



---

## Language and Dalit Expression in Indian English Literature

**Mrs. Hemkumari Patel**<sup>1</sup>

Asst. Professor (English)

Govt. P. D. Commerce and Arts College Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, India

Email ID: - hemkpatel.raigarh@gmail.com

**Dr. Kaushilya Sahu**<sup>2</sup>

Asst. Professor (Botany)

Shahid Rajeev Pandey Govt. College Bhatagon, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

Email ID: - kalpanasahu63@gmail.com

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

---

#### Keywords :

*Dalit voices, Dalit writers,*

*Dalit fiction, Social Justice,*

*Identity, Resistance*

---

---

### ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the role of language in the Dalit representation in Indian English literatures, and how English is used as a medium to break the silence of Dalit voices. Analyzing main works of Dalit writers and their positioning in Indian English literary texts, the investigation opens to understand how language functions as a tool enabling the switch and as the ground of caste oppression. It explores on the other hand how English was a tool of colonial oppression as well as the ability of a number of the Dalit writers to break free of other linguistic regional dominance to take their message to the world. Also, the paper examines the role of English in shaping narrative voices and techniques, and negotiation of self and culture in Dalit fiction. Thus, the study focuses on caste, literature, and language in modern India through the exploration of the topic that addresses social justice, identity, and resistance; at the same time, the research aims to enlarge the understanding of the role of literature in constructing change in society.

---

## 1. Introduction

Dalit literature means the existence of the members of the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) who were excluded and marginalized socially, culturally, and academically precluded from history. This term means the people who suffered or are still able to suffer social injustice and exclusion, and who were able to feel isolation and spiritual emptiness as part of their identity and tries to escape the unchangeable destiny of untouchability that have been always applied to them. The protest of the colonial status quo, this literature was initially a forceful rebellion against the dominant literary and societal order, which arrogated to neglect the questions and histories of the downtrodden in India. The exclusion and exclusion of the Dalit community has been built into the texture of practice intentionally and unintentionally. The awakening of Dalit consciousness arises from centuries of agonizing torment, and the literary works that capture and articulate this consciousness can rightfully be identified as Dalit literature within the realm of Indian English literature. In a land burdened with five millennia of degradation, the question remains: How can we liberate the Indian populace from this burden that has plagued them for far too long? (Bilton, 2021)

The emancipation of the untouchables is possible only when there comes into being a real and a thorough revolution in the complicated social structure of the Hindus. From this it follows that total and radical change in concepts of the directed Layer, in this case the Hindu masses is imperative to make an understanding of the subtle and deeply cherished caste system in the society. It just makes one wonder how those pathetic patients who are tortured with those chronic diseases can get a complete and juicy constitutional treatment if not treated they can hardly ever recover. Indeed, what was unique and radical about the efforts of Dalit writing – and not only for Dalit writing but for women and other regional and subaltern forms of writing – was the very premise and urgent need of such writing to be not only heard but to be heard as literature. It is important to note that this literary movement dreamed of sitting at the same level as other great literatures. In fact, to achieve a higher status and be considered equal to the other person, both were endowed, so to say, with that sense of the universal. However, this tendency to achieve a universal dimension remained unattainable for them as the others were not embedded into their distinctive socio-cultural settings, pointer to the values they hold dear, and in fact their suffering and pain milestones. (Sonowal, 2023)

## 2. The Evolution of Indian English Literature and Dalit Expression

Mainstream Indian English literature took major turns during its historical evolution: it began as a traditional art and adhered to romanticism and aestheticism, which were remnants of colonial effects.

Poetry flourished in its classical forms from ancient times, picking and refurbishing it with Indian literary themes. During the 1930s, some writers made a switch from 'innocent art' to 'responsible art' with the onset of the nation's socio-political awakening. In a way, the writers of this period were trendsetters and tradition makers in this transitory period. Under colonial rule, the literary atmosphere of Indian writing in English started with the abstract or generalized portrayal of life and personalities; it later evolved to revolve around themes that made readers realize the complex and numerous aspects of Indian social and mental existence. It was in this respect that fiction in English was adapted for 'writing back' and interiorizing the natural and supernatural. That was also the time when caste social segregation underwent a great deal of criticism. The depressed class, today referred to as the 'Dalit' class, revolted against untouchability and ugly social practices of the inner class, creating extensive literature. (Regmi, 2021)

As time progressed, these themes underwent remarkable expansion, capturing the essence of India's cultural tapestry with astonishing depth and richness. The trajectory of Indian English literature witnessed a fascinating metamorphosis, giving birth to an opulent amalgamation of diverse narratives and eloquent prose. The writers, armed with their pens as mighty instruments, embarked on an exploration of the intricacies of the human experience within the vibrant and multi-layered Indian society. Their words became a symphony of emotions, painting vivid portraits of love, suffering, and triumph against the backdrop of a nation on the cusp of profound change. Delving deeper into the intricacies of the human psyche, the writers honed their craft, wielding language as a brush to craft intricate masterpieces. They delved into the labyrinthine complexities of human relationships, exploring the bonds that shaped individuals and communities alike. Words became bridges, connecting distant hearts and unraveling the threads that wove the tapestry of Indian life. The stories they wove began to resonate with readers, resonating with the echoes of shared experiences and unspoken truths. (Williams, 2024)

As the colonial shackles loosened their grip, the writers seized the opportunity to shed light on the dark corners of society, exposing the harsh realities that lay hidden beneath a veneer of tradition. They fearlessly confronted the prejudices and injustices that plagued their nation, giving voice to the marginalized and oppressed. The once silenced voices of the 'Dalit' class reverberated through the pages, challenging the status quo and demanding change. Indian English literature became a vehicle for not just storytelling, but also for social commentary and advocacy. It became a powerful tool for enlightenment, as the writers harnessed their literary prowess to ignite conversations and inspire introspection. Through

their words, they celebrated the rich cultural heritage of India while also examining the flaws and shortcomings that needed addressing. (Karim et al.2023)

The literary landscape of Indian English literature expanded exponentially, embracing a multitude of genres and styles. From spellbinding historical epics to introspective coming-of-age tales, the writers navigated uncharted territories, pushing boundaries and defying conventions. They crafted narratives that transcended time and space, capturing the essence of India's diverse landscapes and intricate tapestry of traditions. Today, Indian English literature stands as a testament to the resilience and creative spirit of a nation. It continues to evolve, adapting to the changing times while staying true to its roots. The writers of this rich tradition have left an indelible mark on the literary world, enriching the global literary canon with their unique perspectives and unparalleled storytelling. They have paved the way for future generations to weave their own narratives, ensuring that the vibrant legacy of Indian English literature will endure for generations to come.

Many of the major literary works in the rich and diverse English language have assertively showcased Dalit concepts in both subtle and fiercely competitive ways, giving voice to the long-suppressed narratives and experiences of the marginalized. The impactful emergence of Dalit literature in modern times in India began to take root from around the 1960s, propelled by a multitude of illuminating concepts that elucidated the essence of Dalit consciousness. It is crucial to recognize that Dalit consciousness, as we know it today, has undergone a profound and arduous journey of introspection, self-discovery, interventions, and deep understanding. (Kumar)

Before a Dalit writer even embarked on the courageous path of penning down their vivid collection of experiences, encompassing their joys, agitations, and idiosyncrasies, they were already imbued with the weight of over two hundred years of tumultuous history.

This significant period can be thoughtfully divided into three distinct phases: the pre-Independence era, the post-Independence era, and the era of neo-Dalit literature that seamlessly emerged thereafter. In the first phase, the seeds of Dalit literature were sown by individuals who embodied immense wisdom and courage, such as the eminent social reformer Jyotirao Phule. Likewise, one cannot overlook the indelible contributions of his prominent students, including Lakshmi Narshamma and the remarkable Tarabai Shinde, who authored a deeply impacting, voluminous denunciation of the oppressive Brahminical order that continues to resonate powerfully even today.

### 3. Language and Linguistic Choices in Dalit Literature

From its formative years, Dalit literature has been understood in terms of language. The establishment scholars have been harshly critical of it for speaking through the crude and ugliness of victimhood, which is often seen as a language of illicit and horrendousness, or have deeply appreciated the same horrendousness as the most honest and plainest reflection of Dalit pain and desperateness. The Dalit genre embodied writers loudly affirm the importance of linguistics and the epic experiences of their people, firmly maintain the language of their bodies as their true tors, their dense cultural heritage, and the lived realities of the Dalits. In their attempts to attain authenticity, Dalit writers always effortlessly employ code-switching, the loveliness ceaselessly of creole languages, and the unique phrases of region languagedialects all in a manner of stitching together a tale the beautifully telescopes the dense pronunciations of region words, the blindingly profound proverbs, the evocatively idiomatic, nothingness, the positively metaphorical and the vivid imagery that are indivisible from this. This is not only a joyful piece that succeeds in weaving together the extreme suffering and impossibility of justice experienced by the Dalit community with such deliberate linguistic choices, but rather it is poised to become a recital that stands out on its own. (Browarczyk, 2021)

The dividing line in Indian literature is not so much between Dalit and Non-Dalit as it is between the English used in Indian writing in English and the vernaculars of India. The struggle over language reveals the writer's politics. However, the usage of language according to his or her own choice by a Dalit writer, being on the margin, becomes a radical and innovative act, which neither a colonial nor an elite writer can parallel. The life-space of the Dalits has been violent, and it is the politics of experience that guides the rhetoric of Dalit literature, which has to be authentic and will be orally communicated. Ultimately, in Dalit literature, voice is ideology. Dalit literature is more consciously ideological, as it fights for social transformation within. Hence, writing itself, in terms of content and form, becomes revolt, struggle, and resistance.

In the field of literature, this translates into counterposing Dalit narratives to the myths of Aryan culture, purity, and innocence in caste matters of poetry, to the experience of the sufferer endured in the poetry of Untouchables. Dalit linguistic constants have become expressive of content, reflecting the state of society and the individual self. The significance of this dynamic cannot be understated, as it shapes the narrative landscape while paving the way for unprecedented change. The resounding impact of Dalit literature echoes through the corners of cultural reformation, fostering a profound metamorphosis in the societal consciousness. (Azam, 2022)

Through the sheer power of its words, Dalit literature awakens the dormant vigor in the hearts of the marginalized, shattering the chains of oppression that have strangled their souls for centuries. As the pen dances across the untamed pages, it breathes life into long-suppressed voices, offering a sanctuary of expression where untold stories unfold. In this battle for emancipation, language becomes the spearhead, piercing through the barriers of societal hierarchy, forever altering the landscape of literature. The courageous act of a Dalit writer defies the confines of convention, for their words reverberate with an unwavering truth that reveres their own unique experiences.

The struggles engrained within the life-space of the Dalits have been nothing short of cataclysmic, leaving an indelible mark on their existence. Through the unwavering power of penmanship, Dalit literature illuminates the darkness that has long veiled their narrative. It charts its course through the choppy waters of oppression, navigating uncharted territories with the insistence of a roaring tempest. Enveloped within its essence lies the ideology that propels the movement forward, relentlessly advocating for social metamorphosis. In the ceaseless quest for societal transformation, the written word emerges as the bedrock of this revolution. Every stroke of the pen carries with it a defiance that challenges the very foundation on which societal constructs have been built. Content and form intertwine, birthing a formidable force that dismantles long-standing myths with unprecedented precision. The intricate tapestry of Dalit narratives interlaces with the threads of Aryan culture, casting light on the fallacy of purity and innocence intertwined with caste matters of poetry. From the depths of suffering endured by the Untouchables, a poetry emerges that transcends boundaries, preserving the essence of their collective pain.

Within the realm of Dalit literature, language assumes a profound significance. It becomes more than just a vessel for expression; it becomes the embodiment of the collective consciousness of a marginalized community. The very linguistic constants that define their existence become conduits of their truth, mirroring society's flaws and mirroring the ache of the individual's soul. Through these linguistic constants, the state of not just the self, but of an entire society, permeates the pages, underscoring the urgent need for change. The pervasive influence of Dalit literature resonates far beyond the confines of mere words on a page. It reverberates with the weight of a thousand voices, breathing life into a transformative journey towards justice and equality. With every stirring narrative, the narrative landscape shifts, propelling society towards an uncharted future where liberation and understanding reign supreme. As the echoes of Dalit literature reverberate through the corridors of cultural progress,

the world bears witness to a metamorphosis of the human spirit, forever altering the trajectory of our shared existence.

#### **4. Themes and Motifs in Dalit Literature**

In her groundbreaking and revolutionary study, *Dalit Literature: Contents and Cultures*, Suniti S. R. Diwakar extensively and comprehensively elucidates and provides a vivid and comprehensive account of the profound and significant major themes and motifs that are inherently characteristic of Dalit writings from the historic 19th century to the contemporary present. The range and scope of the themes encompassed within this remarkable and awe-inspiring list are truly vast and multifarious, representing a diverse and thought-provoking tapestry of the Dalit experience.

These themes include but are by no means limited to the pernicious realities of oppression and impoverishment, the intricate and complex aspects of identity, the abhorrent and deeply entrenched practice of untouchability, the influence and impact of historical, ontological, and patriarchal factors, the interplay and dynamics of caste-class relations, the ramifications of race and gender, the intersections of Hinduism and exclusion, the plight of the marginalized and dispossessed, the harrowing plight of landless laborers trapped in a cycle of degradation and exploitation, the cruelties and horrors of torture, fascism, and slavery, the pervasive and insidious nature of discrimination, the experience of marginalization and dispossession, the desolation and confinement of ghettos, the profound sense of isolation, the struggles and challenges faced by the sub-peasantry, the concept of collective life and its implications, the exploitative and degrading systems that perpetuate suffering, the denial of fundamental human rights and the erosion of identity and dignity, the fundamental and intrinsic importance of ethics and values, and finally, the momentous and profound journey towards self-respect and self-realization that lies at the heart of the Dalit experience. (Singh2023)

While every Dalit experience is intrinsically unique in nature, the collective micro-narration that emerges from these profound and deeply personal stories serves to eloquently and powerfully articulate the collective sorrow, pain, and suffering of not only the Indian Dalit community but also the downtrodden communities worldwide. It is through this poignant and emotive collective micro-narration that a resounding and profound macro-resonance is generated, aiming to quell the agonizing pain that ignites the spirit while simultaneously granting the long-sought-after and cherished autonomy and self-declaration of the Dalits, thereby enabling them to rise above and ultimately reject the well-intentioned yet misguided assistance of outsiders. However, amidst this landscape of hope and progress, there

lingers an unanswered and troubling question that continues to haunt and elude resolution: Who will rise to the challenge and bear the responsibility of aiding and supporting those who desperately seek liberation and justice? (Misrahi-Barak2021)

Dalit literature inherently engages with and embodies the intricate and nuanced narratives of both individuals and communities, skillfully weaving together a rich tapestry of interconnected stories that highlight the resilience, strength, and unwavering determination of the Dalit people in the face of overwhelming adversity and systemic discrimination.

In addition to these themes, Diwakar not only identifies motivational preoccupations such as land and labor, dispossession and social justice, and familial relations but also delves deeper into their complexities. The Short Stories and Letters that Diwakar explores are not just narratives focusing on familial relations, but also vivid portrayals of the harsh reality of marginalization and oppression. Many talented writers have dedicated themselves to capturing these profound motifs in their works. One can see their dedication and passion in pieces like *The World of Hori*, *Godan*, and *Nectar in a Sieve*, where they have sought to understand and depict these motivational upshots with remarkable intensity. Their efforts have resulted in bringing the readers closer to the stark realities of Dalit concerns, as these fundamental motifs serve as powerful tools to further deepen the delineations and presentations of Dalit re-advancement to the rich Indian heritage. Moreover, they encompass visible and read-out progressiveness, particularly in lifestyle and day-to-day behavior, offering a glimpse into the transformative power of these themes. The themes of aesthetic movement, influenced by inherent motivations, play a pivotal role in showcasing the complete impartiality required to explore and appreciate the nuances of artistic expression.

### **5. Impact and Significance of Dalit Expression in Indian English Literature**

Over the course of many years, the expression of the Dalit community in Indian English literature has played a significant role in shattering the barriers constructed by the caste system. It is now evident that context has evolved into nothing more than another facet, as Dalit literature has been recognized and acknowledged as a counter-narrative within the vast framework of Indian English literature. This form of literature has allowed us to view the established literary canons through a completely different lens, prompting us to reevaluate our preconceived notions. The ingenious Dalit writers have fearlessly challenged the prevailing values and representations that have been imposed upon us by the traditional literary works. Moreover, they have tirelessly fought for their rightful place within the existing literary



tradition. Unfortunately, more often than not, they have been systematically excluded from the conventional realm. It is crucial to recognize that the social problem at hand will not be resolved until the upper-caste writers themselves take responsibility for the cruelties, exclusions, and other deficiencies perpetuated by the Hindu socio-political-economic systems upon the Dalit community. (Ghatak, 2021)

The emergence of a higher level of perception and criticism of religion within Dalit literature has undeniably left an indelible mark, profoundly influencing and quite possibly instigating a societal transformation towards a more liberal and inclusive climate. As a result, this ultimately sparked a renaissance within Indian society, permeating all societal levels. The presence of Dalit literature has successfully captured the attention of the global community, shedding light upon India and its multifaceted realities.

It traces the various phases of poetry, deeply delving into the intricate details of the immense creativity displayed by these talented wordsmiths. Furthermore, the poetry magnificently shines a glaring spotlight on the relentless violence and excruciating oppression that the Dalits endure within the confines of Indian English literature. As such, the focal point of Indian English literature effortlessly shifts towards the fundamental principles of justice, equity, and fairness within the vast tapestry of Indian society, with a particular emphasis on the state of Maharashtra. Throughout this profound exploration, the concentration intently zeroes in on the powerful impact of the word 'persecute,' which masterfully portrays the harsh realities of exploitation, repression, and brutal assaults inflicted upon humanity by fellow human beings. Consequently, it powerfully sheds light on the existence of extreme adversities and harrowing predicaments that life frequently hurls in our paths, thus leading to widespread anguish and unhappiness. Exemplifying immense resilience, the oppressed Dalit writers and critics have risen above these challenges and firmly established themselves as formidable instruments for fostering awareness within society. (Richard, 2020)

These incredibly talented authors hailing from marginalized backgrounds have made substantial contributions, deftly crafting profound themes that effortlessly encapsulate the aesthetic, cultural, societal, and compassionate aspects of the human experience. Although these remarkable writers journey along the path of creating a distinctive brand of literature, they have astonishingly managed to captivate the hearts and minds of the public, evoking deep emotions and contemplation. The magnificent realm of Dalit writing has undeniably laid bare the shocking discrepancies and the inherent worthlessness of the rights to freedom of expression. It is crucial to acknowledge the monumental

impact that translated Dalit writing has made, as it has finally begun to gain the serious recognition and appreciation it so undoubtedly deserves within the vast realm of literary works. Within the expressions of these talented writers, one can vividly hear the resounding roar of denial, anger, despair, and profound intellectual prejudices. Furthermore, they valiantly shed light on the barbaric perception that society often forces upon the untouchables, as most translations eloquently reflect the simmering undercurrents of violence that permeate their conversations, themes that have historically found limited space within the realm of Indian English literature.

## 6. Conclusion

The present article aims to comprehensively analyze and delve into the intricate usage of language across different epochs of Dalit expression, focusing on the profound manner in which Dalits depict and encapsulate the raw realities within the vast expanse of various writings in Indian English literature. It is discernible that the expression of Dalits vividly manifests itself throughout the realm of literature, etching an indelible mark on the sentiments and consciousness of readers. Remarkably, Dalit expression occupies a preeminent and meritorious position within the vast tapestry of Indian writing in English, commanding attention and admiration. Every facet of existence, devoid of exception, has been irrevocably touched and impacted by the scrutiny and exploration of Dalit expression, becoming a poignant testimony to their enduring suffering, arduous struggles, and profound ruminations. The pervasive societal stigma, as well as the perpetual state of marginalization, unrelentingly permeate every arena and discipline of Dalit writings within the rich tapestry of Indian English literature, further emphasizing the potency and significance of their words.

India is the land of snake charmers where chaos is part of routine life. India remains entirely patriarchal and caste-ridden. Perhaps, these are the characteristics of the country, that is why all through several stories are still into the news regarding the bride burnings and female feotocides and there are around 6.8 crores of people live in abject poverty and live such an economic condition, in which fulfil his/her basic educational requirement is unable to optimise up to the age of 32 to 50. Nearly 85% of the people who are a part of the great circus of Indian democracy are anguished because of their caste, and the conditions will not change until and unless untouchables are going to complete forced social ostrasis. Caste system, due to its prevalence, hoards social ostrasis and unapproachability, fill 70 percent of the rural scheduled caste population under the category of bonded labour and 75.9 percent dalit labourers are paid less than Rs.100 per month, because a small percentage of rich people hold the upper hand.

**References:**

- Bilton, D. (2021). Dalit writing in the 21st century: activism and literary aesthetics in contemporary India. [ntu.ac.uk](http://ntu.ac.uk)
- Sonowal, C. J. (2023). Religious Conversion and Emancipation of Untouchables: Gandhi's View, Ambedkar's Action and Beyond. Contemporary Voice of Dalit. [\[HTML\]](#)
- Regmi, J. (2021). Identity Crisis in Anand's Untouchable. [202.45.147.228](https://doi.org/10.20245.147.228)
- Williams, T. W. (2024). If All the World Were Paper: A History of Writing in Hindi. [degruyter.com](http://degruyter.com)
- Karim, A., Kabilan, M. K., Ahmed, Z., Reshmin, L., & Rahman, M. M. (2023). The medium of instruction in Bangladeshi higher education institutions: Bangla, English, or both?. Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 22(3), 232-246. [\[HTML\]](#)
- Kumar, C. (). DISCOURSE OF DISSENT: LANGUAGING RESISTANCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN SUBALTERN LITERATURES--DALIT AND BLACK.. Studies in Linguistics. [\[HTML\]](#)
- Browarczyk, M. (2021). WE are Dalit History. Cracow Indological Studies. [akademicka.pl](http://akademicka.pl)
- Azam, R. (2022). Imagining the Dalit Identity: An Analysis of Narrative Techniques in Select Dalit writing. The Creative launcher. [redalyc.org](http://redalyc.org)
- Singh, S. (2023). Dalit Women as Outsider Within: A Standpoint Exploration. Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature, 17(2), 153-166. [iium.edu.my](http://iium.edu.my)
- Misrahi-Barak, J. (2021). Edwidge Danticat Writes the Refugee: "Children of the Sea," "Caroline's Wedding," "Without Inspection". Journal of the Short Story in English. Les Cahiers de la nouvelle, (77), 223-246. [openedition.org](http://openedition.org)
- Ghatak, N. (2021). Alterities of Desire: A Comparative Analysis of 20th century Women's Autobiographical Writings from India. [auckland.ac.nz](http://auckland.ac.nz)
- Richard, H. L. (2020). Cultural Gaps: Benjamin Robinson's Experience with Hindu Traditions. [\[HTML\]](#)