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# Dalit Representation in Post-2010 Indian English Literature

**Sneha Chaudhary**[1]
UG student, Department of English, School of Liberal Education

**Dr. Vivek Kumar**[2]
Professor, Department of English, School of Liberal Education

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**Abstract:** This research paper critically examines the representation of Dalits in Indian English literature published post-2010. It explores how contemporary authors, both Dalit and non-Dalit, have responded to the socio-political transformations by articulating the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of the Dalit communities. Post-2010, there has been a noticeable shift in the literary landscape, marked by the emergence of assertive Dalit voices in English. This paper analyses selected literary works that reflect the evolving themes of caste, resistance, intersectionality, and identity politics, while critiquing the ethical implications of representation when non-Dalit writers engage with Dalit narratives. Through close textual analysis, the paper engages with the works of writers such as Yashica Dutt, Sujatha Gidla, and Meena Kandasamy, among others, to investigate how Dalit subjectivity is constructed and communicated in English. Additionally, it considers the role of language, literary form, and aesthetics in challenging dominant caste ideologies. The study situates these literary developments within broader socio-cultural and political contexts, including the rise of digital activism, institutional casteism, and the global discourse on marginality.

**Keywords:** Dalit literature, Indian English writing, caste, post-2010 literature, Dalit feminism, caste and gender, marginality, Dalit assertiveness

**Introduction:** The Indian English literary scene underwent a drastic change after 2010, particularly in the way Dalit voices began to emerge and represent themselves. This change was a departure from the previous trends wherein Dalits were either being written about by non-Dalit writers, mostly through "constrictive stereotypes or sympathetic but partial representations" (Guru 45). The post-2010 period witnessed Dalits taking charge of their own voices, using digital media and new publishing avenues to print lived experiences that turned established literary conventions on their head. It was not merely a case of a greater number of Dalit writers, but a qualitative shift in the agency of who controlled the business of telling stories. As Yengde contends, it was the start of what he terms "Dalit assertiveness"

(Yengde 23) in literary circles when members of the community rejected outsourced definitions of their realities and demanded self-representation.

After 2010, Indian English literature saw a huge change in how Dalit people were written about. Writers like Yashica Dutt and Suraj Yengde are the greatest this change. In her book Coming Out as Dalit, Dutt writes about hiding her caste to escape discrimination in the best workplaces. She later decided to share her genuine identity, which activated many public conversations. Yengde's book Caste Matters connects the struggles of Dalits with the global conflict for justice, like the Black Lives Matter movement. These authors show how personal stories can, over and above that, become powerful political messages.

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology rooted in literary and cultural analysis. Primary texts written by Dalit and non-Dalit authors post-2010 form the core dataset. A close reading approach is employed to analyse themes, narrative techniques, and character construction. The study also uses theoretical frameworks from Dalit studies, postcolonial theory, and feminist criticism. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, interviews, and reviews to contextualize and support the analysis. Attention is given to both textual content and the broader socio-political environment in which these texts are produced and received.

As Yengde critiques, members of the community rejected outsourced definitions of their realities and demanded self-representation. This research paper discusses the representation of the Dalits in Indian English literature since 2010, reviewing prominent authors, online media, publication patterns, and the larger cultural stakes of this literary turn. Based on primary texts, critical reviews, and current scholarship, this study discusses the ways post-2010 Dalit literature transformed the power dynamics within Indian English literature while establishing new opportunities for genuine self-expression. The year 2010 is a convenient benchmark for a number of converging forces that made it easier for greater Dalit literary expression. "Dalit literature in English had many hurdles, such as restricted access to education, publishing circles controlled by upper-caste gatekeepers, and audience demands that kept Dalit narratives limited to some approved topics" (Limbale 78). Yet, by 2010, various developments had created more positive circumstances for Dalit literary emergence.

As Thorat and Attewell observe in their critical writings, the increase in access to higher education provided opportunities for more Dalits to enter universities and acquire English language skills to write creatively. At the same time, the digital revolution introduced new media that did not need conventional publishing approval. As Dutt records in her memoir, "social media became important for young Dalits to network across geography and publish experiences that mainstream literature had excluded" (Dutt 89). The time also overlapped with growing academic and activist interest in the study of caste, which was partly triggered by international debates concerning race and social justice that opened doors to examining Indian caste relations. As Teltumbde critiques, "such an international focus

offered more platforms and audiences for Dalit authors to present their views" (Teltumbde 67).

Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) is among the most important works of post-2010 Dalit writing. Dutt's choice to out herself as a previously closeted caste identity on the job as a journalist in upper-class media spaces transgressed traditional borders between personal and political prose. Her memoir illustrates what Das terms a new trend in Dalit writing - the employment of professional success narratives to identify ongoing caste discrimination instead of concentrating on economic poverty alone. Dutt's authorial strategy is one of what she terms "passing" - actively hiding her Dalit identity to escape discrimination within education and the workplace. This term, taken from African American literary theory surrounding racial passing, "gave a model for understanding the ways that caste works in putatively progressive cities" (Dutt 45). Her work showed how "upper-caste presuppositions infect elite institutions, rendering genuine Dalit engagement all but impossible unless on condition of self-denial" (Dutt 78). The impact of the memoir spread from literature to wider social conversation. Dutt's Facebook announcement of her identity went viral, initiating countrywide debates over covert caste discrimination in contemporary India. This showed how post-2010 Dalit authors were employing multiple media at once - social media for instantaneous community formation and conventional publishing for prolonged examination.

Suraj Yengde's *Caste Matters* (2019) applied scholastic rigour to autobiographical Dalit storytelling, merging real-life experience with critical scholarship. Being the first Dalit to hold a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand, Yengde's global education "gave him comparative models for interpreting the oppression of caste" (Yengde 23). Yengde's insight is in relating Dalit struggles to international social justice movements, specifically analogizing to Black liberation movements in the US and South Africa. This comparative strategy "disabused the tendency to isolate caste as an abnormally Indian institution, instead situating it in larger trends of racialized oppression" (Yengde 156). His critique of "Dalit capitalism" - how economic prosperity does not dissolve caste discrimination - gave contemporary Dalit experiences a new language.

The reception among scholarly circles of the book reflected increasing interest in academia in Dalit analyses of caste. University course curricula started including Yengde's work along with classical caste studies, "an indicator of a move towards integrating Dalit intellectual work instead of studying Dalits as objects" (Chakravarti 89). One prominent anonymous blog, *The Dalit in Me*, "documented instances of caste discrimination at work in the tech sector, revealing how modern workplaces reproduce ancient hierarchies through informal networks and cultural assumptions" (Anonymous 1). The writer's anonymity replicated the ongoing occupational hazards of Dalits speaking truth to power regarding discrimination. Similarly, anonymous comments on blogs like Round Table India provided sharp insights into current affairs, book reviews, and theoretical analysis that enriched Dalit intellectual discourse. These writers demonstrated that anonymity could be Armor, not vulnerability, enabling truth-saying that would otherwise be repressed.

Round Table India, established in 2009 but becoming influential after 2010, became arguably the most important digital site for Dalit intellectual voices. Established by faceless editors operating under pseudonyms such as Kuffir and Guru, the site "offered room for close examination of caste phenomena without expecting authors to go through conventional academic or media gatekeepers" (Anand 145). The platform's impact extended beyond publication. The freelance writers developed persistent dialogue about caste theory, contemporary politics, and literary analysis that created a virtual intellectual community. As Balasubramanian critiques, the model challenged traditional assumptions about where serious academic discourse happens and demonstrated that electronic sites could sustain advanced examination beyond the purview of university walls. Round Table India's editorial policy openly preferred Dalit authors but left space for thoughtful non-Dalit writers with a genuine perception of caste action. This "created a precedent of inclusive but Dalit-centric debate that other platforms and publications emulated" (Guru 178).

Dalit Camera, founded by Ravichandran Bathran, initiated the application of video and visual media for representing Dalits. The social media presence of the platform and its YouTube channel "proved the capability of digital modes to break literacy and linguistic barriers that restricted access to text-based publications" (Bathran 23). The interviews by the platform of Dalit artists, activists, and thinkers offered an archive of contemporary Dalit thought that supplemented written work. As Kumar observes in his critical writings, video forms also enabled storytelling in local languages with English subtitles, expanding possible audiences while maintaining linguistic legitimacy. Dalit Camera reporting on discrimination cases, cultural events, and political updates offered real-time recording of modern Dalit experiences that mainstream media tended to exclude or distort. This reporting role showed how "Dalit-owned sites could fill more than one literary and informational role at the same time" (Bathran 45).

Marketing campaigns for Dalit literature often prioritized personal struggle narratives above intellectual contributions, "indicating that publishers saw such books primarily as sociology and not literature" (Deshpande 76). Such a trend was in alignment with more general assumptions regarding what type of stories qualified for serious literary consideration. Distribution channels also restricted the dissemination of Dalit writing. As Publishers Weekly India observes, Dalit writings "had fewer chances to be placed in flagship bookstore windows or get wide publicity support, making them less visible than writings by established upper-castes" (Publishers Weekly India 12). Minor publishers also had significant roles in maintaining Dalit literary voices. S. Anand established Navayana Publishing with a special interest in anti-caste literature and "offered editorial assistance suitable for the needs of Dalit writers" (Anand 89). Navayana Publishing's list included translations of key Dalit works, original writing, and scholarly studies that mainstream publishers did not publish.

Zubaan Books, although not specifically Dalit literature-focused, released a number of significant titles and "showed how feminist publishing houses could make space for intersectional voices that spoke to both gender and caste oppression" (Roy 145). Their joint editorial practices set models for respectful working with marginalized writers. Self-publishing and print-on-demand options also allowed Dalit writers to have more control over their work while reaching designated audiences. These systems "lowered economic entry points to publication while keeping authors in control of rights and revenues that mainstream contracts tended to take" (Malik 67).

The decision to publish in English raised complicated dynamics for Dalit writers after 2010. English opened doors to national and global publics, schools, and policy circles that writing in regional languages may not have access to. Yet it also "risked distancing writers from other members of their communities who were non-literate in English" (Ciotti 123). Numerous writers managed to resolve this tension using creative linguistic techniques. Code-switching between English and regional languages was a popular method of "preserving cultural integrity while appealing to wider audiences" (Mukherjee 78). Authors used untranslated words, described cultural practices, and employed regional grammatical forms to construct uniquely Indian English voices.

Dalit authors in the post-2010 period experimented with literary genres in a manner that questioned the traditional genre. Memoirs were blended with analytical essays, academic writing with personal stories, and creative writing with poetry and prose. These blended methods "showed the complex nature of Dalit experiences that could not be confined within customary literary forms" (Kumar 89). Digital media facilitated additional formal innovation. Blog entries might intertwine text and images, videos might have accompanied written commentary, and social media permitted serialized narrative that evolved over time. As Rege observes in her critical writings, these multimedia forms extended definitions of what constituted literature while disseminating stories more widely to a broader population of people.

Educational institutions demonstrated incremental yet lagging reactions to post-2010 Dalit writings. A few institutions started incorporating the works of writers such as Dutt and Yengde in English literature studies, which "represented a transition from reading about Dalits to reading Dalit scholarly contributions" (Chakravarti 67). Yet integration was usually superficial. As Deshpande critiques, Dalit literature was often "studied as sociological texts and not literary texts deserving of proper analysis" (Deshpande 145). This fed into presumptions that Dalit literature was mostly useful for its documentary and not artistic value. Graduate studies research increasingly turned toward new Dalit literature, and theses and dissertations offered serious critical engagement with the new works. This new scholarship "provided academic legitimacy to post-2010 Dalit literature and educated new generations of scholars in proper analytical methods" (Kumar 178).

Book reviewing culture exhibited uneven dealing with Dalit literature post-2010. Mainstream journals tended to commend books for their "authenticity" and "powerful personal narratives," while "lacking analytical complexity compared to reviews of books by established writers" (Sen 89). This led to the suspicion that reviewers were hesitant to know how to deal with books that merged personal narrative with political critique. Scholarly journals increasingly carry articles of critical analysis of new Dalit literature, engaging in more mature critical engagement. As Thorat observes, scholarly analysis helped solidify a critical lexicon for the discussion of Dalit literary output while illustrating their intellectual value.

The emerging Dalit literary voices had critical questions regarding non-Dalit authors who continued to write about castes. Instances such as the foreword by Arundhati Roy to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* "created controversy regarding when non-Dalit opinions concerning Dalit ideas were useful and when they took over Dalit voices themselves (Pandey 145). Some critics argued that "non-Dalit writers should focus on examining their own caste privilege rather than interpreting Dalit experiences" (Thapar 78). This perspective emphasized the importance of upper-caste self-reflection and analysis of how privilege operates rather than continued focus on Dalit suffering or resistance. Others argued that "intelligent non-Dalit discussion of caste continued to be useful when it strengthened instead of substituted Dalit voices" (Menon 134). The principal difference concerned whether this work made space for Dalit voices or took up space that could potentially be occupied by Dalit writers.

Even when things improved significantly, structural barriers prevented Dalit writers from being part of literature after 2010. The majority of individuals who wanted to be writers "could not do so full-time due to financial issues, particularly those who lacked family funds or a fixed employment" (Malik 123). Writers who were "unable to write for free were also at an issue since the literary career was based on free or low-cover writing assignments" (Malik 145). Schools didn't take the step of incorporating Dalit literature into their standard courses, which "made it more difficult for researchers of the subject to become employed within academe" (Deshpande 178). Since there was little institutional backing, the majority of significant research on Dalit literature was conducted by individuals and not by established academic programs.

Complementary frameworks linking caste oppression to other expressions of racialized hierarchy placed Dalit literature within the larger discourse around social justice and human rights. These linkages "facilitated the possibility of coalition formation with other oppressed communities and foregrounded the international relevance of caste-based discrimination" (Teltumbde 145). But global scrutiny also posed dangers of oversimplification or distortion when "intricate caste relationships were glossed over for readers new to Indian social environments" (Guru 123). Writers struggled to balance subtle analysis with communicating in ways that appealed to varied international readerships.

Global academic exchange opened the field for Dalit intellectuals and authors to understand comparative frameworks while communicating Indian experiences to international readers. Universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries "included Dalit studies in their courses, generating demand for true Dalit voices" (Chakravarti 156). Scholarly journals and academic conferences are more and more "including panels and articles concerning modern Dalit literature, bringing the opportunity for theoretical development and critical analysis in order to offer forums for continued literary development" (Thorat 67). But institutionalization of academia also placed pressures to "align with international theoretical models or analytical strategies that may not resonate with Dalit intellectual processes" (Pawar 178). The balancing of global academic interactions with people-based analysis was a continuing concern.

**Conclusion:** The Dalit presence in post-2010 Indian English literature marks a core shift in Indian literary culture. Dalits transitioned from being objects of others' literary representation to authors writing about themselves, using online spaces and new publishing models to bypass conventional gatekeepers who previously held literary control. Influential voices such as Yashica Dutt and Suraj Yengde demonstrated how "individual narrative could function as a political intervention, defying the taken-for-granted nature of caste discrimination in contemporary India and inventing new lexicons for reading contemporary Dalit realities" (Yengde 234). Their achievements opened the door to various voices, including anonymous cyber contributors who leveraged online forums to express views that might otherwise remain subordinated. Digital media became significant alternatives to conventional publishing, offering opportunities for community formation, experimental modes of expression, and direct audience contact that avoided institutional gatekeepers. Nevertheless, digital access remained unequal, "generating new exclusion even as it opened up possibilities for some voices" (Kumar 189). The moral issues raised by this literary innovation—representation, authenticity, and the duty of non-Dalit authors—highlighted the broader political stakes of literary production. Such discourses "responded to increasing Dalit assertiveness in managing how their groups were represented and in acknowledging internal heterogeneity that defied commonsense categorization" (RTI Collective 145). In the future, the groundwork laid by Dalit literature post-2010 provides a springboard for further growth and diversification of voices.

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