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Dalit Writing in English: A Dalitification of the History of Indian Writing

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Abstract: This essay makes a pedagogical intervention in the theorisation of Indian writing in English (IWE). It asserts that postcolonial studies and anthologies of IWE have deliberately excluded Dalit writing, which narrates the caste discrimination experienced by the majority of the Indian population. It proves the discipline of IWE—the writing and its study—has been hegemonised by upper-caste writers and academics who disregard the historical presence and literary worth of Dalit writing. This essay proposes that Dalit writing in English (DWE) should be viewed as an independent area of study. It traces the history of Dalit writing through three waves in conjunction with Indian politics and argues that DWE achieved the "Dalitification" of English by challenging Brahmanical control over the language and introducing caste into the reading and writing of English from a Dalit perspective.

Keywords: caste, Indian writing in English, postcolonial studies, Dalit literature, Ambedkar, Phule

I. Introduction

This paper thematises a new area for literary study and analysis that I call Dalit writing in English (henceforth DWE), which challenges the established postcolonial and predominantly upper-caste writing that emerged post-independence in India and is academically categorised as Indian writing in English (IWE) by writers and researchers from the subcontinent. Meenakshi Mukherjee, an upper-caste English professor and one of the earliest theorists of IWE, states that "Indian Writing in English as a recognisable literary phenomenon goes back only to the 1930s (most

earlier attempts being either amateurish or sporadic in nature), and the first generation of writers, as a ballast to the supposed alienness/elitism of the language, tended to deploy certain thematic or formal devices to tether their texts to indigenous contexts" ("The Anxiety of Indianness" 2608). In 1997, Salman Rushdie, the winner of the 1981 Man Booker Prize, traced the history of IWE from the 1940s and asserted that IWE or "'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (Rushdie and West, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947–1997* xiv). Mukherjee's periodisation and Rushdie and Elizabeth West's anthology exclude Dalit writing from the history of Indian writing and firmly entrench upper-caste writing as IWE. I argue that IWE and its academic categorisation create a universe of decolonisation that retains the caste privilege of upper castes and renders Dalit writers invisible.

By tracing the unacknowledged history of DWE through three waves of Dalit writing, this essay unravels the identity of the "Indian" in IWE, revealing that the Indian whose writing has been canonized is primarily upper-caste. IWE, and the study of IWE through anthologies and postcolonial studies, have marginalised Dalit writing when it comes to research and academic discussions. Such academic efforts have isolated DWE, which is often only included in university syllabi as an afterthought, if at all, and is subsumed under the larger umbrella of IWE.[1] The pedagogical strategy of excluding Dalit writing reflects academic and institutional practices of casteism in Indian classrooms.[2]

This article insists on perceiving DWE as an independent category that needs to be researched and taught. DWE represents history from a Dalit perspective and encourages an analysis that does justice to Dalits' experiences of caste-based discrimination, colonial rule, and English education. DWE proposes a new way of comprehending the world: through the frame of Dalit and non-Dalit. It reveals the lie perpetrated by upper castes in India: that India is a Hindu majority. Upper castes constitute less than 10% of the Indian population and yet hold more than 90% of the wealth and positions of power in urban, political, and academic spaces. After two millennia of being considered Untouchables and outcasts, or outside the Brahmanical caste order, Dalits were

forcefully and numerically incorporated into the twentieth century invention of the category of "Hindu." Their incorporation, along with the incorporation of Shudras (refer to Endnote 9), meant that India could now be represented as a "Hindu" majority, but what remained hidden from the public view was that lower castes were deemed Hindu in name and not in practice. Divya Dwivedi, Shaj Mohan, and J. Reghu call this "The Hindu Hoax," which refers to the historical incorporation of lower castes in order to fictitiously represent a Hindu majority while maintaining caste divisions and exploiting lower castes for labour. DWE asserts the political aspirations of the hidden majority in India by revealing the "Hindu hoax" that has been perpetuated for far too long only because upper castes have dominated writing, researching, and analyzing literary works in India.

One might consider the simpler solution: making IWE more representative by expanding it to include DWE, as excluding it might perpetuate the false idea that the Indian whose writing in English is worth reading internationally is upper-caste. However, this would neglect pedagogical practices in universities, where upper-caste professors who have consolidated their power by teaching upper-caste literature would be able to hide their casteism and appear liberal by teaching lower-caste literature. Furthermore, lower-caste authors often do not want their literature to be read in comparison with or as a supplement to upper-caste writing in English. The risk of the upper-caste perspectives dominating the discourse on caste is far too dangerous.

The theorisation of DWE should be understood as a pedagogical intervention. IWE and postcolonial studies have often silenced and reduced the Dalit to an object of study from a non-Dalit perspective. This essay exposes IWE through the lens of caste and resists the absorption of DWE within IWE. It reveals the oppositional struggle between IWE and DWE since the conditions for acquiring English, and hence the experience of postcoloniality, have been very different for upper castes and Dalits. This essay introduces and charts DWE through three distinct waves of Dalit writing that reflect the dynamics of Dalit mobilisation and the conditions of emergence for Dalit writing in vernacular and in English. The first wave was sparked as a combined anticolonial and

anti-caste effort by a rising Dalit intelligentsia; the second wave was a result of the regional mobilisation of Dalits and the writing of Dalit memoirs and autobiographies in vernacular languages; and the third wave created DWE because of the rise of the Dalit middle class and visibility of the Dalit diaspora along with the internationalisation of the Dalit cause.

I propose that DWE has achieved the "Dalitification" of English, which entails the following: the introduction of caste and its politics from a Dalit perspective into the reading and writing of English; the unreading of history represented in IWE by representing a parallel but unacknowledged lower-caste history; the challenge to upper-caste hegemony over the discourse of caste and representation of Dalits; and the articulation of Dalit subjectivity in opposition to the postcolonial idea of the subaltern subject. Academia and literary writing became the battleground on which this war was waged. By writing in English, Dalits defied being represented as the subaltern who could not speak; in fact, the subaltern that international South Asian academics were obsessed with was upper caste. Through IWE, upper-caste academics asserted that the subaltern who should speak and be heard is the upper-caste Indian.

The *Dalitification* of English challenges hegemonic, Sanskritic, and Brahmanical definitions and ideologies of caste in a dominant language. *Dalitification* enables the creation of new categories and definitions of what it means to be Bahujan—a term meaning "the many" that includes Dalits, Tribals, and Shudras. It allows for the expression of new solidarities, if not unity, in the struggle to create a new political identity of oppressed people who together form a 90% majority in India. Today, the majority realises itself in and through the tradition of writing in English started by Jotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar, and that majority continues the project of *Dalitification.*

II. The Importance of English for Dalits and Their Writing

It is important to pay attention to DWE because English has long been a tool of humiliation for Dalits. Belittling Dalits for their inability to articulate in English, presuming ignorance or lack of care towards

grammatical rules, or claiming their lack of knowledge of texts, writing styles, and forms that exemplify English writing are the core of caste-based discrimination in academia. The upper castes' focus on Dalits' inability to speak with an Anglicised or Americanised diction or write in certain styles creates a false narrative of individual failure and prevents a wider audience from discerning how, for millennia, the entire Dalit community was and continues to be discouraged from accessing education. The Dalit writer and academic Yogesh Maitreya describes his experience with a non-Dalit professor at university. He writes, in English:

> For two years, a Brahmin professor taught me English literature. On one not-so-fine day, I shared my experience with her of reading a novel, in English. Uninterested in what I spoke, she corrected me on a grammatical mistake from my conversation in an authoritative voice.
>
> I felt belittled. My understanding had been reduced to errors in grammar. ("My English Isn't Broken")

Upper-caste academics and writers maintain Brahmanical control over English because they are often the Indians who can make themselves heard and read. Maitreya reveals how expressivity in English marks the upper caste's elite status and is weaponized by academic gatekeepers who prevent the majority of Indians, who are lower caste, from breaking through the international perception of Indian writing. DWE challenges upper-caste hegemony by asserting ownership over English in the struggle for self-representation.

Reading and writing in English has also enabled the awakening of Dalits and encouraged them to challenge caste-based discrimination. The Dalit journalist Sagar writes, in English:

> All I have read of Ambedkar has come to me in English—the language he himself wrote in. It is also in English that I have since learnt about Jotirao Phule, Periyar and Malcolm X. . . . Once, I wondered why my awakening did not come in Hindi. . . . I realise now that my upbringing in Hindi did not just delay my discovery of Ambedkar, it kept me from under-

> standing the very concepts of justice and equality. . . . This was not an accident. It had everything to do with who created the language, who developed and propagated it, and whose stamp remains deepest upon it today.

Sagar's education in Hindi, at the hands of Brahmin teachers, deliberately blocked Dalit enlightenment and never incorporated radical Dalit thinkers like Ambedkar. Dalits and their concerns, if ever in syllabi, continue to be represented through the works of non-Dalit writers like Premchand, who stereotyped Dalits and made them appear passive and disempowered.

The Dalit writer and entrepreneur Chandra Bhan Prasad deifies English, giving it a counter-scriptural authority, for "English makes it much easier for all Dalits to leave caste-based occupations. Will English-speaking Dalits, for instance, be asked to skin dead cows? . . . The Goddess English can empower Dalits, giving them a chance to break free from centuries of oppression" ("Hail English, the Dalit Goddess"). In the twenty-first century, education and articulation in English have enabled Dalits to leave caste-based occupations and achieve social mobility and economic empowerment previously denied to them by upper castes. Through DWE, Dalits challenge the control upper castes exert over the professional avenues opened by English; hence, it is important to pay attention to the history of English acquisition for Dalits.

III. The Conflict between DWE and IWE

Additionally, we must ask why DWE comes so late after IWE. We need to address the history of the development of English as a language of literary expression in India.[3] Caste has played a definitive role in the tradition of writing in English,[4] wherein upper-caste history, writing, and pedagogy dominates and conceals the concurrent DWE. Therefore, DWE directly conflicts with IWE. The rise of DWE has been deliberately blocked and significantly delayed by IWE and its theorists, and any revolutionary attempts made by Dalit writers have been incorporated into the margins of IWE. IWE is primarily seen as an anti-colonial effort to properly "Indianize" English to reflect the subaltern

experience of modernity. Various academics, from Namvar Singh[5] to A. K. Ramanujan,[6] offer theories about the function of Indian English in decolonising the "Indian" mind but use the term "Indian" uncritically and in a manner unreflective of caste.

Literary works like Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997) imagine a post-nationalist India that defies the conventional nationalist rhetoric of writing about caste. Such works have often found a place within postcolonial studies and anthologies that systematise IWE.[7] On the contrary, literary works written by Dalit writers in English challenge some of the assumptions of literary works written by non-Dalit writers in English, and hence, DWE resists IWE that has primarily been shaped by non-Dalit writers and their sensibilities, conflicts, and views of the Indian nation. DWE has, therefore, been the undocumented, invisible other of IWE. Caste (if it has featured) in the works of IWE—which might be better described as "upper-caste writing in English"—has been represented in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through a unilateral, elitist, and non-marginal perspective. Subsequently, upper-caste scholarship created the category of IWE and refused to acknowledge the concurrent tradition of DWE. In an ironic repetition of history, in the twenty-first century upper-caste writers and intellectuals once again became the ones to represent lower castes.

Upper-caste academics, who form the majority in academia in India and the diaspora (while belonging to a powerful minority population), extend the project of the "Hindu hoax" into academic discussions on IWE and postcolonial studies. By vilifying the colonial master, upper-caste academics hide the continuing problem of caste on the subcontinent. This omission is a studied tactic to avoid confronting caste, which would mean acknowledging that upper-caste academics perpetuate caste hierarchies (Dwivedi et al. 21). Upper-caste academics argue that Indians, implying lower castes, must be educated in vernacular languages while ensuring that the benefits of an English education only accrue to upper castes (Dwivedi et al. 22). IWE and its academic discussions have belied the history of the majority of Indians and their political aspirations, misrepresented the colonial encounter, and obliterated Dalit voices in the historicisation of IWE. To explain why DWE is only

emerging now, I chart the three waves that have shaped the emergence of DWE. In conjunction, I assess the history of upper-caste writing in English and why it predates DWE. This analysis will reveal that IWE is a misnomer, for it is actually a vehicle of caste discrimination.

IV. The First Wave: The Education of Dalits in English and the Rise of the Dalit Intelligentsia

The first wave of Dalit writing was enabled by the imperial introduction of English and reveals the asymmetry of the colonial encounter between the upper and lower castes. The upper castes appropriated the means of education and writing in English to castigate the colonial master, whereas Dwivedi, Mohan, and Reghu assert that the lower castes viewed colonisation as productive as it created the conditions to publicly challenge the authority of upper castes. The first wave was shaped by the efforts and writings of figures like the Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Ambedkar, who paved the way for the rise of Dalit organic intellectuals.

In India, English was introduced in 1835 by the British imperial officer Thomas Macaulay. The intention, he writes, was to "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" ("Minute by the Hon'ble T. B. Macaulay"). The Brahmanical castes were traditionally considered the intellectual class; consequently, they monopolised education in English and barred its access to the lower-caste masses.[8] They reaped the benefits of an English education to hegemonise the position of the traditional intellectual in society, access positions in the government, and consolidate their social power. The Brahmins in India have always had social capital, or what should be categorised as "caste capital"—a certain amount of social currency, wealth, land, and privilege that can only be obtained by one's caste position. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd argues that in industrialised and capitalist India, the caste capital acquired by Brahmins and Baniyas has enabled them to perpetuate caste inequalities (*Post-Hindu India* 162). Positioned at the top of the caste order, Brahmins have conventionally monopolised caste capital and reaped the most benefits from

education in English as well, since they created a coterie exclusively for upper castes.[9]

The project of exclusionary education for upper castes was initiated in 1828 by Raja Rammohan Roy's Brahmo Samaj, a socially reformist organisation that aimed to reconstruct Hinduism as a monotheistic religion. Roy was considered the father of the Indian (or what has been revealed as the Brahmanical) Renaissance because he wanted to reform Hinduism. He introduced education in English to steer upper castes away from learning Sanskrit and the Vedic texts. Roy questioned the excesses of the caste system but not the caste system itself.[10] Organisations like Brahmo Samaj, which posited itself as reformatory, created an educated class of Brahmins who began to wield caste power in a different way: they now controlled the bureaucracy, legal systems, and means of modern education in English. Upper castes deliberately blocked Dalits and lower castes from accessing education, thereby creating a lag in education and writing that is visible even today.[11]

In stark contrast to the Brahmo Samaj were the efforts of the Satyashodhak Samaj, a radical anti-caste organisation that worked for the socio-economic welfare of lower castes, started in 1873 by the visionary Shudra leader Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his partner Savitribai Phule. They undertook the education of the Shudras and Ati-Shudras (the lower castes and Untouchables), organised a peasant rebellion, and popularised Satyashodhak *tamashas* (folk dramas that challenged conventional upper-caste symbols and authority)[12] in Maharashtra. Rosalind O'Hanlon observes that the advent of British rule and laws widened the scope of educational opportunities for lower castes; however, "the old association of the higher castes with the skills of literacy gave them a much greater flexibility and readiness to exploit these new possibilities" (7), which ensured that education in English was capitalised on by upper castes. Critically aware of this asymmetry and aiming to remedy it, the Phules ensured education for Untouchable children. The conceptualisation of Bahujan, or lower-caste solidarity, and the beginning of education for lower castes can be credited to the Phules' efforts. They became anti-caste leaders and offered a targeted attack on Brahminism and its control over pedagogy.

Jyotiba Phule inaugurated the tradition of lower-caste writing by penning *Gulamgiri* (translated as *Slavery* [1873]). He rejected the scriptural justification of the caste system, revealing it to be a system of inequality perpetuating itself under the guise of divine sanction. Gopal Guru describes Phule as a pioneering intellectual in Shudra and Dalit thought for his revisionary historical politics and his reimagining of India in anti-mythical terms. Phule also coined the term "Dalit," thereby giving the Untouchables of India a new political identity constituted by self-definition and self-affirmation. It enabled them to define themselves through terminology that defied Brahmin epistemology. In his introduction to *Gulamgiri*, Phule draws a comparison between enslaved African-Americans and the lower castes in India by writing, in English: "The miserable condition of both types of slaves is identical. The hardships heaped upon the slaves in America were also suffered by the depressed and down-trodden people in India at the hands of the Bhats (Brahmins), Nay, even more!" (*Slavery* xlv).

In addition to laying the foundation for Black and Dalit solidarity and theorising about the racialization of the caste order, Phule gives a different definition of what "anti-colonial" means for the lower castes. He writes: "We are much beholden to the British rulers. . . . It was the British rulers who freed us from the centuries-old oppression of the Bhat (Brahmin) and assured a hopeful future for our children. Had the British not come on the scene (in India) (as our rulers) the Bhats would surely have crushed us in no time (long ago)" (xlix). The lower castes in India were doubly colonized by upper castes and the imperial order. However, they viewed the imperial colonisation as beneficial, as it allowed them to escape from the clutches of Brahmanical tyranny and lower-caste enslavement primarily through education. Therefore, it is important to observe that the modern literary category of "postcolonial" writers consists of upper-caste Indians, since Dalits have historically had a very different relationship with colonial rule.

Phule rejects any scriptural justification of the caste order. He proves his farsightedness by foreshadowing that race, too, will be considered a social construct in the twenty-first century when he notes that "the Bhats (Brahmins) invented the pernicious fiction of the caste system"

(l). The Shudras were mentally enslaved to the Brahmins, and according to Phule, this form of slavery could only end through education.[13] Written as a fictional dialogue, Phule's literary project was mythopoetic—he reimagined myths from a Bahujan perspective, representing Brahmanical gods as colonisers and Bali Raja as the true god of the lower-caste masses (59). To reject the authority of Brahmanical gods was tantamount to rejecting the authority of Brahmins themselves, who used Hindu gods to justify their caste privilege and power. *Slavery* is the first instance of subversive lower-caste writing and critical theory, and hence, Phule was the first public and organic intellectual of the lower-caste masses. Antonio Gramsci defines an organic intellectual as one who emerges organically with a new class and makes the class conscious of its role in society (5).

The successor to this project of lower-caste emancipation was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a political philosopher, intellectual, and statesman. I argue that he inaugurated the literary category of the Dalit memoir in English by writing "Waiting for a Visa" around 1935, which is not acknowledged in the anthologies of IWE by Mukherjee, Gopal, or Rushdie and West. In this short memoir, Ambedkar describes how he did not look like an Untouchable child but was forced to reveal his caste to a station master through constant questioning and profiling; he was asked to leave the station once the station master uncovered his lower caste. The practice of caste-based profiling and discrimination is prevalent even in the present day in social and academic spaces. Naively narrated from the perspective of a child, the interaction reveals the social dynamics of caste: how Dalit children are expected to look and dress a certain way, how the possession of material wealth is unacceptable for lower castes, and how the hatred of well-spoken or intelligent Dalit children is more vehement because the transgression of caste boundaries enrages the upper castes.

This discrimination did not end when Ambedkar grew up. Its relentlessness led him to organise radical rallies like taking Untouchables to common drinking wells, which was traditionally prohibited. In his memoir, Ambedkar recalls an incident in which a young Untouchable woman died because an upper-caste Hindu doctor refused to touch her

to take her temperature. He observes that "[t]he Hindu would prefer to be inhuman rather than touch an Untouchable" ("Waiting for a Visa"). This moment undercuts the liberal rhetoric that education alone would lead the caste system to gradually fade away because many educated people continue to practice caste discrimination. Furthermore, the encounter reveals the systemic discrimination that allows for the murder of lower castes: through negligence in the case of the Untouchable woman and through social humiliation and institutional discrimination in the present day. The acceptance of an upper-caste position is not merely an inheritance of a traditional category or a religious position but a pact made within the Brahmanical community to perpetuate inhumane discriminatory practices. Ambedkar's memoir builds on the idea he develops in his entire oeuvre—that to identify as Hindu means to accept one's dominant caste position.[14]

Ambedkar's epistemological project rejects the authority of the *Shastras*, ancient Brahmanical texts that outline caste duties, and proposes intermarriage and inter-dining as social practices that could abolish caste. Ambedkar challenges the authority of the Brahmins, or the traditional intellectuals of Hindu society, by contending that "the intellectual class in India is simply another name for the Brahmin caste" ("Annihilation of Caste"). Ambedkar emerged as an organic intellectual who challenged traditional intellectuals and their control over the English language. He revealed the tyranny of the Brahmanical caste to the world. Ambedkar enabled the rise of Dalit intellectuals by ensuring constitutional reservation in government universities and offices, thereby securing Dalit representation, at least statistically, in public spaces. As a leading policymaker and writer of the Indian constitution, he abolished the practice of Untouchability, challenging caste-discrimination in an unprecedented legal way.

Ambedkar's work stands in opposition to the nation imagined by M. K. Gandhi, who wanted Untouchables only to be seen as "Harijans" or God's children—a term which most Dalits reject today because, although it proposes the humanisation of Dalits, it upholds the caste order. Gandhi wrote a critical response to Ambedkar's "Annihilation of Caste," arguing that "[c]aste has nothing to do with religion. . . . The

law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties" ("A Vindication Of Caste By Mahatma Gandhi"). Gandhi preserved the *varna* division and the caste system and only supported the abolition of untouchability. Dwivedi and Mohan observe that "Gandhi had maintained a studied observance of the most important caste rule, which is that there shall be no miscegenation" (189). A lower caste's—such as Ambedkar's—reading of history and scripture is the reading against the grain labelled as "misreading" by Gandhi and dominant castes who believe it is not the duty of lower castes to interpret scripture. Furthermore, Ambedkar was forced to sign the Poona Pact when Gandhi decided to fast unto death to oppose separate electorates,[15] which significantly altered his visionary dream for the emancipation of Dalits. Ambedkar had to relinquish his dream of separate electorates for Dalits and dilute his affirmative action plans. While Phule questioned the mythical basis of Brahmanical authority, Ambedkar cemented the critique by questioning Hindu scripture, which he read and critiqued in English. He courageously and publicly challenges Gandhi's casteist politics in his writings in English, starting the anti-caste intellectual tradition against dominant upper-caste leaders. In *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (1945), Ambedkar reveals Gandhi's hypocrisy in commenting on this political situation: Gandhi could have fought for the emancipation of Dalits but chose not to, thereby aligning himself with upper castes (246).

The first wave of Dalit writing witnessed the rise of Dalit and lower-caste organic intellectuals, much like the ones imagined by Gramsci. An organic intellectual is an "organizer of masses of men" (Gramsci 5) and their confidence. Their authority is counterposed to that of the traditional intellectual, like the ecclesiastic, who has consolidated their authority over time and represents a "historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes" (7). Phule and Ambedkar were organic intellectuals, contending with the Brahmanical traditional intellectuals who exercised power over access to education and ensured Dalits remained confined to their caste duties. The Shudra or the Dalit intellectual belied the upper-caste assertion that lower castes

were biologically inferior to the traditional Brahmanical intellectuals. Shudra and Dalit intellectuals commenced the pedagogical and epistemological project of DWE by revisiting traditional forms of knowledge and critiquing scriptures and contemporary public figures in English. Organic intellectuals like Phule and Ambedkar contended the caste capital of upper castes because they challenged the casteism of an overwhelmingly Hindu, or upper-caste, India.

IV. The Second Wave: Political Mobilisation, Self-Assertion, and the Rise of the Dalit Writer

The second wave of Dalit writing was fostered by the political rise and militant activism of the Dalit Panthers and lower-caste or Bahujan mobilisation through the efforts of Kanshi Ram. The emergence of Dalit life writing and poetry in regional languages was, in many ways, a response to ongoing caste-discrimination in various parts of the country, particularly in schools, villages, and religious institutions. The post-independence years in India were marked by Dalit civil and political mobilisation. In the second wave, Dalit leaders became increasingly visible. Although the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and criminalised caste-based discrimination in 1956, daily practices of caste-based discrimination and atrocities were (and are) still widespread. The correspondence between W. E. B. DuBois and Ambedkar in the 1940s (which marks the beginning of the Dalit epistolary form),[16] the American Civil Rights Movement to end segregation and racial discrimination in the 1950s, and the rise of the Black Panthers in the 1960s established solidarity between African-American and Dalit causes. All of these factors contributed to the rise and operation of the Dalit Panthers from 1972 to 1974. The founders, Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, and Raja Dhale,[17] mobilised Dalit youth through their political rallies and writing. In *Dalit Panthers* (2017), Pawar describes the Dalit Panthers as a radical, militant organisation that tried to stem the atrocities inflicted on Dalits and carry forward Ambedkar's legacy.

The education and political efforts of Dalits contributed to Kanshi Ram's rise as an architect of lower-caste mobilisation in the state of

Uttar Pradesh. He visualised a conglomerate lower-caste identity as "Bahujan," a political tactic which allowed lower castes who experienced routine discrimination at the hands of the upper castes to form an eighty-percent voting majority in the Indian national state and therefore be seen as a force to be reckoned with. Ram wrote *The Chamcha Age: An Era of the Stooges* (1982) in English; the text is a lesser-known political commentary on the Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi. In a literary style that mixes Dalit historiography, critical commentary, and political manifesto, he denounces the system of joint electorates, arguing that Dalits would never be adequately represented in the current political system. Ram states that "the purpose of writing this book is to enlighten, awaken and caution the Dalit-Shoshit Samaj (Oppressed and Exploited Society) and its workers and leaders about the large scale existence of this element of stooges (Chamchas) in our oppressed and exploited society" (2), thereby continuing the legacy of Ambedkar as an organic intellectual. According to Ram, the "Chamcha Age" started with the Poona Pact when separate electorates were relinquished in favour of joint electorates with reserved seats for Dalits, since Dalit leaders gave up any sort of real power and became stooges of upper-caste leadership in this format. To further his project of creating independent lower-caste leadership, Ram created the Bahujan Samaj Party in 1974.[18]

The second wave witnessed the effects of education on Dalits and their consequent empowerment. This period nurtured the creation of Dalit literature, or the writing and publication of Dalit memoirs, poetry, and autobiographies in vernacular languages, and the creation of a Dalit public sphere that included Dalit writers and readers. Dalit writers challenged the stranglehold upper-caste writers had on regional and vernacular languages, since they controlled access to education and publication. In this period, most of the Dalit writers wrote in vernacular languages and the autobiography or memoir arguably emerged as the most popular narrative form.[19] Some of the most seminal autobiographical works published during this period were Pawar's *Baluta* (1978) in Marathi, Bama's *Karukku* (1992) in Tamil, and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997) in Hindi, to name a few. Valmiki describes both the

difficulty and necessity of writing Dalit autobiographies after his first autobiographical notes were published in a newspaper. He writes that

> Dalit readers had seen their own pain in those pages of mine. They all wanted me to write about my experiences in greater detail. Putting these experiences on paper entailed all sorts of dangers. Once again I had to relive all those miseries, torments, neglects, admonitions. I suffered a deep mental anguish while writing this book. How terribly painful was this unraveling of my self, layer upon layer. . . . Why should one feel awkward in telling the truth? To those who say that these things do not happen here, to those who want to claim a superior status for Indian civilization, I say that only those who have suffered this anguish know its sting. (xiv)

The early Dalit autobiographies caused a seismic shift in the agency and self-perception of Dalit readers. Not only did they provoke the courageous genre of Dalit life writing but they also revealed the farce of democracy and universal human rights in a country that blatantly practiced caste discrimination. Dalit life writing initiated a crucial project of awakening and inspiring the Dalit community. Similarly, Bama's autobiography has an eponymous impact on its Dalit readers who become like the serrated *karakku* or Palmyra leaves, capable of self-protection and abundant with the potential of newness and creation. Bama asserts that Dalit life writing has the power to tangibly convert its readers: those "who have been oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged karakku, challenging their oppressors" (xiii). Apart from enabling lower castes silenced by history and politics to articulate their oppression and creating visibility for those whose existence was erased from representation in urban and social spaces, Dalit writing in this second wave had a domino effect of empowering and giving courage to multiple generations of Dalits.

The second wave also paved the way for the rise of Dalit feminists like Kumud Pawde, Baby Kamble, and Shantabai Kamble, who questioned caste through the lens of gender and vice versa. Baby Kamble unmasks the hypocrisy of upper-caste women and Indian feminism—which

should rightly be called Savarna (upper-caste) feminism—in her autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (1986). She describes how Dalit girls were humiliated and discouraged from attending school when she was growing up, a reality that continues to the present day. Kamble writes that "the higher caste girls would . . . hurl insults at us, 'That Ambedkar has educated himself, that's why these dirty Mahars are showing off!'" (100), to which the Dalit girls would boldly respond with insults of their own, refusing to be cowed. Dalit feminists formed an important critique of the agency of Dalit men and Savarna women, thereby articulating a new micro-community based on solidarity between Dalit women. Dalit feminism revealed the failure of supposedly intersectional feminism in India, which accounted for concerns of women across class but not caste lines. The Indian feminist movement was, and perhaps continues to be, directed by upper-caste women and their problems and concerns.

Dalit literature is always politically motivated and historically revisionist. It includes different forms and genres. It is "a social movement invested in the battle against injustice and driven by the hope of freedom" (Satyanarayana and Tharu 7) because it is "writing about dalits by dalit writers with a dalit consciousness" (Limbale 19). Dalit autobiographies describe the predestined fate of all lower castes, the protagonists' struggles in understanding their Dalit identity,[20] and their attempt to craft identities in their own, non-Brahmanical terms.

V. The Third Wave: Dalit Writing in English and the Internationalisation of the Dalit Cause

Caste-based discrimination exceeds class boundaries and geographical borders. In the twenty-first century, many middle-class[21] and diasporic Dalits also participate in the project of Dalit emancipation once they discover that it is impossible to escape caste and its entailing discrimination. Having overcome their fear of being discovered, these Dalits participate in and spearhead the third wave of Dalit writing. Due to international developments and economic mobility, they change the stereotype of the Dalit perpetuated by upper castes and claim English as a language that can narrate their experiences of dehumanisation and recast the popular image of the servile, silent Dalit.

The third wave of Dalit writing takes on an international dimension. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, many Dalits had been educated, particularly in English, and had created a place for themselves in all professional spheres: as academics, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and service professionals. International events related to caste, the education of Dalits in English, the rise of the Dalit diaspora, and the availability of web-based platforms on which Dalit voices could be heard ushered in the third wave of Dalit writing, which firmly established English as the dominant language for Dalit writing.

The third wave articulates the socio-political need for Dalits to write in English, as doing so enabled Dalit writers like Yashica Dutt, Meena Kandasamy, and Sujatha Gidla and academics like Suraj Yengde and T. Sowjanya to address an international audience through their works. DWE rejects the model of subalternity proposed by postcolonial scholars, which imposes an upper-caste perspective on Dalit lives. Even though post-colonialists do not explicitly say so, it is implicit in their research that the Indian or the subaltern they are concerned with is in the upper caste. Subaltern politics—its negation or redemption—is built on the suppression of lower-caste voices, and hence it is futile to argue whether the subaltern can speak or be heard. Both postcolonial studies and subaltern studies have done a disservice to Dalits by monopolising academia and India's history through the perspective of the upper caste.

The twenty-first century marks a new wave in the history of Dalit mobilisation. In 2001, the United Nations organised a "World Conference against Racism" in Durban. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) attempted to include caste-based discrimination in the Durban declaration, but the Indian government blocked its efforts.[22] The South Asian construct of descent-based social discrimination gained further international interest through the rise, coming out, and activism of the diasporic Dalits,[23] who continue to experience caste-based divisions, inequalities, and discrimination in their diasporic Indian communities. The Dalit activist Thenmozhi Soundarajan, based in the United States, visited an Indian friend's house as a child and was served with a different cup, a telltale sign of the practice of untouchability.

Her experience echoes the childhood of many Untouchable children in middle-class families and the diaspora, whose lower-caste origins are temporarily hidden by their parents to shield them from shame and trauma. She recalls her mother's surprise when she questioned her about their caste origins, for her mother believed caste would be a thing of the past since they had left India. Soundarajan observes: "Everywhere South Asians go, they bring caste and trauma from caste apartheid. Caste migrates and spreads, reestablishing itself in our new geographies" (27). She implies that upper castes carry their privilege and sense of superiority while lower castes carry their shame and humiliation. Writing in English is a crucial way to unmask the hypocrisy of upper castes in India and abroad who represent themselves as the persecuted victims while being the oppressor.

The emergence of Dalit autobiographies in English in India and the diaspora coincided with the increased translation of vernacular Dalit narratives in English, such as Manoranjan Byapari's *Interrogating My Chandal Life* (2014) in Bengali and the translation of new and older Dalit autobiographies in English. For instance, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* was published in 1986 in Marathi, and its English translation was first published in 2009. Broadly, the beginning of the twenty-first century marks an increase in and quicker translation of Dalit narratives from vernacular languages to English. This period also witnessed the rise of Dalit fiction in regional languages, like Akhila Naik's *Bheda* (2010) in Odia, as well as the translation of existing Dalit fictional works like Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*, which was initially published in Tamil in 1994 and translated into English in 2001. Through translation in English, older Dalit narratives in English are available to a broader audience outside South Asia, which had thus far largely remained in the dark about the caste system. Furthermore, Dalit autobiographies and fictional works in vernacular languages in the third wave were translated within a few years, as opposed to the earlier lag of twenty years.

In the twenty-first century, English has become essential for making visible the Dalit struggle for emancipation. As a theorist of IWE, Mukherjee reveals her shortsightedness:

> I cannot imagine any Indian—whether Punjabi, Bengali or Oriya—one day making a deliberate decision to write in English because it would guarantee him a wide audience and ensure access to the literary reproduction system of a world marker, hence yield royalties in foreign exchange. Those who write in English do so because—no matter what language they speak at home—they have literary competence only in English. (*The Perishable Empire* 2607)

Not only do such claims unmask the failure of theorists of IWE to imagine that Dalits would one day write in English but they also reveal that such theorists ignore the political choice of writing in English, as is evident when bilingual Dalits choose to write and publish in English. English is now the language of three types of writing by Dalit organic intellectuals: literary works published as fiction and autobiographies, non-fictional theoretical works on caste, and narratives published in community-led and web-based forums, which are particularly focused on representing Dalit voices and history. Writing in English enables the *Dalitification* of the history of Indian writing: a revision and narration of history of education and politics in the subcontinent from a Dalit perspective.

The first type of DWE consists of autobiographical and fictional literary works. Y. B. Satyanarayana's *My Father Baliah* (2011) is a biography of the author's father and the experience of three generations of caste atrocities. Similarly, Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) is an autobiography of a middle-class, urban Dalit and her experience of publicly revealing her caste. Before coming out publicly, English was "the language [Dutt] had hoped would help [her] escape [her] own Dalit identity" (xiv). While speaking well in English helped her escape caste-based profiling, reading Ambedkar's work and writing her life's narrative in English helped her reveal and articulate her Dalit identity in opposition to popular perceptions and scriptural definitions of caste. Writing in English from a Dalit perspective with the intent of undoing Brahmanical history, or in other words *dalitifying* history, her narrative

aims to reveal how difficult it was for Dalits to acquire education in English in a hostile and casteist ecosystem. Writing in English offers an escape from the fate of profiling and being confined to the shackles of a conventional Dalit life (which consists of enforced scriptural duty such as manual scavenging or toddy tapping).

Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) is an imaginative history of the massacre of over thirty Dalits in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu, when lower-caste peasants tried to earn minimum wage and were burned for their elemental request. Given the horrific and brutal nature of the massacre and its meagre coverage in regional and mainstream media, Kandasamy's narrative asserts that injustice against lower castes will be remembered and scribed into eternity. Kandasamy *dalitifies* history by not letting Kilvenmani's massacre be forgotten and by giving most Dalits in the text a voice, a way of articulating their demands in a literary life and afterlife.

Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* (2017) is an imaginative history of a Dalit family and their tryst with regional communist movements in Telangana. It *dalitifies* the dominant history of Telangana that privileges the declining Mughal empire or the ebbing regime of feudal lords from dominant castes by putting a poor Dalit family and their history and traditions at its centre. Mimi Mondal's "His Footsteps, through Darkness and Light" (2019) is a short story about a queer Dalit trapeze artist challenging the upper castes' appropriation of the Devadasi tradition, a form of dance worship that belonged to lower castes. Maitreya's *Flowers on the Grave of Caste* (2019) is a collection of short stories; the titular story narrates how Dalits are not accommodated in public spaces even in death. These texts *dalitify* writing in such a way that is impossible to escape the reality of caste.

The twenty-first century saw a proliferation of articles and blogs written by Dalits in India and the diaspora, recording their narratives of coming out and their experiences of caste discrimination at the hands of upper castes irrespective of their geographical location. Some of these writers are Christina Dhanraj, who wrote "Swipe Me Left, I'm Dalit" (2018) and co-founded Dalit History Month,[24] and Soundararajan,

who wrote "What It Means to Be an 'Untouchable'" (2017) and co-founded Equality Labs, a community-led and research-based organisation that fights for Dalit, Adivasi, and Bahujan rights.

The second type of DWE is a vast body of critical work by Dalit scholars and intelligentsia who continue the legacy of academic activism started by Phule and Ambedkar. These writers form a part of the third wave of Dalit writing because of their achievement of writing and publishing in English, with the promise of new research directions. Their work offers a new theoretical framework through which Dalit lives can be comprehended. The academic activism of Guru, Anand Teltumbde, Sukhadeo Thorat, and Cynthia Stephen[25] has been further elaborated by Harish Wankhede, Sowjanya,[26] Yengde, and Roja Singh (this list is merely indicative and not comprehensive). Their writing *dalitifies* the conditions of pedagogy and research on caste that has thus far been shaped by upper caste postcolonial scholars working on subaltern studies. Their writing opens up new lines of investigation from a Dalit perspective, as well as a research methodology and resources for Dalit and non-Dalit scholars working on Dalit studies.

The first and second type of DWE (as well as Dalit narratives in the vernacular) exist through the support of new-age publishing houses that strive to extend Dalit voices like Navayana Publishing, Zubaan, Stree-Samya Books, Speaking Tiger Books, Panther's Paw Publication, and Niyogi Books. However, many Brahmins and members of upper castes are editors of publishing houses, and because of upper-caste networks of control, it is difficult for Dalit writers to get published. The internet has enabled Dalits across class and geographical spectrums to write and publish their experiences of caste-based discrimination, thereby consolidating the third type of DWE through accessible opinion articles that reflect on contemporary and cultural casteist practices.

Hence, the third type of DWE can be found in community-led forums, websites, and podcasts that create space for the voices of Dalits, Tribals, and Bahujans. The internet platform *Round Table India* hosts discussions on contemporary issues pertaining to Dalits that are ignored by mainstream media. *Dalit Camera* captures narratives from a Dalit perspective. *Savari* publishes the narratives of Dalit women that reflect

the intersection of gender and caste. *Velivada* was inspired by the institutional murder of the Dalit academic Rohith Vemula. Yengde's column "Dalitality" in *The Indian Express* follows the footsteps of Chandra Bhan Prasad's column "Dalit Diary" in *The Pioneer* by addressing caste-based issues from a Dalit perspective in national newspapers. Anurag "Minus" Verma discusses contemporary media, art, and culture from a Dalit perspective with popular Dalit and Bahujan critics on his podcast. DWE is inclusive of different genres on web-based platforms, since it is guided by the motivation to extend the scope of Dalits articulating in English. DWE has enabled the formation of Bahujan solidarity through common experiences to challenge the hegemonic control of IWE by influencing lower-caste and Tribal writing in English. [27]

The development of Dalit literature, theory, and opinion represents a continuation in the process of "un-casteing" the mind rather than merely decolonising it. "Un-casteing" refers to the anti-caste thought articulated by DWE and practiced by Dalit intellectuals, which entails questioning religious scriptures like Hindu texts, nationalist leaders like Gandhi, social practices like untouchability, and academic and political discrimination. DWE does not contribute to IWE but challenges its mainstream, Brahmanical notions of what it means to be Indian. It deconstructs the "Indian" identity that camouflages caste, which is the basis of the organisation of Indian society and writing. DWE does not perform the Indianization—or what Rushdie calls the "chutnification" (*Midnight's Children* 364)—of English, which are necessarily reflective of an upper caste Indian's experience with the English language. DWE performs the *Dalitification* of English, which is the narrative form of introducing and explaining caste and its descent, history, and politics for an international audience in a narrative that is owned and governed by Dalits. *Dalitification* undertakes the articulation and development of Dalit subjectivity through a rejection of upper-caste literature, theory, and praxis. Therefore, DWE marks a decisive break from postcolonial studies as it creates the space for discussing anti-caste efforts in English through a lower-caste subjectivity.

DWE has flourished in an ecosystem of Bahujan mobilisation because of its defiance of Brahmanical hegemony over writing and representation

in English. DWE attempts to un-caste the Indian mind by demonstrating that language choices for Dalit writers are not straightforward or easy, or even the same as they are for upper-caste writers, thereby revealing how theorists of IWE never considered how caste privilege has shaped IWE. Since the imperial encounter, access to English has been an upper caste privilege, and hence DWE addresses a different antagonist, a different coloniser, than IWE addresses. It is not the British colonial master who is under attack but rather the upper castes and Brahmins, who through access to education and the English language have constructed a specifically upper caste international symbol of who is "Indian" or what it means to be "Indian" and have excluded the Dalit from this definition. While English does not carry the traumatic baggage of caste in the form of connotations, DWE creates Dalit ownership over the English language and snatches what upper castes have so fiercely guarded and used to gatekeep academic institutions and positions of socio-political leadership. There is a psycho-affective dimension to using English as a vehicle of articulation and expression.

VI. Conclusion

This article traces the tradition of Dalit writing, which can be historically split into three waves. Each wave has been moulded by the effort of Dalit organic intellectuals who have led the struggle against Brahmanical control over education in the first and second wave and the English language in the third wave. The preoccupation of Dalit writing has been to un-caste the Indian mind rather than merely decolonise it. To un-caste means to reveal the caste privilege of those concerned with "decolonising" the mind, to unmask how "decolonising" was a subterfuge to elevate upper-caste interests, and to demonstrate how upper castes attempted to safeguard the English language and keep Dalits unenlightened. Writing in English, or performing a *Dalitification* of English, is a political choice that has enabled Dalit writers to shake the Brahmanical monopoly on the means of representation in front of an international audience. DWE consists of a vast array of literature, theoretical works, and opinion articles in community-led and web-based forums, all of which have helped Dalits counter the caste capital of upper castes.

DWE has established new material for literary studies by showing the limitations of and thereby counterposing IWE and postcolonial studies. By revealing IWE's marginalisation of lower-caste writing, DWE shows that postcolonial studies has canonised IWE at the cost of marginalising Dalit writing. DWE calls for a reorganisation of academic research and syllabi on Indian writing in which DWE cannot simply be a part of contemporary IWE. DWE has achieved the *Dalitification* of English by making caste its theme and genre—by internationalising the understanding of caste and challenging upper-caste hegemony over writing in English.

Notes

1 The syllabus for the undergraduate study of English literature at the University of Delhi has the bifurcations of "Indian English Literature" (or IWE) and "Marginalities in Indian Writing," continuing caste distinctions in pedagogical practices. On the other hand, the reading list for comparative literature at Princeton University features no Dalit writers. In departments run by South Asian (or upper-caste) professors, the pedagogical practice of decolonisation invisibilises the politics of caste.

2 Indian academia practices passive and aggressive caste-based discrimination. See my article "Casteism in City Colleges and Classrooms."

3 Deshpande observes that English in independent India reflects the "subtle shades of our infinitesimal status hierarchies," implying that the acquisition of English is fraught with its historical relationship to caste.

4 Anand observes that "a systematic denial of English . . . to the Dalit Bahujans in contemporary India . . . shows that . . . the 'upper caste' urban Indian uses English like he did Sanskrit in the imaginary 'golden, classical' era" (2055). DWE was delayed because access to English was and continues to be controlled by upper castes.

5 Singh argues that "we often define our very identity in the language of our erstwhile colonial masters" (153) and that Indian writers must look at modes of expression other than the language of colonisation. He remains ignorant of the possibilities of social mobility that English offers to Dalits.

6 Ramanujan writes that "Indian borrowings of Western cultural items have been converted and realigned to fit pre-existing context-sensitive needs" (57). He tries to debunk the term "Indian" but confines himself to the aesthetic problems of upper castes.

7 Consider the essays and anthologies on Indian writing in English like Mukherjee's *The Perishable Empire* and Gopal's *The Indian English Novel*.

8 The Bahujan intellectual Shepherd observes the continuation of the upper-caste practice of monopolising English even today: he notes that all the (upper-caste) supporters and detractors of Macaulay are able to speak and write in English. The "mother tongue" is forced upon lower castes, so that education and writing in English becomes the means of economic advancement only for upper castes. See Shepherd's "Macaulay Is Very Relevant Today."

9 Brahmanical scriptures like *Laws of Manu* and *Bhagavad-Gita* consolidate the caste order in descending hierarchy as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudra. Exiled from but entirely governed by the caste order are the Chandalikas or Ati-shudras—the Untouchables who lie outside this caste order entirely because of their supposed inferiority.

10 Ahmad observes that "Rammohan Roy, reputedly 'the father of Indian Modernism,' expected from the colonial government that it would introduce far-reaching reforms . . . such as banning of widow immolation, child marriage and polygamy, while introducing 'Western' education. . . . The great anti-caste leaders—Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar among others—who arose somewhat later expected more from the colonial government than from the upper-caste nationalist leaders on the whole range of issues pertaining to caste discrimination" (203).

11 Despite being a minority in the population, upper castes are over-concentrated in academia; forming 30% of the Indian population, only 9% of academics in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) are Dalits and Adivasis (see Sharma's article on the violation of reservation norms and Sukumar's book on caste in Indian academia). Brahmin educators have consolidated their caste capital: by controlling the means to education they ensured that Dalits are excluded from enlightenment (see Nambissan's article on the exclusion of Dalit students from schools and educational policies) and, therefore, created the stereotype of the "ignorant" or "stupid" Dalit.

12 Omvedt provides a historical account of the activities of Satyashodhak Samaj.

13 Yengde writes that

> Phule . . . also made a weapon of the English language, understanding its power to carry his message beyond the confines of India's vernacular tongues, where the dominant castes jealously policed access and ideas. *Gulamgiri* was published in Marathi, but to make sure its point was not lost to English speakers the book carried a translation of its full title—*Slavery In The Civilized British Government Under the Cloak of Brahminism*—and an English dedication and preface. ("Harvest of Casteism")

14 Ambedkar also authored the political document of the Indian Constitution as well as counter-canonical caste theory through his texts *Castes in India* (1916), "Annihilation of Caste" (1936), *Who Were the Shudras* (1946), and *The Untouchables* (1948), to name a few. In "Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar daringly asks

his upper-caste peers and politicians: "Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like the Untouchables to use public schools[,] . . . public wells[,] . . . public streets?" He calls caste the basis of the atrocities and the reason behind lower-caste un-enlightenment. He writes that "[o]n account of the Caste System, they (lower castes) could receive no education. They could not think out or know the way to their salvation. They were condemned to be lowly; and not knowing the way of escape, and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate" ("Annihilation of Caste").

15 In the first Round Table Conference in 1930 meant to hand over political power from British imperialists to Indians, Ambedkar proposed separate electorates for Dalits. This meant that in areas that are concentrated by Dalits, only a Dalit representative could be elected and voted for by Dalits. Furthermore, in areas where Dalits lived but did not form a majority, they had a right to vote and stand for the election. This implied that at least two Dalit representatives would make it to the Parliament, significantly doubling and empowering Dalit political representation. As of 1919, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians had separate communal electorates. However, to ensure the continued representation and power of upper castes and deny Dalits any representation in the constitution, Gandhi went on an indefinite hunger strike in 1932 in Poona to oppose separate electorates for lower castes. Ambedkar was forced to abandon his request for separate electorates because of Gandhi's stubborn casteism. Had Gandhi died on a fast opposing separate electorates, Dalits would have been vilified and never received any representation. Ambedkar had to sign the Poona Pact in 1932, assuring Gandhi that Dalits would not ask for separate electorates. Thus evolved the provision of reserving seats for lower castes. For Ambedkar's analysis of the debacle, read "Dr Ambedkar Remembers the Poona Pact."

16 Ambedkar and DuBois wrote letters to each other, expressing solidarity over the African-American and Untouchable causes. See Yengde's article on "Harvest of Casteism."

17 For an introductory note on Dhasal, see Maitreya's "Namdeo Dhasal's Poetry." For an excerpt from Pawar's history of Dalit Panthers, see "Excerpt." For a biographical account of Dhale's life, see Shantha.

18 Jaffrelot and Jeffrey et al. trace the rise of Ram and the Bahujan Samaj Party.

19 Pandey provides a historical account of Dalit life writing from the 1970s.

20 Brueck describes this as "Dalit chetna," or "the notion of political *awareness*, in the sense of consciousness-raising among certain sections of the Dalit population, and at other times refer[ring] to a collective notion of identity among diverse Dalit communities."

21 The rise of the Dalit middle class (which is, at best, a minority within a minority) was aided by decades of reservation policies and the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1990. As such, one way to interpret this rise is that the advent of

capitalism and its totem of hard work and merit might have served the Dalit community. The Dalit middle class is at best fragmented, unconsolidated, and unwilling to regroup on the basis of a caste unity. Middle-class Dalits are often eager to break free from their caste identity in order to finally escape the discrimination they experienced. Yengde asserts that the Dalit middle class is English educated and ensconced in the bureaucratic order, wields considerable power in shaping the state's reservation policies, and is committed to uplifting Dalits but still needs to provide ideological guidance (*Caste Matters* 142–85). Dalit scholars often critique them for "abandoning" the Dalit cause in favour of economic progress. However, Subramanian reveals that economic liberalisation deepened caste inequalities because of the expansion of the private educational and professional sector, which favoured the dominant castes and elaborated their existing network (*The Caste of Merit* 129). Hence, many middle-class Dalits continue to face caste-based discrimination in the twenty-first century in urban spaces.

22 The Indian government did not want the world to see caste in terms of race, despite many overlapping similarities such as discrimination based on work and descent and practices of apartheid, segregation, and anti-miscegenation. See my article "Calypsology of Caste through Metaphorization."

23 Adur and Narayan note that affirmative action policies and the strengthening Dalit movement in India, accompanied by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 in the United States, facilitated the emigration of Indian Dalits to the US.

24 For a brief introduction to the project, see Dhanaraj's "The Dalit History and the Dalit Present."

25 https://countercurrents.org/2017/08/heroes-and-sheroes-of-plural-india-savitribai-phule/.

26 "Understanding Dalit Feminism."

27 DWE has encouraged Tribal and Bahujan literature as well, which has also recently seen the emergence of narratives in English like the Tribal writer Shekhar's collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), Birulee's digital platform *Adivasi Lives Matter*, which undoes myths about Tribals and explains Tribal history, and the Bahujan academic and writer Shepherd's memoir *From a Shepherd Boy to an Intellectual* (2019). The Adivasi writer Masram explains the conditions of acquisition of education for most Tribal children. First, they are forced to assimilate into an upper-caste Hindu culture and forget their Tribal roots, tradition, and history. Belonging to one of the largest tribes in India called Gond, she describes her navigation from knowing Gondi to learning Marathi to learning English. In a strange circle, English has now become the way through which she documents the history Adivasis have been forced to forget. These writings in English by Dalits, Bahujans, and Adivasis are united by the political impulse to challenge the hegemonic control of IWE, which has always excluded their experiences in the articulation of decolonisation.

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