Appendix
बरसा रहा है रवि अनल, भूतल तवा सा जल रहा है चल रहा सन सन पवन, तन से पसीना बह रहा देखो कृष्ण शोषित, सुखाकर हल तथापि चला रहे किस लोभ से इस आंच में, वे निज शरीर जला रहे— मैथलीशरण गुप्त

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Dalit Discourse in Modern Indian English Writing

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Abstract:
Dalit literature, like Feminism, has emerged as a very popular trend in the recent literature in India irrespective of any language. The term ‘dalit’ was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of “suppressed classes”— a term the British used for what are now called scheduled castes. Dalit literature was originated in the form of revolt against the injustice to the downtrodden and suppressed group. The motto of Dalit Literature is to bring out the truth that dalit is not untouchable but a dignified human being as Gandhiji called him ‘harijan’— the son of God. Dalit literature, actually, means literature written by dalit writers; and thereby it aims to liberate the dalits from their recurrent discrimination, injustice, ill-treatment on the basis of their caste or low birth. In Bhojpuri language ‘Achhut Ki Shikayat’ (1914) by Hiradom is regarded as the first official work of Dalit literature. The present research paper deals with dalit narratives and discourses in modern English writing.

Key-words: Vachana poetry— readily intelligible text, Hagiography— the biography of saints, Achhut— untouchable, Dalit— Hindi and Marathi translation of the “suppressed”

Introduction:
Dalit literature, like Feminism, has become as a very popular and conspicuous trend in the present day literature in India irrespective of any language and discipline. Dalit literature has generated awareness among the people about the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of the dalit in one or in another form. Despite our 70 years of Independence, dalits still continue to face abject suppression, discrimination, misery, inhumane and barbaric treatment at the hands of the upper caste in the society. Politicians, instead of trying to uproot this evil, seem to capitalize on it. Even today we come across so many examples of ill-treatment with dalits in the society; and consequently their plight continues without any
remedy. Therefore, the dalit ones and other sensitive people have taken up the pen to express their agony, their culture and society.

The term ‘dalit’ was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of “suppressed classes”—a term the British used for what are now called scheduled castes. Then gradually its reference was expanded to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Thus, dalit is not a caste; it is a symbol of change and revolution.

**Objective:**
The objectives of present research paper are: (a) to focus on the abject oppression, torture and the inhumane treatment to the dalits in the society at the hands of upper castes; (b) to explore the atrocities inflicted upon dalits in our society; (c) to locate the dalit issues dealt in the recent Indian writing in English; (d) to sensitise the society for the problem faced by the dalits; (e) to promote dalit perspective in literature; and (f) to try to establish new social values in place of old ones.

**Textual Discourse:**
Dalit literature was originated in the form of revolt against the injustice to the downtrodden and suppressed group. In literature, especially Hindi literature, saints and writers like Kabir, Raidas, Tuka Ram, Dadu, Sahjobai, Guru Nanak, Narsinh Mehta, Prem Chand and so on tried to express the “voice” of such downtrodden. In Bhojpuri language, Hiradom wrote a poem ‘Achhut Ki Shikayat’ (1914) and that was the first official work of Dalit literature. In Dalit literature, suppressed and marginalized man is in the centre and the writer tries to establish new social values and rejects the old or out-dated traditions and thereby advocate liberty, fraternity and equality—the three basic fundamentals of real democracy. Thus Dalit literature reflects the real scenario of dalit’s society. The motto of Dalit literature is to bring out the truth that dalit is not untouchable but a dignified human being as Gandhiji identified the dalit with the term ‘Harijans’ i.e. Children of God.

One of the first dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah in the 11th century who was a popular saint also. He was regarded as the father of ‘Vachana Poetry’ by some scholars. Another dalit poet who is to be mentioned is Dohara Kakkarah and he has written six confessional poems regarding the dalit issues. The origin of dalit literature writing can be traced back to Buddhist literature. Dalit Bhakti poets like Gora, Raidas,
Chokha Mela, Karma Mela and the Tamil Siddhas or Chittars many of whom must have been dalits going by hagiographical accounts. Dalit literature became famous after the democratic and egalitarian thinkers such as Shree Narayana Guru, Jyotiba Phule, B.R.Ambedkar, Sahodaran Ayyappan and the others. They articulated the sources and modes of caste oppression that gave rise to the modern dalit writing as distinct genre in Indian writing.

In 1958, the Dalit literature was used at the first Conference of “Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh” in Mumbai by the people including Jyotiba Phule and B.R.Ambedkar. In 1963, Baburao Bagul (1930-2008) wrote in Marathi and his first collection of stories entitled *Jevha mi Jat Chorali* depicted a cruel society and wrote in a new momentum to dalit literature in Marathi. Today it is seen by many critics as an epic, portraying lives of the dalits and later on it was filmed by actor and director Vinay Apte with the same title.

Gradually with other writers like Namdeo Dhasal, a Maharashtrian dalit poet, founded ‘Dalit Panther’ and paved the way for strengthening dalit movement in literature.

In 1993, Ambedkar sahitya Parishad, Vardha (MH) organized the first Akhil Bhartiya Ambedkari Sahitya Sammelan to re-conceptualize and transform dalit Sahitya into Ambedkari Sahitya after the name of the dalit modern-age hero, scholar and inspiration, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. Modern dalit literature began to be main stream in India with the appearance of English translations of Marathi dalit writing. *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*, edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot, and *Poisoned Bread: Translation from modern Marathi Literature* originally published in three volumes and edited by Arjun Dangle in 1992 were perhaps the first books that popularized the genre throughout India.

**Dalit Discourse in Indian Writing in English:**

Indian writing in English, in spite of having an impression of being an elite and esoteric brand of literature even after more than two hundred years of existence, has its own contribution in the sphere of emphatic writings on dalits, though not in a big way. The noteworthy point is that the pioneering writers of dalit empathy are mostly non-dalit writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Padmini Sengupta, Bhabani Bhattacharya, T. Shiv Shankar Pillai, Raja Rao, Shashi Deshpande, Girish Karnad, U.R.Anantha Murthy, Rohiton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and others. These writers have
powerfully presented dalit issues, dalit characters, dalit milieu in their works and shown concerns for their sufferings and agony.

With the advent of Gandhian mass movements in the 1930s, Indian English writing became more relevant. Nearly all major writers, especially novelists of the post-Independence era started to take up social and economical issues in their works with an aim of social awakening. The publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s first and perhaps the most widely acclaimed novel Untouchable (1935) is a landmark in the history of Indian novel in English because of its ideological involvement with the Gandhian Movement for the abolition of untouchability and their upliftment and assimilation in the main stream of the Indian society.

Through the protagonist Bakha, the novelist realistically probes into the evil of untouchability, suppression, oppression and isolation in the Indian social context. The predicaments of untouchables and the sense of self degradation and the loss of human dignity are presented through Bakha and his fresh recognition of the various manners of segregation and oppression: caste-bound wells, his exclusion from formal education, the sin of having the audacity to smoke, the difficulty of buying something when one cannot touch or be touched, dalits being forbidden from entering the temples, the difficulty of moving along a street without touching or being touched, his clothes and cleanliness becoming object of ridicule and even being accused of defiling a high caste boy he carries home who was injured in the hockey field.

As dalits constitute an integral part of the Indian social order, we can hardly imagine any narrative without them. Dalit characters as well as other categories of oppressed people—wage-earners, farmers, barbers, iron-smiths, black-smiths etc— occupy their place not only as stock characters but as individuals. These characters are invariably portrayed with understanding and empathy. For example, Suruchi, in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Shadow from Ladakh looks upon Jhanak, a dalit woman, as “the spirit of the age” with courage and resolve to grasp life; and the “boldness to fight” for her rights.

Shanta Rameshwar Rao’s novel Children of God(1976) also focuses on the dalit issues. The central characters are dalits and the novelists presents a realistic picture of caste oppression through the woman-narrator whose son Kittu was beaten and burnt to death for entering a temple even more than 25 years after Independence.

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Girish Karnad deals with the evil effects of caste system in his dramas. Karnad, in his play, *Tale-Danda* (1990) deals with the problem of ‘varna’ system in our society, which has been presented through the Bhakti Movement. The emphasis on ‘Gunna’ and ‘Karma’, and not on ‘Jati’ (birth). The rigid caste system governs the entire play and no one can overrule the system. When a Brahmin boy Jagadeva asks his low caste friend Mallibomma to enter in his house, Mallibomma hesitates and says: “Don’t be silly. I should not have even stepped into this Brahmin street. And you want me to come into your house? No thank you.” (*Tale-Danda*, pg 2) Bijala, a character in the play, declares that one’s caste and status are never changeable. He says: “. . . one’s caste is like the skin of one’s body. You can peel off top to toe, but when the new skin forms there, you are again a barber, a shepherd, or a scavenger!” (*Tale-Danda*, pg 15)

Rohinton Mistry, in his novel *A Fine Balance* (1995), gives central place to the socially marginalized and peripheral characters. He tells the heart-wrenching story of Dukhi mochi and his family. His son Narayan and his two companions are mercilessly tortured by Thakur Dharamsi’s men as they express desire for their right for vote. They are hanged in the village square and tortured to death. To set an example for others, dalits are also beaten up at random, their women raped and hunts burnt down. As if it is not enough, he takes his final revenge by getting Narayan’s innocent teenage son Omprakash castrated to ensure the complete destruction of the dalit family.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) presents the intense cross caste-conflict which is between Syrian Christians and untouchables, underlining that dalits suffer atrocities and harassment from not only Hindus but other religious communities also. The novel is an insightful study of the segregation and oppression of dalits in various contexts. The novel deals with several dimensions of victimization and exploitation of suppressed members of society: women, children, Syrian Christians, dalits and so on. The dalit protagonist Velutha offends against the hegemonic norms by having an affair with a woman of high caste. The ultimate outcome of this love affair is the tragic death of the ‘untouchable’ Velutha by the ‘touchable boots’ of the police, an incident that caricatures the very idea of God. Velutha, the outcaste, thus becomes the epitome of social discrimination, injustice and inequality. The untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies,
not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths while they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed.

All these creative writers are normally responsive and rational individuals, and have attempted to focus upon Indian social issues. Prioritizing dalit issues in their works, they have revealed various unfold layers of discrimination against dalits. In the recent decades, there have been attempts to relocate Indian English literature with emphasis on dalit themes, struggle and resistance.

**Conclusion:**
All said and done, our Indian literature irrespective of language has been commendably carrying the burden of social realism and is continuing to play an important role in the ongoing struggle by dalits to end discrimination and change their social space from ‘Periphery’ to ‘Centre’. Thus the above study of dalit issues and literature comes to the conclusion that our creative writers, free from parochial concerns and prejudices, have truly been sensitive to the subaltern condition to expose the sad plight of dalits. Quantitatively the number is not impressive, though a couple of them are of quite enduring quality. Dalits have suffered centuries of abuse and even after passing the seven decades of our Independence, they are still facing the same situation of suppression and discrimination on the basis of their low birth or caste. Despite much has been done for the sensitization of dalit problems and agony, still they are the part and parcel of suppressed group. Even an increasingly urbanized society and protection from legislation have not been able to completely eliminate the widespread prejudice and appalling forms of discrimination on the basis of low caste birth. If we want to do something for the upliftment of the dalit, we have to change our mentality towards them. We must consider them a better human being rather than the despicable ones as Gandhiji designated them “Harijans”, the children of God. The creative writers are progressively turning their attention towards the ground realities of Indian life, and the forces with which the Dalit Movement is gaining strength, it is expected that we may have more novels and dramas focusing on dalit themes, poverty, discrimination and caste politics.

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Shyam Sunder Pal
The migration of ethnic groups, compelled by various social, economic, political and religious compulsions is generally accompanied by unprecedented pressures and challenges of living in multicultural spaces for the migrant ethnic minorities as they are viewed with suspicion, even antagonism by the host community. They find themselves in a dilemma of selection between identity and assimilation. The Parsis when migrated to India also had to face the same enormous challenge of maintaining their cultural identity on one hand and on the other, merging into the culture of the host country. Despite the complex and formidable challenge, Parsis assimilated themselves with the mainstream and repaid the benevolence shown to them by India. But today theirs is an endangered community, facing physical as well as cultural extinction due to various factors. Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi immigrant writer, is very sensitive towards various anxieties felt by his community and has tried to immortalize this endangered species by capturing its quintessential ethos in his writings. Present paper focuses on the Parsi ethos, community consciousness, ethnic anxiety and problem of survival as presented in his novel Such A Long Journey. He reflects major problems and prejudices, aspirations and ambitions, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, identity crisis and confusion of the Parsi community in the novel and attempts to familiarize the non-Parsi world with the Parsi faith, values and ways of life.

Key-words: exodus, ethnocentric, ethos, ethnic anxiety

The exodus of Parsis from Persia to India in the 7th century A.D. to escape religious butchering from Islamic invasions is a sort of proof which maintains that the act of migration or transfer of population is not a modern development. The ethnic groups, out of various social, economic, political and religious compulsions, have sought asylum in different parts of the globe from time to time. In most cases such a migration is accompanied by unprecedented pressures and challenges of living in multicultural spaces for the migrant ethnic minorities as they are viewed with suspicion, even antagonism by the host community. In a multiethnic nation, a cultural clash as a result of the reluctance of the dominant culture to absorb the immigrant cultures does not come as a surprising phenomenon.

The Parsis who first settled in the hospitable environs of Gujrat, with the condition of marginally off-loading their cultural baggage, later scattered to Bombay and other western parts of India. They found themselves caught in the dilemma of selection between identity and assimilation. There was a challenge before them of maintaining their cultural identity on one hand and on the other, merging into the culture of the host country. Despite the complex and formidable challenge, Parsis assimilated themselves with the mainstream and repaid the benevolence shown to them by India. In relation to their number (which is less than a hundred thousand in total population of India), their achievements and important roles in every crucial development of life can truly be described as outstanding. Their contribution in Politics (Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Pherozeshaw Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha and K.F. Nariman), Industry (Jamshedji Tata), Science (Dr. Homi Bhabha), Law (Nani A. Palkhivala), Army (Field Marshall Sam Maneckshaw) and Music (Zubin Mehta) is a testimony to the fact that Parsis have a wonderful ability to change with time, adapt in a new environment and assimilate in the wider cultural life of Indian society. Their loyalty to the nation is unquestioned and the assuring words of “the Grand Old Man of India” make it very clear: I have never worked in any other spirit than that I am an
Indian, and owe my duty to my country and all my countrymen. Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohemdan, a Parsi, a Christian or any other creed, I am above all an Indian. Our country is India, our nationality is Indian.” (Dadabhai Naoroji)

In the post-colonial scenario, there is no denying the fact that though Parsis have been living in India for more than one thousand years and are the most urbanized community in the country, yet theirs is an endangered community, facing physical as well as cultural extinction. Speedily falling birth rate, no marriages or high average age of marriage, inter-community marriages, non-acceptance of the children of Parsi women married outside the community, high economic pressure of living and the general social norms—all these factors are the reasons behind the sharp decline in the populace of the community. Aditi Kapoor warns in her article, that unless something is done to augment their fast depleting numbers and to revive their religion, the Parsis after an illustrious past could just fade out in oblivion. (Kapoor)

Such a perception is shared and represented by many Parsi creative writers. Most of the post Independence Parsi writing in English is ethnocentric. Parsi novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kang, Dina Mehta, Bomen Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa have reflected through their works major problems and prejudices, aspirations and ambitions, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, identity crisis and confusion, the ethos and ethnic anxiety of the community. These writers express Parsi emotion caught in diasporas. As observed by A.K.Singh, …their works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that community emerges as a protagonist from their works though on the surface these works deal with their human protagonists.(Singh 66)

The novel Such A Long Journey is all about the life and times of Gustad Noble, an aging Parsi. Gustad, his wife Dilnavaz, their two sons Sohrab and Darius and a daughter Roshan live in the Parsi residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay. He is a devoted family man struggling hard to keep his family out of poverty and shortage. But at a point in the novel Gustad and his family begin to fall apart. His elder son Sohrab shatters Gustad’s dreams to the ground by refusing to get admitted in the Indian Institute of Technology, preferring instead to study literature. Various tormenting incidents follow in quick succession in Gustad’s life making it a suffering in incarnation: his daughter, Roshan falls mysteriously ill; he struggles hard with the memories of his financially sound and emotionally balanced past, especially at the financially tough and emotionally perturbed time; his intimate friend Major Bilimoria disappears and then passes away in suspicious circumstances; he loses his co-worker and close friend Dinshawji; he himself unwittingly gets involved in illegal activities, laundering money through his bank, purportedly to support the aspirations of East Pakistan, but actually as part of an elaborate embezzlement scheme by Indian government officials. His conflicts with his eccentric neighbours; death of Tehmul, a mentally disabled character, who brings out the tender side of Gustad’s personality and finally the destruction of Gustad’s sacred wall by municipal authorities, destroy his mental peace. The outside world with its political corruption, conspiracy, treachery, betrayal and impending war add to his suffering. However, Gustad, in the end, Like Oedipus, bows to the will of Providence . . . and finds in compassion and endurance, a dignity and greatness withstanding all that fortune keeps in store for him (Selvam 37) He triumphs all the trials of his life by realizing that things may not always be in his control. He limits his expectations, forgives his son and accepts life as it comes with a hope of reaching a suitable destination at the end of his life-journey. Mistry creates Gustad as a devout Parsi, who offers his orisons to Ahura Mazda and performs his Kusti regularly, (SALJ 1) Religions for him are not like garment styles that could be changed at whim or to follow fashion and he strongly believes that all religions were equal . . . nevertheless one had to remain true to one’s own. Like all Parsis, he identifies with the Western culture and takes pride in the fact that his children are fluent in English.
Celebrations and ceremonies, festivals and prayers, religious and culinary practices, rites and rituals are accurately captured as they are important elements of Parsi identity. The Zoroastrian customs and rites are described in great graphic detail in the novel as is clear from the account of the ceremonies related to the last rites. The prayers preceding the funeral ceremony, the actual ceremony itself, the Tower of Silence and the body-disposal are presented at length in the novel. Last rituals at the death of Dinshawji are described in detail: ...after the prayers are said the rituals performed at the Tower of Silence, the vultures will do the rest when the bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone to prove that Dinshawji is in peace. (SALJ 223) Even The Tower of Silence is described geographically: It had a little verandah in the front leading to the prayer hall and bathroom at the back where the deceased would be given the final bath of ritual purity. "(SALJ 246)

Mistry also points at certain superstitions that Parsis believe in, for example not keeping cats as pets as they never take bath, not killing spiders, eating only female chicken and never a cock etc. There is clear description of rituals or Jaadu-Mantar performed by Dilnavaz and Miss Kutchta with chillies, lemons, nailclippings and tails of lizards as remedies to get rid of the unfortunate happenings in Gustad’s house. Dilnavaz has a reflex habit of saying ‘touch wood’ and touching any wooden item nearby to avoid any untoward miss-happening to her family.

Parsis are known to have a fond obsession for rising to higher intellectual echelons. Their drive towards elitism is what presented by Mistry in Gustad’s earnest wish for his son Sohrab to get admitted in the prestigious IIT, and then a sense of something lost at the latter’s throwing over a chance of admission in IIT.

The novel is also replete with instances of Parsi ethnic anxiety and their fears of losing identity. The Parsi enclave Khodada, enclosed by a wall used for defecation and loitering by pedestrians, itself symbolizes the decline of the community. Mistry explains the Parsi anxiety and a sense of being marginalized through Dinshawji when he remembers how their burial rites had been mocked at by Shiv Sena which abused and threatened the community thus: Parsi crow-eaters, we’ll show you who is the boss. (SALJ 39). As a member of minority community he voices his concern about rising communal forces. Dinshawji considers Shiv Sena a real threat to the Parsi identity: No future for minorities, with all these Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. (SALJ 55)...we have that bloody Shiv Sena wanting to make the rest of us second class citizens. "(SALJ 39) The growing fundamentalism and political power of the Marathas make the Parsis in the novel feel insecure as they believe it would upset social harmony in Mumbai and create chaos all around: Wait till the Marathas take over, then we will have real Gandoo Raj. (SALJ 73)

The ethnic anxiety is also articulated through Dinshawji’s fear of loss of identity, connection & heritage by the change in the names of roads & localities. He worries, one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life? Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me! (SALJ 74)

Nationalization of banks by Indira Gandhi was yet another factor considered as impending danger to the community. Banking had always been one of the traditional avenues of occupation for Parsis. Mistry explains how the nationalization of banks came as a jolt to the identity and honesty of the Parsi community who earlier were the kings of banking...such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoilt. Ever since that Indira has nationalized the banks. (SALJ 38) Anvar Sadath observes: Gustad identified Shiv Sena and Indira Gandhi’s
authoritarian politics and anti-minority policies as two major threats that his community to deal with. (Sadath 5)

A sense of insecurity and doubt of the Parsi community is obvious in the discussion of Dilnavaz and Dinshawji about the Parsi Feroze Gandhi. They believe that neither of Pt.Nehru and Indira Gandhi treated him well. Dilnavaz says that Nehru had never liked his son-in-law Feroze Gandhi. In fact she has conspiracy theory about his death. Dinshawji also agrees to it and remarks: That was tragic. . . Even today, people say Feroze’s heart attack was not really a heart attack.(SALJ 197) Thus the conversation expresses the community’s suspicion about the so-called natural death of Feroze Gandhi and implies the sense of insecurity that it feels.

The fictional figure of Jimmy Bilimoria in the novel is based upon a real life story. In a notorious scandal of 1971, the prime accused Sohrab Nagarwala, a State Bank of India cashier explained that he had received a phone call from the Prime Minister’s office instructing him to hand over a large sum of money to a messenger. However his explanation was never officially accepted and he was charged with embezzlement and arrested. Later he died mysteriously in imprisonment just as Billimoria in Mistry’s novel. Nagarwala’s implication in the ‘scandal’ had terribly shaken the Parsi community, since it was not very often that a Parsi made the newspapers for a crime.(SALJ 207). The community refuses to accept a Parsi’s indulgence in the scandal. Mistry presents fictional rendering of Billimoria’s story through a Parsi perspective and questions the nature of the hasty trial, the general ambiguity of the case and suspicion arousing death of Billimoria during imprisonment. The entire Gustad-Bilimoria plot is an expression of ethnic anxiety and sense of insecurity of the Parsi community during the reign of Indira Gandhi government when innocent Parsis like Jimmy Bilimoria and Gustad Noble were made scapegoats for political ends.

Thus Rohinton Mistry faithfully captures ethnic anxiety and Parsi ethos in Such A Long Journey. The novel attempts to familiarize the non-Parsi world with the Parsi faith, values and ways of life by providing information about the myths, legends, beliefs, customs, ceremonies, rites and rituals of the community. Mistry’s sensitivity of impending dangers to his community is expressed by his Parsi characters. He represents his community’s ethnic anxiety and community consciousness in the novel through different narratives of his characters. They throw light on the existing and changing social, political, moral and religious milieu and express their views on the changes that affect their already dwindling community.

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