank’, represents the group of people who are at the bottom or in the periphery of the society. They get limited opportunities in various spheres. Besides, they are the people with limited rights lacking agency of their own. They are ignored and neglected by the people at the center. Subalterns are under-represented, under-taught non canonical groups in the society. Though they live at the bottom of the society, they can revolt against the mainstream. The term, subaltern was adopted by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist and Communist Party Leader, refers to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. A subaltern is someone with a low ranking in a social, political, or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalized or oppressed. From the Latin roots sub- “below”, and alternus “all others”, subaltern is used to describe someone of a low rank (as in the military) or class (as in a caste system). Subalterns occupy entry-level jobs or occupy a lower rung of the “corporate ladder.” But the term is also used to describe someone who has no political or economic power, such as a poor person living under a dictatorship. Different kinds of synonyms are used for the word ‘Subaltern’, like: common people, lower-class, underprivileged, exploited, inferiors, minors, weak etc. After Gramsci, South Asian scholars initiated the debate on Subaltern Studies. They wrote a series of volumes on Subaltern Studies since 1982 to let the historians know about the culture and existence of the marginalized people in colonial and post-colonial India. The South Asian subaltern group which was guided by Ranjeet Guha attempted to give voice to the voiceless. This was a group of historians “who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Society” (Guha 34). Guha and his team aimed to analyze the general attributes of marginalization in South Asian Society in terms of class, caste and gender. Subalterns are different from elites. The feature that explains subaltern identity for Guha is ‘negation.’ To evaluate the peasant resistance as a subject of history, the event needs a corresponding epistemological inversion (Awasthi 2-3).

Another scholar, Gyatri Spivak deals with the realm of subalternity by taking into account the problems of gender especially of Indian women during colonial times. She sheds lights on the status of Indian women based on her analysis of Sati practices under the British colonial rule. Position of women under Sati practice differs from their position in the twenty-first century Indian society. Now, women hold better positions in social, financial and political spheres than they did under Sati practice. Thus, the subaltern as women at one time or place may not be subaltern in another place or time since the term 'subaltern' is relational. Subaltern Studies focuses on the consciousness of the working classes. Spivak also emphasizes on subaltern consciousness. According to Spivak, subaltern consciousness is always subject to the people in power and never completely recoverable. Some dominant classes objectify the subaltern and they take knowledge as power. Dipesh Chakrabarty defines subaltern consciousness as the "peasant consciousness" (372). The consciousness and autonomy of lower-class regarding consciousness is the foundation of Subaltern studies. "In the work of subaltern studies, it is necessary to reach up to not only the ideological part but also the livelihood of common people i.e. poor farmers, shepherds, workers, laborers, oppressed caste women. They are also human beings, they also think, take decisions, decide the way to live and grow in the society. The subaltern studies, therefore, defy those historians who regard people's action as external to their consciousness. So, the chief concern of the subaltern studies venture is thus to appreciate the people's consciousness and their action. A proper analysis of this consciousness and its due recognition by the historians would rightly present and project the subalterns as the maker of the history they live out.

Literature Review

The literature review highlights the significance of Dalit literature as a tool of resistance, the theoretical underpinnings of Subaltern Studies and the transnational parallels between caste and racial oppression. By analyzing "Gahungoro Africa" within these frameworks, this study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on Dalit literature and its place in global struggles for justice.

Dalit literature, both in India and Nepal, has been a crucial medium for articulating the voices of the historically oppressed. Scholars like Eleanor Zelliot (1996) and Gail Omvedt (2006) have explored the revolutionary impact of Dalit writings, emphasizing their role in reclaiming agency and contesting Brahmanical hegemony. Arjun Dangle (1992) asserts that Dalit literature is not merely an artistic endeavor but an act of defiance against social hierarchies.

In Nepal, Dalit writers such as Ranendra Baraili, TR Bishwakarma, Padam Sundas and non-Dalit writers Khagendra Sangroula, Sarad Poudel, Muktinath Sharma, Sanjiv Upreti have played a significant role in literary activism. Bishwakarma (2018) notes that Dalit literary works often remain outside of mainstream academic discourse, despite their radical critique of caste and class structures. Aahuti's poetry, particularly "Gahungoro Africa", aligns with this resistance tradition by directly confronting casteist narratives and proudly highlights Dalit identity and dignity.

The Subaltern Studies collectively led by Ranajit Guha (1982), reshaped historical and literary analysis by focusing on marginalized voices. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) critiques the elitist bias in historiography and calls for the recognition of subaltern agency. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' examines the difficulties of representing subaltern voices within dominant epistemological frameworks.

Aahuti's poem serves as an answer to Spivak's question—it is a direct articulation of subaltern agency that demands recognition. The refrain 'Dare to meet my eyes' आँखा जुधाउने आँट गर (3) embodies what Partha Chatterjee (1993) describes as subaltern resistance, where the oppressed challenge dominant narratives and demand dignity, justice and equality.

Aahuti's use of 'Africa' as a metaphor aligns with global discourses on race, caste, and colonial exploitation. Scholars such as Gopal Guru (2009) and Suraj Yengde (2019) have examined the intersections between caste and race, highlighting their shared histories of structural violence. Frantz Fanon's (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth* and W.E.B. Du Bois's (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk* provide crucial insights into the psychological and social dimensions of oppression, many of which resonate with Dalit experiences.

Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic* framework suggests that marginalized groups across geographies share common struggles against systemic discrimination. Aahuti's invocation of Africa aligns with Ambedkar's (1936) vision in *Annihilation of Caste*, which calls for a global coalition of oppressed people. The poem situates Dalit struggles within this broader historical trajectory, reinforcing solidarity between marginalized communities.

Existing gaps in "Gahungoro Africa"

While there is extensive research on Dalit literature and Subaltern Studies, there remains a critical gap in the study of Nepali Dalit poetry within a transnational framework. Most analyses of caste oppression remain confined to national boundaries, neglecting the global dimensions of Dalit struggles. Additionally, Aahuti's work has not received the scholarly attention it deserves, particularly in relation to its engagement with African history and racial oppression, which serve as metaphor in his poetry (*Gahungoro Africa*) to universalize the Dalit experiences and align it with global narratives of resistance against structural injustice. This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a subaltern reading of "Gahungoro Africa", situating it within the global discourse on marginalized voices and literary resistance.

Finding and Discussions

The term 'Gauhungoro' used in the poem literally refers to a color that is neither white nor black, indicating the absence of clear chromatic segregation, its poetic significance acquires deeper resonance within subaltern theory. In this context, 'Gahungoro' functions as a metaphor for the subaltern condition existence suspended

between dominant binaries yet fully belonging to neither. It signifies a subjectivity that is rendered invisible within hegemonic epistemologies, which rely on fixed categories to sustain structures of power. By occupying this liminal space, the 'Gahungoro' figure exposes the violence of binary thinking and articulates a counter-discourse that challenges both racial and cultural hierarchies. Thus, the term becomes a site of resistance, giving symbolic voice to marginalized identities whose histories and experiences have been systematically silenced. To substantiate the theoretical reading, a few selectively chosen lines from the poem are examined below, as they foreground the experiential realities of subaltern marginalization and the poem's implicit critique of dominant racial, caste and cultural paradigms.

Reclaiming the Dalit Body and Labor

Nepali society is accumulated and structurally sustained through the labour, skills and sweat of the Dalit community. Historically, society could not have advanced even a single step without the indispensable contributions of Dalits. They constituted the actual driving force of the social structure. Yet, a profound contradiction persists: while Dalit labor, skills and bodily toil were deemed acceptable and even essential for the functioning of the society, Dalits themselves were subjected to rejection, humiliation and systematic social exclusion. It is the paradoxical social reality that the poet forcefully interrogates and challenges in the poem through the representation of multiple characters. The poem begins with a striking image of the Dalit body— 'My red blood, the sacred red blood of mankind' मेरो रातो रगत, मानिसको पवित्र रातो रगत (3)—asserting its shared humanity.

However, this blood, which symbolizes dignity and equality, is transformed into labor— 'A drop of blue sweat' (नीलो पसिनाको बुँद (3)—that is appropriated by the privileged caste/class. The persona's labor is paradoxically essential yet unworthy of respect. The physical toil of the Dalit subject, which sustains society, is simultaneously devalued. The phrase 'When I try to inhale the fragrant sweat of my labor, you insult me and push me away' (जब म त्यो श्रमको सुवासयुक्त पसिना सुघ्न खोज्छु, तिमी मेरो अपमान गर्छौ र मलाई टाढा राख्छौ (3)

highlights a key contradiction: while Dalits are deemed impure and untouchable, their labor is indispensable in creating sacred and essential elements of society. This paradox exposes the hypocrisy of caste ideology—where purity is a constructed myth maintained to justify oppression. But, in the poem, the persona confronts the religious orthodoxy that considers Dalits impure while simultaneously relying on their labor. This tension is further underscored in lines referencing temple-building— 'The idol in your temple carries the scent of my forge' (तिम्रो मन्दिरको मूर्तिमा मेरो आरनको गन्ध आउँछ (3)—which highlights necessity of the labor and skill of Dalits in every sphere of life in the society. The idol enshrined in the temple bears the imprint of Dalits strength and labour, foregrounding the indispensability of Dalit skill and craftsmanship in every sphere of social life. Historically, the deities worshipped in temples were sculpted, carved and installed through the labour of Dalits, yet paradoxically Dalits were later prohibited from entering to temples to worship the deities they themselves had created. This enduring paradox exposes the

hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy, inherent in caste-based systems of exclusion, where labor is appropriated but human dignity is systematically denied.

Religion as a Site of Oppression and Defiance

Religion, in its fundamental essence, ought to uphold principles of impartiality and equality toward all humanity thereby rendering human life ethical, dignified and meaningful. However, paradoxically, the institutionally entrenched caste system within Hinduism and the inhuman practices it has generated have subjected the Dalit community to sustained humiliation, injustice and oppression. Such dehumanizing practices, legitimated under the name and authority of religion, have not merely functioned as instruments of social division but have instead become entrenched forms of structural violence that systematically erode human dignity. Through a forceful and fearless critique of these inhuman tendencies, the poet articulates a powerful and uncompromising challenge to religion and to its self-proclaimed custodians.

Aahuti critiques the religious institutions that uphold caste hierarchy. The persona dares the so-called religious man— 'A religious fanatic' . . . 'धर्माती मान्छे' (3)—to acknowledge the Dalit's presence and labor. The lines "Either muster the courage to tear or burn the pages of the religious scriptures that insult me" (कि मेरो अपमान गर्ने शास्त्रका

पानाहरूलाई च्यात्ने या जलाउने साहस गर (3) challenge the authority of religious texts that justify caste-based discrimination (untouchability). The persona demands for dismantling oppressive religious texts echoes Ambedkar's rejection of Hindu scriptures that sanctify caste hierarchies. The poem, strongly expresses the subaltern's awareness, resistance and demand for justice. The awareness and resistance align with Dalit movements that seek to challenge and reform religious traditions that perpetuate inequality and injustice.

Dalit literature frequently engages in what Gopal Guru calls "counter-discourse," where religious narratives are rewritten to expose their inherent biases. Aahuti's invocation of temple-building/ carving an idol as a metaphor for Dalit existence and emancipation/liberation aligns with the broader Buddhist movement, which seeks to reclaim spiritual space from Brahmanical hegemony. Aahuti through this metaphor, critiques the casteist exclusion within Hinduism.

Dalit Identity as Ubiquitous Yet Erased

In every process that sustains and propels society, the presence and contribution of the Dalit community have been pervasive and decisive. Nevertheless, this historical reality has been systematically ignored by the dominant social groups who have sought to devalue and erase Dalit labour, skills and contributions. By exposing these oppressive social practices, the poet powerfully and explicitly foregrounds the indispensable role of the Dalit community in the construction of the society.

One of the most powerful assertions in the poem is the Dalit subject's omnipresence— 'From the shoes on your feet to the cap on your head- where am I not? I

am everywhere’ (तिम्रो पैतालाको जुत्तादेखि शिरको टोपीसम्म म कहाँ छैन? म सर्वत्र छु (4) This line disrupts the notion that Dalit exist at the margins; instead, they are integral to every aspect of society. However, despite this omnipresence, their presence is systematically erased and denied. This paradox is central to the Dalit experience—being essential yet invisible, indispensable yet untouchable.

In the poem, the term ‘Gahungoro Africa’ is employed to interrogate the discriminatory, humiliating and hateful treatment imposed by European white rulers upon Africans by labeling them as ‘black people’. This term conveys the message that human dignity and greatness are determined not by skin color but by consciousness, struggle and ethical action. The tendency to regard whiteness as a presumed marker of beauty, civility and moral conduct, while associating blackness with ugliness, barbarity and moral deficiency, is itself a product of a prejudiced and oppressive mentality. It is precisely to challenge and dismantle this mindset that the poet employs the metaphor of ‘Gahungoro Africa’. The comparison to Africa in the refrain ‘I am Africa of this round world’s village’ यो गोल भूगोलको एउटा गहुँगोरो अफ्रिका हुँ (3) situates the Dalit struggle within a global history of subjugation and resistance. Just as Africa has been historically exploited and racialized, Dalits too have been reduced to a subordinate position and treated as inhumane. This transnational solidarity in oppression underscores the shared struggles of marginalized communities worldwide.

Defiance and the Demand for Justice

Long subjected to relentless oppression under the brutal machinery of the caste system, Dalit community has emerged with a heightened consciousness of justice, dignity and emancipation. Through searing poetic expression, the poet challenges the historical continuum of humiliation, injustice and enforced exclusion, calling for a critical reckoning with a legacy of systematic degradation. The poetic resistance powerfully envisions the transformation of Dalit existence from the shadows of subjugation to the horizon of dignified and emancipated life.

The poem’s refrain ‘Dare to Meet my eyes’ आँखा जुधाउने आँट गर (3) is a direct challenge to the oppressor. The demand to meet the poet’s gaze signifies a confrontation with the humiliated history and negligence to recognize Dalits’ accountability. This moment of direct address is significant in subaltern discourse, as it disrupts the usual narrative where the oppressed remain silent or passive. Aahuti refuses invisibility, demanding that the dominant caste acknowledge the historical injustices they have perpetuated.

The closing lines— ‘I demand an account of my humiliated history (म अपमानित इतिहासको हिसाब चाहन्छु) I seek liberation at any cost..., म कुनै पनि मूल्यमा मुक्ति चाहन्छु (4) Dalit community has historically played a central role in the construction, functioning and continuity of society. For generations, this society nourished by the sweat, blood and labor of Dalits- has paradoxically become a site of suffering, humiliation and pain for them. Therefore, the above lines solidify the poem’s call for historical reckoning. This

demand aligns with Dalit historiography, which seeks to correct the erasure and distortion of Dalit contributions in mainstream historical narratives. The insistence on mukti (liberation) rather than mere a space (inclusion) reflects the radical edge of Dalit literature, which envisions a complete dismantling of caste system/structures rather than mere reform.

Conclusion

Aahuti's "Gahungoro Africa" is more than a poem—it is a manifesto of Dalit resistance and self-assertion. Through direct confrontation, labor consciousness and global subaltern solidarity, the poem dismantles the myth of untouchability (caste-system) and demands justice, equality, dignity and liberation of Dalits. By daring the oppressor to meet the eyes of the oppressed, Aahuti refuses the historical erasure of Dalit voices and transforms poetry into an instrument of liberation. The poem also transcends its immediate social context by forging a global connection between caste oppression in Nepal and racial oppression in Africa. The persona's repeated invocation of "Gahungoro Africa" suggests a transnational solidarity among oppressed communities. By universalizing the problem of the subaltern in the refrain of 'I am the Africa of this round world's village,' the speaker draws a parallel between Dalits and Black people who have historically faced colonial exploitation, caste/racial discrimination and socio-economic marginalization. This analogy reinforces the idea that oppression is not limited by geography but is part of a global system of socio-political and economic exclusion. He concludes with an assertion that the eyes of the oppressed will no longer be cast downward but will dare to meet those of the oppressors, demanding recognition, justice, dignity and liberation.

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