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Dalit Feminism and Indian English Writing Post-2010s

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Abstract: This paper examines the discourse of Dalit feminism in Indian English literature post-2010. Emerging from the complex realities of caste, class, and gender oppression in India, Dalit feminism is a compelling and unique voice in feminist discourse. It differs from an upper-caste dominated feminist narrative, as it centers on the life experiences of Dalit women who face a double bind of oppression. This study seeks to explore how Indian English literature by Dalit women articulates these intersecting oppressions and constructs a resisting space that defies erasure and silence. Datt, Kandasamy, and Gidla are prominent Dalit women writers whose works this paper analyses to show how their narratives contest Brahmanical patriarchy and the elite feminist canon. It also examines how these writings utilize English, a language burdened with historical power and exclusion, as a means of defiance, freedom, and international sisterhood. Literature post-2010 is significant because it marks the advent of digital activism, new avenues for publishing, and public conversations around caste and gender. Through close reading and contextual socio-political analysis, this paper demonstrates the evolution of Dalit feminist discourse through literature.

Keywords: Dalit Feminism, Indian English Writing, Post-2010s Literature, Intersectionality, Caste and Gender, Subaltern Voices, Literary Resistance

Introduction: Dalit feminism has emerged as a powerful and distinct voice in Indian literature and feminist discourse, highlighting the unique struggles faced by Dalit women at the intersection of caste, gender, and class. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often ignores caste, and Dalit politics, which tends to sideline gender, Dalit feminism challenges both, offering a radical rethinking of social justice. Since 2010, Indian English literature has seen a growing presence of Dalit women writers who use storytelling as a form of resistance and self-assertion. This paper examines the representation of Dalit feminism in Indian English writing published after 2010. It explores how writers like Yashica Dutt, Meena Kandasamy, Bama, Gogu Shyamala, Sivakami, and Kalyani Thakur Charal express lived experiences of caste and gender-based discrimination through memoirs, fiction, and poetry. These

narratives challenge dominant literary spaces and redefine feminist thought by centering Dalit women's voices, struggles, and agency in the broader conversation on social transformation.

The literature review focuses on the development of Dalit feminist ideas and their depiction in Indian literature. Scholars such as Sharmila Rege in Writing Caste/Writing Gender offer insights into the interplay of caste and gender in the lives of Dalit women. Rege's *Dalit standpoint epistemology* has become a vital contribution to understanding the lived experience paradigm of Dalit feminism. Anupama Rao's The Caste Question provides an overview of political and feminist thought in the context of Dalit history. Early literary contributions by Tharu and K. Lalita in Women Writing in India incorporated regional works by emerging Dalit women authors. The work of Gopal Guru, Yashika Dutt, and Bama has focused on developing non-tokenistic feminist theories from a Dalit perspective. Since 2010, there has been greater attention to the English writings of Dalit women, including Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You and Sujatha Gidla's Ants Among Elephants. These texts are interpreted as defiant acts of appropriation and reclamation of linguistic and cultural frameworks. Yet, there is still a critical need to examine the space of Indian English writing as a site of Dalit feminist articulation in the context of globalization and digital technologies. This paper attempts to address that gap by analysing works that not only chronicle oppression.

This research utilizes a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary analysis with feminist and Dalit theory. Primary post-2010 Indian English texts by Dalit women writers serve as the foundational sources for the study. Close reading is employed to examine the themes, language, narrative techniques, and underlying ideological positions of these texts. Additionally, this research situates these texts within broader socio-political contexts, including the impact of social media, the emergence of digital activism, and the evolving norms of caste and gender in contemporary India. Intersectionality serves as a guiding analytical framework to explore the multiple, layered forms of discrimination faced by Dalit women. The contextual understanding of the literary works is enhanced by critical essays, scholarly books, articles, and interviews with the authors. This study illustrates that Dalit feminist writing in English functions not only as literature but also as a potent means of resistance and awareness-raising by merging literary critique with socio-cultural analysis.

Dalit Feminism and Indian English Writing Post-2010s: In the Indian feminist conversation, Dalit feminism has become a powerful and distinct voice. It represents the personal experiences, intricate socio-political issues, and literary works of Dalits who are subject to discrimination in gender due to their caste. Hence, it means that the injustice and suffering they experience are different from that of upper-caste women or Dalit men. Caste, gender, and class are intertwined with each other to produce a particular type of oppression. The emergence of Indian English writing after 2010 resulted in a new and significant genre that presented complex issues with greater clarity. In the meantime, Dalit women have written more stories, poetry, and memoirs. It provides them with an opening to articulate

their narratives. This paper delves into the representation of Dalit feminism in the Indian English literature published after 2010. It is the primary focus of this study to explore how caste, gender, and self-expression intersect within these texts. Our objective is to analyse these works and authors in detail; to determine how significant their contributions have been to this crucial debate. Here, we hope to gain an understanding of how the contributions of significant authors and works have shaped and enhanced this important debate by analysing these works and authors.

According to Sharmila Rege's argument, Dalit feminism does not augment the pre-existing feminist theories; rather, it challenges and redefines such theories, which drives a more in-depth engagement with the specific issues that Dalit women experience. It forces us to look at how different forms of unfairness are connected, a concept often called "intersectionality," which was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how marginalized individuals experience "intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" that cannot be understood in isolation (Crenshaw 1241). These writers help us see the world through the eyes of those who have been marginalized in multiple ways, offering new ways to understand power and justice in India. Dalit feminism is not merely an offshoot of feminism or Dalit politics but a radical rethinking of both. It critiques the patriarchal structures within Dalit communities and the caste-blindness of Savarna feminist movements. This dual critique leads to what Gopal Guru describes as the "double burden" or "double exclusion" faced by Dalit women—marginalized both within the Dalit movement, which often replicates patriarchal norms, and within mainstream feminist spaces, which routinely ignore caste. Dalit feminism, therefore, does not seek inclusion into either movement as they exist but aims to restructure both from a position of critique and resistance.

As Cynthia Stephen argues, Dalit women are not simply "doubly" oppressed by caste and gender; rather, their entire existence is shaped by a complex matrix of exclusions that cannot be separated into discrete categories. Thus, Dalit feminism requires an analysis of not only social positioning but also the institutional structures—legal, economic, religious, and educational—that sustain this subordination. Dalit feminist experts say that Dalit feminism should not be seen as a subfield of feminist theory of Dalit studies. Instead, it should be thought of as a new way of looking at both; it changes the focus from general ideas to real-life experiences, from writing to witness, and from theory to practice. It says that social changes cannot happen without understanding how caste shapes gender interaction in India. This change of perspective is important not just for feminist politics but also for imagining a fairer world. Dalit feminism is a dynamic and insurgent political praxis that challenges the silences and exclusions of both Dalit and feminist movements. It demands an epistemological shift that recognizes the centrality of caste in any analysis of gender. Rooted in lived experience, oral traditions, and community activism, Dalit feminism is not merely about representation but about resistance, not just about identity but about structural transformation.

Yashika Dutt is one afternoon fever. one of the most important literary figures in post 2010 era. Her memoir, *Coming out as the Dalit* (2019), is a major work in English Dalit autobiographical writing. The memoir tells the story of her life from passing as an unknown Dalit in a privileged urban area to publicly declaring her Dalit status. This coming out is seen as both a personal and a political act. Dutt writes, "To come out as Dalit is to risk social death but also to reclaim one's dignity" (Dutt 136). The work deals extensively with themes of shame, invisibility, self-erasure, and class mobility, particularly in educational and professional institutions that are dominated by upper-caste norms. Her narrative blends personal memoir with socio-political critique, linking individual trauma to collective marginalization.

Bama Faustina, although her iconic work Karukku was first translated into English in 2000, continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary Dalit feminist writing. Her autobiography documents her life as a Christian Dalit woman navigating dual marginalizations within the Catholic Church and the broader caste system. Bama's narrative style is direct, emotionally raw, and politically urgent. In Karukku, she recounts how even the supposed sanctity of religion was used to perpetuate caste oppression: "Even the Church and convents discriminate against us" (Bama 87). Karukku is considered foundational for Dalit literature in English translation and remains a touchstone text for post-2010 Dalit feminist writers who draw from her unflinching exploration of embodied caste and gender experience.

Another prominent voice is Gogu Shyamala, a Telugu-speaking Dalit writer and activist, whose short story collection Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket has garnered widespread acclaim in English translation. Originally written in Telugu and later translated by the author and others, the stories center around rural Dalit communities, especially women, who confront violence, poverty, and systemic caste discrimination. Yet, her narratives are far from tales of despair—they focus on the strength, wit, and resilience of Dalit women. Shyamala's women characters are resourceful and rebellious, challenging feudal caste structures and patriarchal oppression. As she writes, "It's not in our blood to be cowed down" (Shyamala 58). Her stories create a powerful archive of rural Dalit women's lives, countering both the upper-caste gaze and the patriarchal constructs within Dalit communities.

Another key writer is Meena Kandasamy, whose works post-2010, particularly *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), have received global recognition. While not strictly autobiographical, the novel is deeply informed by Kandasamy's own experiences of domestic abuse and structural misogyny. The protagonist, a writer married to an abusive Marxist academic, is systematically silenced and brutalized. Through her story, Kandasamy critiques not only patriarchal violence but also the hypocrisy of progressive male intellectuals who cloak abuse in ideological jargon. She writes, "He wanted to break me, bend me, and bury me" (Kandasamy 104). Kandasamy's prose is lyrical,

incendiary, and unapologetically political, offering a radical feminist lens that merges caste, class, and gender critique.

In the realm of poetry, Kalyani Thakur Charal is a powerful voice from Bengal. Her collection *Dhorlei Juddho Sunischit* (translated as If Caught, There Will Be War) confronts casteist violence, marginalization, and invisibilization. Though writing primarily in Bengali, the translations of her poems into English in recent years have introduced her radical voice to a larger audience. These writers also don't like it when the little voices are included in academic and literary venues just for the sake of it. In an interview, Kandasamy makes it clear that we're not here to be your only Dalit panellist. We have come back to the space. Their unwillingness to be controlled by Savarna-led publishing and literary groups is part of a bigger fight for epistemic fairness. In short, Dalit women authors in English are both representing and fighting against something. They're not just writing about Dalit women; they're writing as Dalit women and don't want to be seen through the lens of Savarna empathy or liberal guilt. Their writing is a place of conflict where art and activism come together to create work that is both artistically rich and politically important.

Contemporary Dalit women authors are pushing the boundaries of genre and form, particularly through memoirs, autobiographical fiction, and hybrid narratives. Yashica Dutt's Coming Out as Dalit (2019) is an illustrative example. Dutt recounts her journey of "passing" as non-Dalit in elite urban spaces, and her eventual decision to reclaim her Dalit identity. Her narrative is a direct challenge to the silencing and erasure that Dalit women often endure in English-speaking, upper-caste-dominated spaces. Dutt writes, "To come out as Dalit is to risk social death but also to reclaim one's dignity" (Dutt 136). The act of coming out thus becomes a political performance, reclaiming space and narrative from structures designed to marginalize. Beyond autobiographical Dalit women in literature are more complex and empowered in Gobu Shyamala's short tale collection, Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a small basket, but rural Dalit women lived with dignity and strength. These women who fight structural injustice are not only passive victims; their use of regional idioms, cultural memory, and oral traditions keeps these stories grounded in community experience while translating them into English.

Dalit women's literature now challenges stereotypes. They talk about survival, intellectual labour, political awareness, and cultural pride, as well as my misery. These texts challenge the idea that Dalit women are victims; they are considered thinkers, organizers, in life narrators. This change affects how these texts are received. Dalit women writers are being featured at literary festivals, although Savarna voices dominate panels in discussions. The task is not simply writing but developing inclusive literary settings where the little women's tales are vital to modern Indian literature. Importantly, this portrayal affects teaching, though limited universities' syllabi now include Dalit women's walk, legitimizing their voices. True change evolves from active engagement, not simply inclusion. Reading these texts as complex literary works with sarcasm, satire, allegory, and subversion is

different from reading them as social documents. Post-2010 Indian English literature by and about Dalit Women represents a significant shift in literary representation.

The digital revolution has completely changed how the Dalit women speak up and express themselves. Digital platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Blogs, and YouTube, and other media sites have become important places for women to tell their stories, share their experiences challenge cast dominance and established alliances unlike traditional publishing which is typically controlled by Savarna editors and institutions the digital world gives the a chance to get around these systems and tell their stories in their own words without interference. Yashika Dutt, who wrote Coming out as Dalit, is an example of how internet platforms may help Dalit women's voices be heard. Before her book came out, she ran a blog called Documents of Dalit Injustice, where she collected experiences of caste injustice without giving her name. The project gave Dalit people, especially women, a secure and visible place to talk about their lives. The fact that the Internet is anonymous gave people the chance to think critically and write confessionals, which helps many people come to terms with their caste identity. New ways of writing have come forth because of social media hashtag poetry, graphic essays, Twitter threads, digital posts, and Instagram reads are all now real and effective ways to write. These forms value shortness, immediacy, and visual appeals, which frequently means they reach more people and younger people. Digital writing also goes against the elitism of English literature by using other languages, everyday languages, and mixed genres. But the digital world does have its problems. The lead women are more likely than other women to be abused, harassed, and trolled online, especially when they talk about their caste. Paik noted that in many cases, Dalit women authors and activists have had to go offline for a short time or permanently because of targeted abuse, the cyber violence is similar to and strengthens the caste for patriarchal rules that exist in real life. Despite this, the resilience of Dalit women in digital spaces is remarkable. Their presence marks a refusal to be silenced and a claim to voice, representation, and visibility. The emergence of podcasts, YouTube channels, and even self-published digital anthologies has enabled a decentralized and community-based literary culture.

Mainstream Indian English literature anthologies seldom include Dalit women writers, particularly those writing in English. Even when included, their writings are often treated as sociological data rather than literary artifacts. Dalit feminist writing is thus reduced to testimony, valuable but not literary in its own right. This trend needs urgent correction. As Meena Kandasamy asserts, "We are not just writing oppression; we are writing literature" (Kandasamy 18). Moreover, the institutional neglect is mirrored in academia. Most literature syllabi in Indian universities lack texts by Dalit women in English. Even when included, these works are often relegated to "margins" sections or optional readings. A truly inclusive curriculum must centralize, rather than peripheralize, Dalit feminist voices.

Literary festivals, too, must reimagine their programming. Merely having a Dalit woman on a panel is not enough if the structure, themes, and moderation of the panel are dictated by Savarna logic. Real inclusion means giving editorial power, curatorial voice, and

institutional support to Dalit women in these spaces. The model should shift from "representation" to "participation with power." Critical frameworks must evolve to accommodate Dalit feminist aesthetics. The emphasis should not only be on trauma or resistance but also joy, humour, everydayness, and imagination. Dalit feminist literature explores a range of themes, romantic love, mental health, domesticity, and childhood memories, that are often ignored in critical discourse.

The path forward lies in building solidarity. Upper-caste feminists must move beyond performative allyship and engage in structural redistribution of power. This means mentoring, citing, and platforming Dalit women, and also challenging casteism within one's circles. As Cynthia Stephen argues, "Dalit women are not just fighting caste and patriarchy; we are imagining new futures" (Stephen 32). These futures, articulated in memoirs, poems, blogs, threads, zines, and digital art, form an emergent archive of Dalit feminist literature. This archive is already reshaping the contours of Indian English writing, offering readers a more inclusive, complex, and just literary landscape. The work ahead involves both dismantling structures and building alternatives. Publishers must commit to inclusive editorial practices. Literary prizes must broaden their criteria. Academic institutions must revise their syllabi. Most importantly, readers must open themselves to the multiplicity of voices that Dalit feminist writing offers.

Conclusion: In Indian English literature after the 2010s, Dalit feminism has emerged as a literary and socio-political force, both corrective and transformative to the prevailing narratives of feminism and Dalit discourse. Writers such as Meena Kandasamy, Yashica Dutt, and Sujatha Gidla have given voice to the unyielding struggles of Dalit women through their art, portraying their lived experiences with honesty and courage. These works counter the Brahmanical patriarchal and elite feminist silences, forging a unique identity rooted in resistance, agency, and collective memory. Through Indian English, once seen as a marker of elitism, Dalit women authors now wield it as an instrument of reclamation and global unity. They illuminate the complex intersections of caste and gender, depicting these socio-political structures as inextricably intertwined. The years following 2010 have witnessed a remarkable change not only in the publishing landscape and online activism but also in the academic and public discourse surrounding caste-inflected gendered experiences. It is essential to recognize that Dalit feminist literature transcends merely documenting systemic oppression; it is a bold assertion of existence, a political statement, and the exercise of the right to self-narrate.

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